
Evil and the Rationality of Christian Belief

by Michael L. Peterson

Does Evil Make Christian Belief Irrational?

The reunion of two brothers, Ivan and Alyosha Karamazov, bears poignant expression to the problem of evil in human existence. Ivan, a university-educated and worldly-wise man, has turned atheist over the injustice and suffering in the world. Alyosha, in the odyssey of his separate life, has become a faithful monk and tries to dissuade Ivan from his all-consuming rebellion against God. But Ivan swiftly dismantles each fragmentary answer and continues to press Alyosha for a sufficient explanation of why God allows evil in the world. Reduced to dumb silence, Alyosha approaches Ivan, kisses him softly, then turns and runs back toward the monastery. As Dostoevsky says, "It was nearly dark, and he felt almost frightened."¹

Too often, Alyosha is typical of Christian reactions to the problem of evil: *emotional response, rational retreat*. As the problem of evil is a genuine intellectual objection to Christian belief, however, it must be faced head on.

While the problem of evil is in actuality not just one problem, but a cluster of different problems, each having an identifiable structure and strategy which must be examined and refuted in order to answer completely the general problem of evil, it is the more modest task of this article to analyze only one version of the problem — a version that seems to emerge powerfully from the encounter of the two Karamazovs: that evil can be employed to show Christian belief irrational, noetically improper, and intellectually substandard.

Of course, the worry over whether or not Christian belief is rational is only one instance of philosophical reflection on all human beliefs. The philosophical enterprise operates on the legitimate

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principle that responsible persons do not simply have beliefs, but follow certain guidelines which help insure that those beliefs are adequate or true. The set of these guidelines, then, constitutes a kind of standard of rationality, and the person following them is to that extent rational. It is no grave embarrassment for thinking persons to abide by these procedures and sometimes arrive at false beliefs. To do this is simply to participate in the fallible venture of human knowledge. But to ignore or violate these accepted parameters of rationality is a great offense.²

It is not uncommon to find religious believers being accused of violating rational procedures. The determination to be made is whether evil may be used to ground the charge that the Christian believer is in flagrant violation of his intellectual duty and is thus irrational. Various studies of rationality might lead one to approach this question in several different ways. To be focused upon here is *what is believed* (i.e., a set of propositions central to Christian theism³) in the determination of whether Christian theism possesses inherent defects which preclude one from *rationally* believing it. Can the accuser in this matter — the “atheist,” avoiding the term’s misleading connotations — use evil to show that the theist *qua* theist is guilty of the charge of irrationality? In terms of existing criteria of rationality, it can be convincingly argued that Christian theism is not irrational in light of evil. One must remember, however, that to meet this atheistic objection is not to establish that Christian theism is true or even probably true. That would be quite another task altogether.

An apparently straightforward and promising way to approach the question of whether evil renders belief in God irrational would be to postulate a definition of rationality⁴ and see whether belief in God conforms to it. The chief difficulty with this course is that no final and complete definition of rationality is available. If there were such a definition, it would contain a set of conditions which would be severally necessary and jointly sufficient for a belief to be rational. The absence of a universal definition of rationality alone ought to humble the atheist and reduce his charge. However, there do seem to be partial definitions, two of which can be carefully fashioned into arguments from evil against the rationality of Christian theism. The first criterion of rationality is that beliefs be logically consistent; the second, that they be in close accord with the evidence. Hence, the atheist may construe Christian theism to be *irrational* in either of two ways:

(i) Theism is *logically inconsistent* in its own claims about God and evil,

or

(ii) Theism is *highly improbable* with respect to the evidence of evil.

Let us call these two broad challenges the logical problem of evil and the probabilistic problem of evil respectively,⁵ and consider each one in detail.

The Logical Problem of Evil

Many contemporary authors conceive of the problem of evil as a completely logical one. The atheistic charge is that orthodox Christianity is self-contradictory and thus irrational in the strongest sense.⁶ Alvin Plantinga, a theist, explains that in order to establish the charge of self-contradiction the atheist must identify a set of propositions which both entails a contradiction and is such that each proposition in the set is either necessarily true, essential to theism, or a consequence of such propositions.⁷ Obviously the theist would have no problem if he were not committed, on some grounds or other, to each proposition in the set or if the set did not really entail a contradiction. The following set of propositions is commonly cited:

- 1 God exists,
- 2 God is omnipotent,
- 3 God is omniscient,
- 4 God is omnibenevolent,
- 5 Evil exists.

Historically, both theists and atheists have recognized that this set or a set quite like it constitutes a logical problem for theism. J.L. Mackie insists that the enigma is insoluble and hence the defeat of theism:

In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these propositions so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions; the theologian, it seems, at once *must* adhere and

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cannot consistently adhere to all three.⁸

Several characteristics of this problem deserve attention. First, when posed as an *a priori* question of logical consistency, the problem does not suppose any matter of fact and can be discussed, for example, independently of other arguments for the existence of God or the non-existence of evil. The point at issue is whether theism contains contradictory propositions. If so, the atheist is victorious. Second, it is interesting to note that the belief in the sheer existence of evil is generally taken as essential to the alleged logical difficulty of theism. Only a very few authors have attempted to formulate a logical problem out of propositions 1 - 4 together with, say, this proposition:

- 6 Large amounts, extreme kinds, and perplexing distributions of evil exist.

Or propositions 1 - 4 and this proposition:

- 7 Unnecessary or gratuitous evil exists.

One would think that the theist would more easily be trapped in a contradiction if he must hold 1 - 4 and either 6 or 7. Nevertheless, the traditional formulation of the problem has centered around 5 and the charge that 1 - 4 entail its denial, or conversely, that 5 entails the denial of at least one proposition in the set 1 - 4.

The third interesting feature of the logical problem of evil is that the putative contradiction does not arise immediately on the basis of 1 - 5, but only after certain additional assumptions such as the following are made:

- 1' God has being or independent ontological status,
- 2' An omnipotent being can do anything the description of which does not involve a logical contradiction,
- 3' An omniscient being knows all the ways to eliminate evil,
- 4' An omnibenevolent being is opposed to evil and always seeks to eliminate it completely,
- 5' Evil is not logically necessary.

Presuming that the theist is committed to 1' - 5', the rumored implicit contradiction becomes explicit. It appears that 1 - 4 and 1' - 5' do entail this, to which the theist is unwittingly committed:

~5 Evil does not exist.

Yet the theist is officially committed to this statement:

5 Evil exists.

So, the atheist rightly points out that the theist cannot *rationally* have it both ways. Mackie, for example, believes that only premises 2' and 4', together with 1 - 5, are needed to trap the theist in a contradiction.⁹

The Theist's Rebuttal

When the structure of the atheistic challenge is laid bare in this way, what the theist must do to rebut it seems clear. The theist must reject one or more of the additional premises 1' - 5', or any others which are offered. This, of course, is precisely the spirit of Western theodicy, showing why God and God's world are different in important if subtle ways from the descriptions in 1' - 5'. For example, Augustine and Leibniz argue that premises such as 5' are false because any created finite world necessarily involves some evil, and thus, that God is not culpable for not eliminating it.¹⁰ More recently is the argument of C. S. Lewis, M. B. Ahern, and Alvin Plantinga that premises such as 4' do not hold because there are morally sufficient reasons why God might not completely eliminate all evil, the chief reason being the preservation of free will.¹¹

Theistic resistance to various propositions in 1' - 5' demonstrates that versions of the logical problem typically commit either of two fallacies in trying to find a contradiction within theism: They either *beg the question* by selecting propositions to which the theist is not committed, or *lift out of context* propositions to which the theist is committed, imputing new and convenient meanings to them.¹² So, the self-contradiction strategy for indicting theism of irrationality does not seem to be a promising avenue of atheistic attack. Of course, there *may* be a self-contradiction derivable within traditional theology, but the continued failure of atheists to produce it seems to count heavily against the likelihood of their eventual success.

The Probabilistic Problem of Evil

The logical problem of evil is not the only case for the irrationality of Christian theism. Another, and increasingly popular, rendition of the problem of evil is that Christian theism, though not strictly *inconsistent*, is *improbable* (implausible, unlikely, etc.). To accept a proposition or system of propositions clearly disfavored by a computation of relevant probabilities would be irrational in a different but nonetheless significant sense. In this kind of probabilistic case against theism, evil must somehow function as data or evidence for or against theistic claims. Cornman and Lehrer offer a brief description of the kind of world in which we live and then write:

Given this world, then, it seems, we should conclude that it is *improbable* that it was created or sustained by anything we would call God. Thus, given this particular world, it seems that we should conclude that it is *improbable* that God — who, if he exists, created the world — exists. Consequently, the belief that God does not exist, rather than the belief that he exists, would seem to be *justified by the evidence* we find in this world.¹³

William Rowe makes the argument more pointed:

We must then ask whether it is *reasonable* to believe that *all* the instances of profound, seemingly pointless human and animal suffering lead to greater goods. And, if they should somehow all lead to greater goods, is it *reasonable* to believe that an omnipotent, omniscient being *could not* have brought about *any* of those goods without permitting the instances of suffering which supposedly lead to them? When we consider these more general questions in the light of our experience and knowledge of the variety and profusion of human and animal suffering occurring daily in our world, it seems that *the answer must be no*. It seems *quite unlikely* that all the instances of intense human and animal suffering occurring daily in our world lead to greater goods, and *even more unlikely* that if they all do, an omnipotent, omniscient being could not have achieved at least some of those goods without permitting the instances of suffering that lead to them. In the light of our experience and knowledge of the

variety and scale of human and animal suffering in our world, the idea that none of those instances of suffering could have been prevented by an omnipotent being without the loss of a greater good seems an *extraordinary, absurd idea, quite beyond our belief*.¹⁴

These and similar arguments share at least one basic motif: On the evidence of evil, theism is improbable, and the theist accepting it is irrational.

Three aspects of the probabilistic problem of evil are noteworthy. First, theism is treated as an internally consistent system which implies factually testable assertions. Hence, one phase of the debate must be *a posteriori* in nature, seeking to ascertain the facts of the matter (e.g., what kinds of evils exist, whether they lead to greater goods, etc.). Second, most formulations of the probabilistic argument operate on the assumption that it is not the sheer fact that

5 Evil exists

which constitutes the negative evidence against theism. Instead they argue that either the fact that

6 Large amounts, extreme kinds, and perplexing distributions of evil exist,

or that

7 Pointless or gratuitous evil exists

does count against the basic set of theistic propositions 1 - 4. This focus is quite a shift from that of the logical problem.

The third aspect of this kind of problem is that, while all versions of it incorporate the concept of probability to cut against theistic belief, they seldom provide precise analysis of probability so that we can follow the pattern of argument. What, exactly, does the atheist mean when he says that theism is *improbable* in light of the facts of evil?

The scholarship on probability theory offers four popular specifications of the concept of probability. To be inspected here as to whether the atheist can use any of them in his argument from evil

are the personalist, logical, frequency, and inductive theories of probability.

The Personalistic Theory of Probability

The personalistic theory of probability might seem to aid the atheist in his argument against theism. The personalists (e.g., de Finetti,¹⁵ R. Jeffrey,¹⁶ I. Hacking¹⁷) classically hold that for each person there is a credence function (between the real numbers 0 and 1) which records the degree to which that person believes a given proposition relative to his own already accepted beliefs. Personalists sometimes claim to be able to measure a person's degree of belief by involving him in certain betting situations. The atheist wishing to phrase his probabilistic argument from evil in personalistic terms would have to maintain that the probability (as thus defined) of 1 - 4 on, perhaps, 7 is less than .5 (or 50 percent). But what really has transpired here? All that is being claimed is that a given person, presumably the atheist in question, has an assemblage of background beliefs (call it noetic structure) which leads him to conclude that the probability of 1 - 4 in light of 7 is low.

We can pass over the notorious difficulties in assigning quantitative measures to beliefs and simply point out the highly arbitrary nature of any measure at all. At best the probability value records nothing more than a piece of biographical information about the atheist, but certainly nothing about the qualities of theism itself or the theist's acceptance of it. In fact, given the theist's own noetic structure, theism has a fairly high credence function in spite of the facts of evil. The point here is simply that how well a proposed belief fares with a given person depends on what other beliefs he already happens to hold. On this criterion, it would be irrational for a person to believe that

8 Whales are mammals

if prior beliefs such as

9 All sea creatures are fish,

or

10 No mammals live in the sea

were part of his noetic structure. What background beliefs one happens to hold, how he comes to hold them, or how he could ever revise them, are questions which are utterly ignored. Yet, settling these issues is crucial, giving a respectable case for the irrationality of theism. So the personalistic interpretation of probability can hardly be used to show that theistic belief is irrational. One's next hunch at this point may be that a person's subjective belief must at least roughly correspond to some objective value which attaches to the propositions under consideration.

The Logical Interpretation of Probability

The logical interpretation of probability appears to be a more promising avenue of atheistic attack. Those who hold a logical concept of probability (e.g., R. Carnap¹⁸ and R. Swinburne¹⁹) describe probability as a completely objective relation holding between or among given propositions. One's degree of belief, then, is rational only if it conforms to the actual degree of probability of the proposition in question. For example, the rational degree of belief, i.e. the credence function, of

11 Jones can swim,

given

12 Nine out of ten Hoosiers can swim and Jones is a Hoosier,

should be .9 (or 90 percent), provided one has no other relevant knowledge. Following this interpretation of probability, the atheist must hold that the probability of 1 - 4, given perhaps 7, is again less than .5.

But how can the atheist legitimately claim that the set of propositions 1 - 4, given proposition 7, just *have* a low probability? What is the rule or criterion for assigning probability in these cases? Does one just *see* the correct probability, consult other relevant knowledge, or what? If the latter is done, then the atheist's other beliefs must be brought up for scrutiny, their respective probabilities checked, and so on. It is just not clear that all contingent propositions have a logical probability, that there is a method for determining whether they do, or that 7 would disconfirm 1 - 4 anyway. Thus, there

is certainly no auspicious attack from evil which can be generated from the purely logical concept of probability.

The Frequency Theory of Probability

The frequency theory of probability may seem to offer some help at this point. The frequentists (e.g., H. Reichenbach²⁰ and W. Salmon²¹) hold that probability expresses a ratio or proportion of events of one kind among events of another kind. An insurance actuary, for example, might find that the frequency with which death occurs among American males under thirty-five years of age is 50 out of 1000, or 5 percent. Hence, the probability of the proposition

13 An American male will die before his thirty-fifth birthday

is a very low .05.

Those who work with statistical frequencies, however, are familiar with the difficulties which plague the formation of a completely adequate method. One problem is obtaining proper samples of the two classes of events. A second problem is correctly extrapolating the observed samples to the unobserved cases. And a third — a notoriously difficult one — is that of the single case, that unique event for which no reference class at all can be found.

When the issue concerns the probability of theism, the problems are particularly exacerbating. How can we observe, for example, the relative frequency with which other worlds containing evils (similar to the evils we know) are also divinely created, such that we can ascertain the probability that this world is created by deity? Our world is the most difficult “single case” for which we have no other similar *actual* cases constituting a relevant reference class. At our feeble best, we can concoct possible worlds or analogous cases and try to draw some fragmentary conclusions.

Creating analogous cases from previous knowledge or experience, however, revives the skeletons in the personalist’s closet and totally skirts the crucial issues at the foundation of the general frequency view. Such a maneuver simply opens the door through which the theist and atheist may come to perfectly legitimate, but quite different, conclusions. It appears, then, that the frequency interpretation of probability offers the atheist no help in arguing for the strong improbability of theism.

The Inductive Theory of Probability

The inductive theory of probability pertains to the likelihood that a hypothesis is true in light of relevant factual evidence. Some authors attempt to assign quantitative probability value to hypotheses, but the majority of them believe that ordinary qualitative values are appropriate (e.g., “low,” “high,” etc.). At any rate, all of these authors (e.g., C. Hempel²² and K. Popper²³) interpret probability to be closely associated with scientific procedures. Basically, scientific induction consists in deriving the test implications of a given hypothesis and then checking (e.g., by observation, experiment, etc.) whether the anticipated results occur. Suppose that we are in ancient times and want to test the hypothesis that

14 The earth is round.

The hypothesis H by itself does not yield readily testable statements T, but does so only upon the addition of some assumption(s) A, such as

15 Lunar eclipses are due to the earth’s shadow cast upon the moon.

Now, from 14 and 15 it clearly follows²⁴ that

16 Lunar eclipses are round shaped.

The structure of reasoning here may be schematized like this:

$$\begin{array}{l} [H + A] \longrightarrow T \\ \text{evidence tends to confirm T} \\ \hline \text{Therefore, probably H,} \end{array}$$

where H = 14, A = 15, and T = 16. On the other hand, if the evidence disconfirms T, the probability of H decreases, and on the schema looks like this:

$$\begin{array}{l} [H + A] \longrightarrow T \\ \text{evidence tends to confirm } \sim T \\ \hline \text{Therefore, probably } \sim H. \end{array}$$

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On this scheme, the atheist must argue that theism, when treated as a hypothesis, possesses a very low probability on the evidence of evil. As we have already seen, 1 - 4 do not straightforwardly imply anything about God's disposition of evil, and do so only when conjoined with at least one additional assumption. Since there may be good reasons for God to allow not just the sheer existence of evil, but great amounts and variety of evil, the strongest atheistic attack would include the assumption that

- 17 God would not allow unnecessary or gratuitous evil to exist.²⁵

Gratuitous evils, to stipulate, are those evils which are not directly and specifically compensated by greater goods. Clearly, from 1 - 4 as the initial theistic hypothesis, together with 17 as an auxiliary assumption, it follows that

- 7 Unnecessary or gratuitous evil does not exist.

Mounted on the schema, the atheist's reasoning takes this form:

[(1) - (4) = (17)] \longrightarrow (7)
probably \sim (\sim 7), or (7)
Therefore, probably \sim [(1) - (4)].

Since it seems plausible and perhaps probable that 7 — the contradictory of the expected test implication \sim 7 — is the case,²⁶ the probability of 1 - 4 is reduced accordingly. Hence, the person believing 1 - 4 would appear to be irrational, and must give up at least one of these four claims.

Problems with the Inductive Approach

Although this inductive approach to probability provides the most respectable argument from evil (an argument whose method is reminiscent of corresponding theistic arguments within the tradition of natural theology) theists are still not without adequate reply. The difficulties of the atheist's case may be revealed simply by noting the problems which typically attend the normal scientific use of inductive-probabilistic reasoning.

First, there is the problem of ascertaining the occurrence or non-occurrence of the test implication: Were the instruments accurate, the reports reliable? In the atheist's argument, then, he faces the enormous task of determining the truth of 7. Evils which *appear* gratuitous may not *really* be gratuitous, particularly if one's perspective changes, or if a longer time-span is allowed. At best, the atheist can make a plausible case for the claim that *some* evils are really gratuitous. The theist can counter, as many theists have done in the long tradition of Western theodicy, with explanations of why those evils are not really gratuitous.

The second difficulty in the atheist's case is that the assumption needed to deduce the test consequence is not itself beyond question. It is true that the majority of theists agree with the atheists that the following is a fair assumption:

- 17 God would not allow unnecessary or gratuitous evils to exist.

This accounts for the fact that most theistic rebuttals of the atheistic challenge focus on defeating the factual premise 7 and not 17. There is also room, however, for calling 17 into question. For example, it is imaginable that God might allow gratuitous evils to exist if eliminating them meant precluding either the actuality or possibility of greater goods (e.g., God might allow the painful consequences of a physically violent act in order not to curtail the scope of human freedom). Moreover, God might allow numerous trivial evils to exist gratuitously while directing his providential activity to more significant evils.

Last, it might even be argued that God could allow significant evils to exist gratuitously, without any form of compensation, and that this is part of what it means to have a world which is *lost*. God may ultimately redeem *persons* affected by those evils, but need not meticulously compensate for every earthly event labeled evil. The upshot of these probings is simply that assumption 17, which the atheist needs in order for his argument to go through, is not above question.

There is yet a deeper problem with the atheistic attack under consideration. An established requirement for the final evaluation of any hypothesis is that the *total* body of available evidence be consulted. In the present case, evil is certainly one important and

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impressive piece of evidence, but is by no means the only relevant evidence. As long as the atheist insists on testing theism as a kind of hypothesis, then he must also inspect the large number and variety of goods present in the world, as well as a wide range of historical and existential considerations, which might well yield a high probability for theism. Unless the apparently falsifying evidence of evil is conclusive, which, as we have just seen, it is not, then the inductive appraisal of theism does not look nearly so dim for the theist, but may actually backfire on the atheist. At least the atheist can no longer charge that theism is clearly irrational by virtue of being wildly improbable.

Finally, a Matter of Terms

The conclusion of our investigation must be that the atheist cannot use evil to show that Christian belief is irrational, if by the term “irrational” he means either “logically inconsistent” or “highly improbable.” Since there are no other clear and accepted meanings for the term, it appears that the atheistic program here is totally misconceived. Upon close examination, the charge that theism is irrational turns out to be nothing more than a bit of intellectual imperialism on the part of the atheist. If the chastised atheist would like to venture the substitute thesis that, in light of the facts of evil, Christian belief is *false* rather than downright irrational, there would emerge a different and more fruitful debate. Of course, the recalcitrant atheist might still think that theism is irrational and claim to have other good arguments to prove it. The argument from evil, however, is not among them.²⁷ ■

Footnotes

¹Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Norton, 1976), p. 245. The encounter of Ivan and Alyosha constitutes one of the high points of world literature and deserves to be read carefully in Book Five “Pro and Contra,” chapters 3-5.

²In his classic of the last century, *The Ethics of Belief*, W. K. Clifford writes: “Whoso would deserve well of his fellows in this matter will guard the purity of his belief with a very fanaticism and jealous care, lest at any time it should rest on an unworthy object, and catch a stain which can never be wiped away.”

³I use “orthodox Christianity,” “Christian theism,” and “theism” interchangeably throughout the paper, although I am well aware of the distinctions which may be drawn.

⁴See John Kekes, *A Justification of Rationality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1976) in which he presents the problem of arriving at an adequate and

complete definition of rationality.

⁵See Michael L. Peterson, "Christian Theism and the Problem of Evil," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21 (March, 1978), pp. 35-46.

⁶Technically, for two propositions to be contradictory, one must be true when the other is false and vice versa. Since they both cannot be true at the same time, anyone who believes them or a set of propositions which entails them is irrational. For example, "It is raining" and "It is not raining" are explicitly contradictory; "If all men are mortal, then Jones is mortal," "All men are mortal," and "Jones is not mortal" are implicitly contradictory (i.e., imply the explicit contradiction "Jones is mortal" and "Jones is not mortal.")

⁷Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 117.

⁸J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind* 64 (1955), p. 200. Also see H. J. McCloskey, "The Problem of Evil," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 30 (1962), p. 187.

⁹Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," pp. 200-201. Also see R. R. LaCroix, "Unjustified Evil and God's Choice," *Sophia* 13 (April, 1974), pp. 20-28. LaCroix's article explores other premises to force the contradiction.

¹⁰Augustine, *The City of God and Enchiridion*; Leibniz, *Theodicy*.

¹¹C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962); M. B. Ahern, *The Problem of Evil* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971); Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1974), especially pp. 164-190.

¹²See Michael L. Peterson, "Evil and Inconsistency: A Reply to LaCroix," *Sophia* 18 (August, 1979), pp. 20-27.

¹³J. Cornman and K. Lehrer, *Philosophical Problems and Arguments* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 340-341; some italics mine.

¹⁴William Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion* (Encino: Dickenson, 1978), p. 89; italics mine.

¹⁵Bruno de Finetti, *Studies in Subjective Probability*, eds. Kyburg and Smokler (New York: Wiley, 1964).

¹⁶Richard Jeffrey, *The Logic of Decision* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1965).

¹⁷Ian Hacking, "Slightly More Realistic Personal Probability," *Philosophy of Science* 34 (1967).

¹⁸Rudolf Carnap, *Logical Foundations of Probability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

¹⁹Richard Swinburne, *An Introduction to Confirmation Theory* (London: Methusen and Co., 1973).

²⁰Hans Reichenbach, *The Theory of Probability* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1949).

²¹Wesley Salmon, *The Foundations of Scientific Inference* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1966).

²²Carl Hempel, *Philosophy of Science* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966).

²³Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Hutchinson, 1959).

²⁴Technically, another assumption is needed to derive the conclusion. The assumption would have to be something such as this: "Under no circumstances do round objects cast rectangular shadows." The round earth hypothesis example is drawn from George Schlesinger's *Religion and Scientific Method* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1977), pp. 11-12.

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²⁵See Michael L. Peterson, "God and Evil: Problems of Consistency and Gratitude," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 13, No. 1 (1979), pp. 305-313.

²⁶Whether gratuitous evil really exists is a vexed question. But it seems difficult to believe that *every* evil will or can be rectified in the future, or was the bearer of meaning when it occurred. For example, the pain of cutting my finger on a shoestring seems to be a gratuitous evil. More seriously, the burning to death of infants in the atomic blast at Hiroshima seems also to be gratuitous. Theists could deny that gratuitous evils exist and lock themselves into the task of proving their claim for all alleged cases, but this mode of defence against the problem of evil seems ill-founded and might ultimately force us to reject our ordinary moral judgments about evils in the world.

²⁷I cheerfully acknowledge a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities which allowed me to do the research out of which this article developed.