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THEISM, THE HYPOTHESIS OF INDIFFERENCE, AND THE BIOLOGICAL ROLE OF PAIN AND PLEASURE

Daniel Howard-Snyder

Following Hume's lead, Paul Draper argues that, given the biological role played by both pain and pleasure in goal-directed organic systems, the observed facts about pain and pleasure in the world are antecedently much more likely on the Hypothesis of Indifference than on theism. I examine one by one Draper's arguments for this claim and show how they miss the mark.

1. *Hume's Indifference Hypothesis*

In Part IX of the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Hume has Philo reflect on the "immense profusion of beings" on earth, their "prodigious variety and fecundity" and their destructiveness and inability to achieve happiness. What hypothesis could possibly explain such mixed phenomena?

Here the Manichean system occurs as a proper hypothesis to solve the difficulty; and, no doubt, in some respects it is very specious and has more probability than the common hypothesis, by giving a plausible account of the strange mixture of good and ill which appears in life. But if we consider, on the other hand, the perfect uniformity and agreement of the parts of the universe, we shall not discover in it any marks of the combat of a malevolent with a benevolent being. There is indeed an opposition of pains and pleasures in the feelings of sensible creatures; but are not all the operations of nature carried on by an opposition of principles, of hot and cold, moist and dry, light and heavy? The true conclusion is that the original source of all things is entirely indifferent to all these principles, and has no more regard to good above ill than to heat above cold, or to drought above moisture, or to light above heavy.

There may *four* hypotheses be framed concerning the first causes of the universe: that they are endowed with perfect goodness; that they have perfect malice; that they are opposite and have both goodness and malice; that they have neither goodness nor malice. Mixed phenomena can never prove the two former unmixed principles; and the uniformity and steadiness of general laws seem to oppose the third. The fourth, therefore, seems by far the most probable. (Hume 1970, pp. 103-104)

Hume initially contrasts Manicheanism with "the common hypothesis," theism. The former, he says, explains the pattern of suffering and good in the



world better than the latter; hence Manicheanism is more probable than theism on that account. However, theism explains the orderliness of nature better than Manicheanism, and so theism is more probable than Manicheanism in light of that fact. Interestingly, Hume does not pursue the relative merits of these competing hypotheses. Instead, he introduces a third: “the original source of all things is entirely indifferent to all these principles, and has no more regard to good above ill than to heat above cold...” Call this the *Indifference Hypothesis* (IH). Hume asserts that, unlike Manicheanism, IH better explains the orderliness of the world and, unlike theism and the malicious genius hypothesis, IH better explains the “mixed phenomena” of good and evil. Thus, IH is more probable than any of its competitors, including theism.

Four features of Hume’s strategy are worth noting.

i. He is concerned to show that observed facts about *both* good and evil are more likely on IH than on theism. Thus, he aims to shortcircuit the response that even if evil is more likely on nontheistic hypotheses, the good in the world is much more likely on theism.

ii. The central claim — that facts about good and ill in the world are more likely on IH than on theism — can be true even if we are unsure exactly how likely those facts are on theism. All Hume needs is the judgment that facts about good and evil are *comparatively* more likely on IH than on theism.

iii. Hume’s strategy would work even if IH is neither true, nor probable nor more reasonable than not to believe. IH need only be more likely than theism in order to infer that theism is improbable. If two hypotheses are incompatible and known to be so, and the first is more probable than the second, then the probability of the second is lower than .5 regardless of how probable or improbable the first is.

iv. Hume says that there is some “operation of nature” that is “carried on” by “the opposition of pains and pleasures in the feelings of sensible creatures.” This natural role played by pain and pleasure, he says, is not unusual, since “all the operations of nature [are] carried on by an opposition of principles.” Moreover, this natural role is what makes the observed facts about good and ill, pain and pleasure, more likely on IH than on theism. Although it is clear enough that Hume thinks the observed facts about pain and pleasure are due to some role pain and pleasure play in the lives of sentient beings and that this role makes those facts more likely on IH than on theism, it is not clear in the passage quoted what role he is talking about. However, he suggests earlier in Part IX that it is the role of pain and pleasure in “the great work of self-preservation” that he has in mind (Hume 1970, pp. 96-97). So the idea is that observed facts about pain and pleasure are more likely on IH than on theism because of the role that pain and pleasure play in keeping sentient beings alive, in short, because of their survival value. While this suggestion is certainly interesting, one would like Hume to have had Philo

say more about *why* the role that pain and pleasure play in self-preservation renders the observed facts about pain and pleasure more likely on IH than on theism.¹

2. Draper's Deployment of Hume's Strategy

Fortunately for students of Hume and the problem of evil, Paul Draper has recently given us a good idea how the gap in Hume's strategy might be filled (Draper 1989, 1993, 1995). Draper asks us to consider a serious alternative hypothesis to theism, by which he means one that is incompatible with theism, not *ad hoc* and at least as initially plausible as theism. He calls it the *Hypothesis of Indifference* (HI):

Neither the nature nor the condition of sentient beings on earth is the result of benevolent or malevolent actions performed by non-human persons.

Now, let 'O' stand for a statement reporting all the observed facts about pain and pleasure in the world. And let a theistic story be any attempt to explain certain facts about evil or good in terms of theism. Draper claims that

(C) O is antecedently much more probable on the assumption that HI is true than on the assumption that theism is true.

That is, given what we know apart from O, the probability of O on HI is much greater than the probability of O on theism.² Let's abbreviate this as the claim that $P(O/HI) >! P(O/theism)$, where ">!" stands for "...is much greater than...." The main premises for Draper's argument for C are these:

- (1) Given "the biological role played by both pain and pleasure in goal-directed organic systems," independent of the effect of theistic stories on $P(O/theism)$, C is true.
- (2) Theistic stories do not significantly raise $P(O/theism)$.

Peter van Inwagen has argued (van Inwagen 1991) that Draper's argument is marred by the fact that some theistic stories show that we are unable to compare the antecedent probability of O/theism to the antecedent probability of O/HI; hence, we are hardly in a position to judge that $P(O/HI) >! P(O/theism)$. Van Inwagen might well be onto something here. But whether he is or not is not my concern in this paper. (But see Draper 1995 and van Inwagen 1995.) My view is that there is something even more fundamentally defective about Draper's argument, namely, that none of the considerations he adduces in support of (1) lend it any credibility at all. I shall defend this charge in short order; but first, I want to observe three things useful for understanding Draper's case properly.

3. Three Preliminary Observations

i. Draper claims that $P(O/HI) >! P(O/theism)$. The probabilities in question here are *conditional epistemic probabilities*, not logical, statistical or other

probabilities. “The concept of epistemic probability,” Draper notes, “is an ordinary concept of probability for which no adequate philosophical analysis has...been proposed.” But, for the purposes of preceding with the argument, Draper offers this: where K is an epistemic situation and p and q are propositions, relative to K , p is epistemically more probable than q just in case any fully rational person in K would have a higher degree of belief that p than that q (Draper 1989, p. 349). Three comments are in order. First, let an “epistemic situation” for an individual at a time be just what she has to go on at the time to judge whether p or q is true. Second, since what one has to go on may differ from what another has to go on, and since what one has to go on at one time may differ from what one has to go on at another time, the epistemic probability of a proposition may differ from person to person and change over time for an individual. This opens the door to the possibility that while Draper’s arguments might well show that relative to some epistemic situations, $P(O/HI) > P(O/theism)$, relative to others, $P(O/HI) < P(O/theism)$. (See Plantinga 1988, 1995 and Draper 1991 on this point.) Indeed, relative to some epistemic situations it might be that $P(O/HI) = P(O/theism)$. Third, a fully rational person might consider the matter carefully and find herself in genuine doubt about how to make a very interesting comparative probability assignment: $P(O/HI) ? P(O/theism)$. Barring any other considerations, the reasonable thing to do in that case would be to withhold belief about the matter.

ii. In Draper’s argument, “pain” refers to any sort of physical or emotional suffering, e.g., the pain of broken limb or childbirth, and grief over the loss of one’s father. “Pleasure” refers not only to the “lower” pleasures — e.g., the pleasure a dip in a cool stream brings in an Indiana summer — but the “higher” pleasures as well — e.g., the pleasure of good friends, Mozart, and constructing philosophical treatises. Now, much pain and pleasure is *biologically useful* — it causally contributes to the biological goals of an organism and its doing so is not biologically accidental. On the other hand, a lot of pain and pleasure is not biologically useful — it is *biologically gratuitous*. However, according to Draper, nearly all known biologically gratuitous pain and pleasure is either *pathological* — it results from the failure of some organic system to function properly, e.g. the pain caused by terminal cancer— or *biologically appropriate* — it is of a kind that is biologically useful but because of particular circumstances it doesn’t contribute to the biological goals of organisms, e.g. the pain caused humans when they burn to death. Thus, pain and pleasure are explained biologically: they are either biologically useful, biologically appropriate, or pathological.

iii. O is equivalent to the conjunction of three propositions — O_1 , O_2 , and O_3 — reporting the facts about (1) moral agents experiencing pain or pleasure that is biologically useful, (2) non-moral agents experiencing pain or pleasure

that is biologically useful, and (3) sentient beings experiencing pain or pleasure that is biologically gratuitous. To show that $P(O/HI) >! P(O/theism)$, Draper argues for three propositions: $P(O1/HI) >! P(O1/theism)$, $P(O2/HI \& O1) > P(O2/theism \& O1)$, and $P(O3/HI \& O1 \& O2) >! P(O3/theism \& O1 \& O2)$. If he succeeds, he will have shown that $P(O/HI) >! P(O/theism)$. Now to Draper's arguments.

4. *The Argument for $P(O1/HI) >! P(O1/theism)$*

O1 is the proposition that records all the facts about moral agents experiencing biologically useful pain and pleasure. Now, why suppose that $P(O1/HI) >! P(O1/theism)$? Because, says Draper, pain and pleasure differ significantly from other parts of organic systems — pain is intrinsically bad and pleasure is intrinsically good. But how does this difference give us reason to suppose that $P(O1/HI) >! P(O1/theism)$? Draper answers:

HI entails that, if pain and pleasure exist, then they are not the result of malevolent or benevolent actions performed by nonhuman persons. So on HI, the moral difference between pain and pleasure and other parts of organic systems gives us no antecedent reason to believe that pain and pleasure will not play the same biological role that other parts of organic systems play. Indeed, a biological explanation of pain and pleasure is just the sort of explanation that one would expect on HI. But theism entails that God is responsible for the existence of any pain and pleasure in the world. Since God is morally perfect, He would have good moral reasons for producing pleasure even if it is never biologically useful, and He would not permit pain unless He had, not just a biological reason, but also a morally sufficient reason to do so. And since God is omnipotent and omniscient, He could create goal-directed organic systems (including humans) without biologically useful pain and pleasure. So theism entails both that God does not need biologically useful pain and pleasure to produce human goal-directed systems and that, if human pain and pleasure exist, then God had good moral reasons for producing them, reasons that for all we know antecedently, might very well be inconsistent with pain and pleasure systematically contributing to the biological goals of human organisms. Therefore, we would have much less reason on theism than on HI to be surprised if it turned out that human pain and pleasure differed from other parts of organic systems by not systematically contributing to the biological goals of those systems. Hence, since O1 reports that the pain and pleasure experienced by humans (who are moral agents) do contribute in this way, $P(O1/HI)$ is much greater than $P(O1/theism)$. (Draper 1989, pp. 336-37)

As Draper correctly suggests in the second sentence, the fact that pain and pleasure have biological utility is manifestly *not* what one would expect on HI *all by itself*. So if we rightly expect biologically useful pain and pleasure on HI more than on theism it must be either because (a) we antecedently know something that gives us good reason to expect biologically useful pain and pleasure on HI, but we have no comparable reason to expect it on theism

or (b) we antecedently know something that gives us good reason not to expect biologically useful pain and pleasure on theism, but we have no comparable reason *not* to expect it on HI. Now, Draper suggests that, barring any reason not to expect biologically useful pain and pleasure on HI, the fact that other parts of organic systems possess biological utility should lead us to expect on HI that pain and pleasure will also be biologically useful. But, of course, if he's right, then the same holds true for theism. Barring reason not to expect biologically useful pain and pleasure on theism, the fact that other parts of organic systems have biological utility gives us reason to expect on theism that pain and pleasure will likewise be biologically useful. So, Draper's argument for $P(O1/HI) > P(O1/theism)$ hangs on the claim that we antecedently know something that gives us reason not to expect biologically useful pain and pleasure on theism, but nothing we antecedently know gives us reason not to expect it on HI.

What is that something? Jointly, that there is a deep moral difference between pain and pleasure, on the one hand, and other aspects of organic systems, on the other; that theism entails God has a morally justifying reasons to permit pain and pleasure;³ and, that since God is omnipotent and omniscient, He could create human moral agents that do not experience biologically useful pain and pleasure. The argument proceeds: for all we know, God's reasons for permitting pain and pleasure might be inconsistent with their biological usefulness. Thus, on theism, we have reason to expect that, if pain and pleasure exist, they won't be biologically useful. But on HI we have no comparable reason to expect that, if pain and pleasure exist, they won't be biologically useful. Therefore, $P(O1/HI) > P(O1/theism)$.

I have two complaints about this argument, one major and one minor. But first, I want to remove a red herring. It is not at all clear that Draper has successfully located a moral difference between pain and pleasure, and other parts of organic systems. He suggests that pain and pleasure have intrinsic moral value or disvalue and other aspects of organic systems do not. But this assumes a highly controversial hedonic value theory. It is much more plausible that there are other intrinsically valuable features of organic systems, life itself, for example, health, strength, beauty, overall flourishing of individual organisms, and the mutual dependence of different organisms in a variety of ways. Of course, if there is no deep moral difference between pain and pleasure and other aspects of organic systems, then we can't say that since there is such a difference, the biological utility of pain and pleasure is less likely on theism than on HI.⁴

But, contrary to what he suggests, Draper's argument does not need the premise that there is a deep moral difference between pain and pleasure and other aspects of organisms. What *is* crucial is the proposition that, for all we know, theism is incompatible with the biological utility of pain and pleasure.

He infers this not from the alleged difference between pain and pleasure and other aspects of organisms but from the fact that theism entails that there is a morally sufficient reason for God's permitting pain and pleasure and the premise that for all we know God's reasons are incompatible with the biological utility of pain and pleasure. Draper can have that argument without implying a highly controversial claim about what is and what is not intrinsically good and bad. So, let us not be distracted by Draper's claim that there is a deep moral disparity between pain and pleasure and other parts of organic systems. (Of course, if, contrary to what I have just said, Draper's argument relies on a hedonic value theory, then that is a major strike against it.) Now to my complaints.

The minor worry is this: Suppose that, for all we know, God's reasons for permitting pain and pleasure are inconsistent with their biological usefulness. And suppose that this gives us some reason to expect that, on theism, pain and pleasure won't be biologically useful. Nevertheless, the fact that there is no comparable entailment on HI seems hardly *enough* reason to infer that we should assign a *much* higher degree of belief in O1 given HI than O1 given theism. At most, this justifies only a *slightly* higher degree of belief in O1 on HI than on theism. In that case, it becomes a serious question whether the slightly higher probability of O1 on HI than on theism is high enough to justify atheistic belief rather than agnosticism. To illustrate the general point here, suppose you have 100 students, 51 female and 49 male. You know that one of them, Pat, is coming for office hours today. While this information might well justify a two-bit bet on the proposition that Pat is a woman, it certainly is not sufficient to justify your telling anyone that a woman is coming for your office hours. The reason Draper gives for $P(O1/HI) > P(O1/theism)$ seems about as weighty as your reason to think Pat is a woman.

My major complaint, however, lies elsewhere. Draper asserts that for all we know God's reasons for permitting pain and pleasure are incompatible with their biological utility in order to suggest that, for all we know, theism *itself* is incompatible with the biological utility of pain and pleasure. Now, Draper is wrong to think that we don't know anything that implies that theism is compatible with the biological utility of pain and pleasure. We can think of reasons for God to permit pain and pleasure that are compatible with their biological utility. Here's one: pleasure is intrinsically good. Surely God might permit pleasure for that very reason, one that is obviously compatible with the biological utility of pleasure. Moreover, theistic stories of the sort sketched by contemporary theodiscists certainly include reasons for permitting some pain, even horrific pain, and those reasons are obviously compatible with the biological utility of pain. It seems then that it is *false* that for all we know theism is incompatible with the biological utility of pain and pleasure.

Of course, Draper will remind me that I am in the process of arguing that

his premise (1) is false, i.e. that it is false that given the biological role played by both pain and pleasure, *independent of the effect of theistic stories on $P(O1/theism)$* , $O1$ is antecedently much more probable on HI than on theism; but I have introduced theistic stories to infer that we know some things that imply that theism and biologically useful pain and pleasure are compatible.

Guilty as charged: I have introduced theistic stories. But what else could a reasonable person do? The only way to tell whether for all we know theism is incompatible with the biological utility of pleasure and pain is to consider whether we know of any consistent stories in which they both appear. And here's the rub: the same goes for HI and the biological utility of pain and pleasure. Draper says that on HI we have no comparable reason to expect that, if pain and pleasure exist, they won't be biologically useful. But we are entitled to join him in that judgment only if HI and the biological utility of pain and pleasure are compatible. And why should we think that? Because we can tell consistent stories in which both appear. But, surely, if we are allowed to consider HI-istic stories to assess whether we know something that implies that HI and biologically useful pain and pleasure are compatible, then we ought to be permitted to consider theistic stories for the same purpose. Otherwise, we stand the chance of judging unfairly, or what's worse, inaccurately, that $P(O1/HI) > P(O1/theism)$.

The point I'm making can be put in the form of a dilemma: either we may consider theistic stories to assess the claim that, for all we know, theism and biologically useful pain and pleasure are incompatible, or we may not; if we may, then, *contra* Draper, we do know some things — namely, theistic stories — that imply that theism and biologically useful pain and pleasure are compatible; if we may not, then, *contra* Draper, we cannot fairly claim that on HI we have no comparable reason to expect that, if pain and pleasure exist, they won't be biologically useful (since, aside from HI-istic stories, for all we know, HI and biologically useful pain and pleasure are *not* compatible).

5. *The Argument for $P(O2/HI \ \& \ O1) > P(O2/theism \ \& \ O1)$*

What about the claim that $P(O2/HI \ \& \ O1) > P(O2/theism \ \& \ O1)$? $O2$ expresses all the facts about nonmoral agents experiencing biologically useful pain and pleasure. If we rightly expect $O2$ on HI & $O1$ more than on theism & $O1$ it must be either because (a) we antecedently know something that gives us good enough reason to expect nonmoral agents to experience biologically useful pain and pleasure on HI & $O1$, but we have no comparable reason to expect it on theism & $O1$ or (b) we antecedently know something that gives us reason not to expect nonmoral agents to experience biologically useful pain and pleasure on theism & $O1$, but we have no comparable reason not to expect it on HI & $O1$. Now, Draper suggests that, barring any reason not to expect nonmoral agents to experience biologically useful pain and

pleasure on HI & O1, the fact that moral agents are biologically similar to nonmoral agents and moral agents experience biologically useful pain and pleasure should lead us to expect on HI that nonmoral agents will experience biologically useful pain and pleasure. But, if he's right, then the same holds true for theism. Barring reason not to expect nonmoral agents to experience biologically useful pain and pleasure on theism & O1, the fact that moral agents are biologically similar to nonmoral agents and moral agents experience biologically useful pain and pleasure gives us reason to expect on theism that nonmoral agents will experience biologically useful pain and pleasure. So, Draper's argument that $P(O2/HI \ \& \ O1) > P(O2/theism \ \& \ O1)$ depends on our antecedently knowing something that gives us reason *not* to expect nonmoral agents to experience biologically useful pain and pleasure on theism & O1, and our antecedently knowing nothing that gives us comparable reason not to expect it on HI & O1. Why suppose theism and HI differ in this way?

Draper claims that "there is an important difference between the biologically useful pain that O1 reports and the biologically useful pain that O2 reports." He continues:

Given theism & O1, we have reason to believe that God permits the pain O1 reports because it plays some sort of (presently indiscernible) moral role in the lives of the humans that experience it. But the pain O2 reports cannot play such a role, since the subjects of it are not moral agents. This difference is plainly not relevant on HI & O1, but it gives us some reason on theism & O1 to expect that the good moral reasons God has for permitting moral agents to experience pain do not apply to animals that are not moral agents, and hence some reason to believe that God will not permit such beings to experience pain. So $P(O2/HI \ \& \ O1)$ is somewhat greater than $P(O2/theism \ \& \ O1)$. (Draper 1989, p. 338)

I take this to be the following argument:

- i. Given theism & O1, God must have morally justifying reasons to permit moral agents to experience biologically useful pain, reasons that have to do with the moral role pain plays in their lives.
- ii. But God cannot permit nonmoral agents to experience biologically useful pain for these reasons since they are not moral agents.
- iii. So, we have some reason to expect that He will not permit nonmoral agents to experience biologically useful pain.
- iv. Hence, on theism and O1, we have some reason to expect that nonmoral agents would not experience biologically useful pain.
- v. But on HI and O1, we have no comparable reason to expect that nonmoral agents would not experience biologically useful pain.
- vi. Therefore, $P(O2/HI \ \& \ O1) > P(O2/theism \ \& \ O1)$.

The trouble here is that (iii) does not follow from (i) and (ii). Since nonmoral

agents cannot respond to their suffering in ways that moral agents can, then some reasons God might have for permitting moral agents to experience biologically useful pain would not justify His permitting nonmoral agents to experience biologically useful pain. Thus we might rightly expect that God would permit nonmoral agents to experience *somewhat* less biologically useful pain than moral agents. (How much less? Who knows. Do they experience less? Who knows.) But to infer from (i) and (ii) that we have reason to expect that nonmoral agents would not experience biologically useful pain *at all* is completely unfounded. To draw that inference requires sufficient reason to expect that God has no other morally justifying reasons to permit biologically useful pain, reasons that would justify His permitting nonmoral agents to suffer biologically useful pain. Draper gives us no good reason to expect that; I doubt there is one.

6. *The Argument for $P(O3/HI \ \& \ O1 \ \& \ O2) >!$
 $P(O3/theism \ \& \ O1 \ \& \ O2)$*

O3 expresses all the facts about both moral and nonmoral agents experiencing biologically gratuitous pain and pleasure. Draper gives what he calls a two-part argument for the claim that $P(O3/HI \ \& \ O1 \ \& \ O2) >!$ $P(O3/theism \ \& \ O1 \ \& \ O2)$ but, in fact, there are three unrelated parts which, together, he believes, supports his claim. I will treat each separately, although not in the order he presents them.

1. The first part is this:

[W]e have, antecedently, much more reason on HI & O1 & O2 than on theism & O1 & O2 to believe that the fundamental role of pain and pleasure in our world is a biological one and that the presence of biologically gratuitous pain and pleasure is epiphenomenal.... And this is undeniably supported by the fact that...much biologically gratuitous pain and pleasure is either pathological or biologically appropriate and very little is known to be both non-pathological and biologically inappropriate. And this is exactly what one would expect if pain and pleasure are fundamentally biological rather than moral phenomena, and so is much more to be expected on HI & O1 & O2 than on theism & O1 & O2 (Draper, 1989, pp. 338-39).

This is not a good argument.

First of all, even if we grant that biologically gratuitous pain will be largely pathological and biologically appropriate,⁵ nothing we antecedently know gives us any reason at all to expect this to be the case on HI *all by itself*. The only antecedent reason to expect this on HI & O1 & O2 is that other parts of organic systems have biological explanations and that O1 & O2 report that much of the pain and pleasure in the world is biologically useful. So, if this is good reason to expect on HI & O1 & O2 that biologically gratuitous pain and pleasure will be biologically appropriate and pathological, then, *ceteris paribus*, it is good reason to expect on theism & O1 & O2 that biologically

gratuitous pain and pleasure will be biologically appropriate and pathological. Therefore, this argument of Draper's is good reason to think O3 "is much more to be expected on HI & O1 & O2 than on theism & O1 & O2" only if HI & theism themselves differ in such a way that we should antecedently expect biologically gratuitous pain and pleasure to be biologically appropriate and pathological more on HI & O1 & O2 than on theism & O1 & O2. So, what is the relevant difference between theism and HI?

Draper suggests that on theism, we would antecedently expect, at bottom, some explanation of pain and pleasure in terms of the moral role it plays in the lives of sentient beings whereas on HI we would antecedently expect no such thing. But this is a relevant difference between HI and theism only if the fact that on theism pain and pleasure have a fundamentally moral explanation precludes their also having a fundamentally biological explanation. I can think of no good reason to expect that, on theism, pain and pleasure will not, at bottom, be explicable *both* in terms of some moral purpose *and* in terms of some biological explanation. Indeed, if pain and pleasure played two fundamental roles in the lives of sentient beings, that would indicate efficiency on the part of our designer, if it indicated anything at all.

2. The second part of Draper's argument that $P(O3/HI \& O1 \& O2) > P(O3/theism \& O1 \& O2)$ is this:

We obviously have much more reason on theism & O1 & O2 than we have on HI & O1 & O2 to expect sentient beings (especially nonhuman animals) to be happy — in any case much more happy than they would be if their pleasure were limited to that reported by O1 and O2. Instead, when the facts O3 reports are added to those reported by O1 and O2, we find that many humans and animals experience prolonged and intense suffering and a much greater number are far from happy.

What shall we make of this dense passage?

Well, let us unpack it by first considering the biologically gratuitous pleasure of the brutes. Suppose Draper is right that we have much more reason to think that they would experience more biologically gratuitous pleasure on theism & O1 & O2 than on HI & O1 & O2. Do we have any reason to believe the brutes *don't* experience the appropriate amount? What is the appropriate amount to expect on theism anyway? Draper implies that we should just look around. But having a look around isn't going to help. I, at any rate, can't tell how much biologically gratuitous pleasure my own cats experience nor whether it approaches the appropriate amount to be expected on theism. So how on earth am I, or anybody else, to get the information needed to take a guess at whether the amount of biologically gratuitous pleasure experienced by all the brutes we know of is up to theistic expectations?

Consider next the biologically gratuitous pleasure of human beings. We can tell in a rough and ready way that many, perhaps even most, of our fellows

do not now experience as much biologically gratuitous pleasure as they would like. But is this reason to infer that human beings have not experienced as much biologically gratuitous pleasure as is expected on theism? That all depends. If it did, then, given theism, we should have reason to expect that we would experience more biologically gratuitous pleasure *in this life* rather than later. We have no such reason.

What about biologically gratuitous pain? Draper is certainly right that we and the brutes experience a lot of prolonged and intense suffering that serves no biological purpose. And perhaps we should not expect anything else on HI & O1 & O2. But why, according to Draper, should we expect much less biologically gratuitous pain on theism & O1 & O2? Note that it is only because of O1 & O2 that we antecedently expect biologically useless prolonged and intense suffering on HI & O1 & O2. So, in all consistency, Draper should say that, *ceteris paribus*, for the same reason we should antecedently expect the same on theism & O1 & O2. Draper doesn't give us any reason to think the two cases are not equal in relevant respects and I can think of nothing plausible to fill the gap.

3. The third part of Draper's argument for $P(O3/HI \ \& \ O2 \ \& \ O3) >! P(O3/theism \ \& \ O1 \ \& \ O2)$ is this:

[W]e have more reason on theism & O1 and O2 than on HI & O1 and & O2 to expect to discover a close connection between certain moral goods (e.g., justice and virtue) and biologically gratuitous pain and pleasure, but we discover no such connection.

I see no reason for Draper to restrict this argument to biologically *gratuitous* pain and pleasure. Moreover, most biologically gratuitous pleasure is very closely connected to a moral good, namely, itself. Perhaps, then, Draper's line of thought is better put like this:

- i. Given theism, there is good reason to expect that if there is pain, then there is a close connection between it and morally justifying goods.
- ii. Given HI, there is no reason at all to expect anything of comparable significance.
- iii. So, we have much more reason on theism than on HI to expect that if there is pain, then there is a close connection between it and morally justifying goods.
- iv. We discover no such connection.
- v. Therefore, $P(\text{pain}/HI) >! P(\text{pain}/\text{theism})$.

What should we make of this argument? The inference from (iii) and (iv) to (v) is strong only if we should expect, on theism, to discover a connection between morally justifying goods and pain. Call this *Draper's Assumption*. Draper's Assumption, I believe, is false.

The first part of my reason for believing this is the *Progress Argument*. Human knowledge has progressed in a variety of fields of human enquiry, in both the hard and the soft sciences. The periodic discovery of previously unknown aspects of reality and the development of concepts with which to grasp them strongly suggests that there will be further progress of a similar sort. Since, future progress implies present ignorance, we have good reason to expect that there is much we are ignorant of in the sciences. Now, given what we have to go on in the way of archeological and paleontological data, it is *at least* as likely as not that our ancestors discovered various intrinsic values over a period of tens of thousands of years dotted by millenia-long gaps in which nothing was discovered. Hence, even if we've discovered no intrinsic goods for two or three thousand years, it is at least as antecedently likely as not that there has been the sort of periodic progress in the discovery of goods that strongly suggests that there remain goods to be discovered, hence goods we are ignorant of. In that case, we should hardly be surprised that, given theism, we would not discover a connection between morally justifying goods and pain.

Here's another argument, the *Argument from Complexity*: It would not be surprising if God, in His perfect goodness and wisdom, would pursue the realization of some very great goods. Now one thing that Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 4, Ste. Michele's Cabernet Sauvignon (Reserve) and the best sort of love share when compared to Chopsticks, Gallo table wine and puppy love is that each illustrates the fact that the value of a state of affairs is sometimes greater since that state of affairs is more complex. So it is *at least* as antecedently likely as not that God, in His goodness and wisdom, would aim to realize some very complex states of affairs. Since much of the suffering reported by O is so horrifyingly bad as to defy adequate description, it would take correspondingly great goods to justify its permission. In that case, it's at least as antecedently likely as not that God's reasons for permitting these horrors have to do with very complex states of affairs. Now, one of the well-known drawbacks of the human cognitive condition is that we are able to conceive of states of affairs of fairly limited complexity. Therefore, it is at least as antecedently likely as not that were God to have a reason to permit the pain and pleasure reported by O, it would have to do with good states of affairs that are too complex for us to grasp given our present cognitive capacities. And so the Argument from Complexity gives us good reason to be wholly unsurprised that, on theism, we would not discover a connection between morally justifying goods and pain.⁶

I submit that The Progress Argument and the Argument from Complexity jointly constitute sufficient reason to be in doubt about Draper's Assumption.⁷

7. Conclusion

Inspired by Hume, Draper set out to show that $P(O/HI) >! P(O/theism)$.

Toward that end, he proposed to argue that $P(O1/HI) > P(O1/theism)$, that $P(O2/HI \ \& \ O1) > P(O2/theism \ \& \ O1)$, and that $P(O3/HI \ \& \ O1 \ \& \ O2) > P(O3/theism \ \& \ O1 \ \& \ O2)$. By my lights, the considerations he adduced to support these claims do not support his probability assignments. Indeed, it seems to me that a reasonable nontheist with a full understanding of Draper's arguments might well believe that $P(O/HI) = P(O/theism)$, or that $P(O/HI) < P(O/theism)$. It is a pressing question whether some other considerations about pain and pleasure in the lives of sentient beings could be used to get Hume and Draper the conclusion they want in the very interesting way that they want it. But I shan't do their work for them here.

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NOTES

1. I am indebted to Draper for teaching me Hume's strategy. Draper 1993 is a "must read."

2. An anonymous referee said that I am overlooking the notorious difficulty in specifying what it is that we are to consider "apart from O." Another said that the way I engage Draper is useless: "no one can usefully debate 'probabilities' of empirical states of affairs in this abstract way at all." It all rests on specious "intuitions about probabilities." Thus, although "competent" and "correct," my objections are, in a word, "trivial." One might add that by engaging Draper in the way I do I implicitly endorse the false assumption that theism is a hypothesis whose credibility is to be assessed by its ability to explain phenomena in the world. (See Alston 1994 on this assumption.) What can I say? Well, first of all, book length discussions of arguments, even important ones like Draper's, are not likely to be accepted by a journal, and I *did* want this piece to be accepted and it would take a book to assess these very interesting worries properly. I hope to do that in the future. But, in the meantime, I have limited myself to *one* sort or level of response. Why this one, rather than something more basic? Well, it is common practice to gloss over various assumptions of an argument in order to assess whether even the most sympathetic reading can withstand critical scrutiny. In doing so, I should not be taken to endorse those assumptions or even to take them seriously. They just aren't my topic. There are several reasons to proceed this way, the salient one being that many people in my audience will accept those assumptions and it will be of interest to them, if not others, what can be said against Draper's argument given those assumptions.

3. To avoid any possible misunderstandings, note that this is not equivalent to the false proposition that theism entails that God has morally justifying reasons to permit pain and pleasure to play a biological role. God might well have no morally justifying reason to permit their playing *that role* yet be fully justified in permitting them.

4. This point was brought to my attention by C. Stephen Layman.

5. And I have my doubts about it. See Plantinga, 1995.

6. Both of these arguments are inspired by William Alston. See Alston 1991, pp. 44-45, and Christlieb 1992. They are discussed at greater length and used against Rowe's many

versions of the argument from evil in Howard-Snyder 1995. See also Alston 1995 in this connection.

7. In thinking about the topic of this paper, I have benefited greatly from talking with Frances Howard-Snyder. I thank William Alston, Paul Draper and C. Stephen Layman for comments on earlier drafts.

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