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HASKER ON GRATUITOUS NATURAL EVIL

David O'Connor

In a recent contribution to this journal William Hasker rejects the idea, long a staple in philosophical debates over God and evil, that the existence of gratuitous evil is inconsistent with the existence of God. Among his arguments are three to show that God and gratuitous natural evil are not mutually inconsistent. I will show that none of those arguments succeeds. Then, very briefly, and as a byproduct of showing this, I will sketch out how a potentially vexing form of the problem of God and natural evil is facilitated by Hasker's distinction between types of gratuitous natural evil.

I

In a recent article in this journal¹ William Hasker rejects the idea that God and gratuitous evil are mutually inconsistent, an idea hitherto generally taken for granted as basic to the philosophical problem of God and evil. If Hasker is right, the initial burden of proof will be shifted from theism to anti-theism, and the problem of God and evil will be transformed accordingly.

Hasker frames his discussion in the following way,

...[I]t seems to many to be almost self-evident that a good God would not allow gratuitous evil. But arguments for this contention are not easy to come by, and I think it may well be possible to show that theism requires nothing of the sort.(24)

Specifically, his argument is that belief in the mutual inconsistency of God and gratuitous evil is not just not self-evident, but false. For most of his paper he concentrates on the question whether gratuitous moral evil is inconsistent with God. Here, however, I shall discuss his arguments for the proposition that God and gratuitous natural evil are not inconsistent with one another. I will show that none of those arguments succeeds.

II

The concept of God in Hasker's paper is standard in classical theism, thus, "God" means the omnipotent, omniscient, perfect creator and sustainer of the universe. The concept of gratuitous evil that Hasker uses is

evil "such that an omnipotent being could have prevented it without thereby having prevented the occurrence of some greater good"²(24). While discussing certain views of William Rowe's, Hasker describes such evil as genuinely gratuitous evil, which he distinguishes from ostensibly gratuitous evil. In his words,

Let us designate as genuinely gratuitous evils those...evils which could have been prevented by an omnipotent being without losing any greater good. And let us use the term ostensibly gratuitous evils to designate evils which could be prevented by God without thereby preventing the existence of any greater good, *apart from the benefit God's permission of such evils may have in preventing the undermining of morality.* (34, italics original)

The difference between genuinely and ostensibly gratuitous natural evil, then, is that the former is natural evil not necessary to the occurrence of any greater goods *whatever*,⁽³⁹⁾ while the latter is natural evil that is necessary to prevent the undermining of morality but that is not necessary to the occurrence of any *other* greater good. Parenthetically, in the wider literature on the problem of God and evil, gratuitous evil is standardly understood as what, after Hasker, we will now call genuinely gratuitous evil. In the case of natural evil, then, Hasker is undertaking to show that God and genuinely gratuitous natural evil are not mutually inconsistent. For brevity and conciseness, let us refer to genuinely gratuitous natural evil as GGNE and to ostensibly gratuitous natural evil as OGNE, and for the same reasons let us cast Hasker's thinking in terms of possible worlds. So cast, Hasker's route to his conclusion is through arguments to establish that there is no possible world in which God, consistent with his nature or with his objectives in world-making, could prevent the occurrence of all GGNE. Hasker approaches this task in 'what if?' fashion: specifically, what if God *did* prevent all GGNE? Hasker's point is that, in any possible world W, if God prevented all GGNE, an outcome inconsistent with God's nature or goals in world-making and world-governance would result, thus that God could not prevent all GGNE.

Hasker's arguments to that conclusion are divisible into two groups, the first consisting of two arguments that examine implications of our not knowing that God prevents all GGNE in W, while the second consists of a single argument examining implications of our knowing that God prevents all GGNE in W. The object of the three arguments is the same: to establish that God and GGNE are not mutually exclusive. I shall begin with the third of these arguments, namely, that God and GGNE are not mutually exclusive in a world where both God prevents all GGNE and we know it.

III

To the question, what would be the consequences if God were known to prevent all GGNE?, Hasker answers:

...it is evident that the consequences with regard to the list of

goods noted above — knowledge, prudence, courage, foresight, cooperation, and compassion — would be rather drastic. Surely the motivation to acquire and/or respond in accordance with any or all of these goods would be greatly reduced, if not eliminated entirely, if we *really believed* that God would prevent any natural evils which were not essential to the realization of still greater goods. To be sure, we might still have some inclination to avoid outcomes that seemed especially distasteful to us personally — but such an inclination would be of questionable rationality, inasmuch as by preventing those outcomes we would also be preventing the occurrence of goods which are at least equal and possibly greater. (39, *italics original*)³

This is to say that, if God both prevents all GGNE in W and we know it, morality is undermined in W. Thus it could not be true in W that God both prevents all GGNE and we know it. In essence that is Hasker's argument.

To facilitate discussion of this argument, let us distinguish between:

- (i) God is known to prevent all GGNE in W, inasmuch as God is known to prevent all natural evil in W
- and
- (ii) God is known to prevent all GGNE in W, but there is still natural evil in W, thus what is known is that all the natural evil in W is necessary to the occurrence of greater goods, specifically, in the present context, necessary to the maintenance of significant morality. Here, then, it is known that all the natural evil in W is OGNE, as that is defined by Hasker.⁴

It is clear from his text that it is (ii), not (i), that reflects Hasker's understanding of what we know when we know that God prevents all GGNE in W. So, it is on the basis of (ii) that I shall examine his argument. As the greater goods that are in question in Hasker's argument are moral goods — courage, prudence, compassion, tolerance, and so on — let us concentrate only on those.

When (ii) is true in W, Hasker thinks that in combatting and counteracting the natural evil that exists in that world (namely, the OGNE remaining once GGNE has been prevented) — for instance, by combatting and curing disease, by alleviating pain and suffering, and so on — we would be preventing the occurrence of those possibly greater goods for which that natural evil is necessary. As we saw Hasker put it, "by preventing those outcomes [i.e. instances of OGNE in W] we would also be preventing the occurrence of goods which are at least equal and possibly greater" (39). In a purely logical sense Hasker is of course right. For instance, with the presence here of oxygen being a necessary condition for the occurrence here of fire, if I prevent oxygen from being present here I prevent the occurrence here of fire. By parity of reasoning, then, it would seem that, by preventing OGNE in W we are preventing those greater goods — courage, compassion, tolerance, and so on — for whose occurrence OGNE is necessary. But, with regard to the connection between the existence of OGNE and the

occurrence of such goods, things are not what they seem, as the following illustration makes plain.

Let Socrates be a person now suffering great pain from a contagious disease for which neither he nor anybody else is responsible. In short, to avoid confusing our discussion with issues peripheral to it, both Socrates's disease and pain are natural evils. Given that Socrates is suffering in *W*, where there is known to be no GGNE, we, knowing that, know that Socrates's pain is a natural evil that is ostensibly (but not genuinely) gratuitous. We are moved by Socrates's pain and treat it. Our intention in treating his pain is to alleviate it. Our intention and action, in short, are moral. Suppose we succeed, and Socrates's pain is alleviated. Being an instance of OGNE, Socrates's pain is a necessary condition of the occurrence of certain instances of such goods as courage, compassion, and so on, and so, by alleviating his pain — in Hasker's term, by preventing it (in the present context, the prevention is of the pain's continuation) — we prevent certain future instances of those goods. For instance, we prevent my courageously, compassionately, prudently, heroically treating his pain tomorrow. But there is something very queer in describing our being moved by, and our treatment and alleviation of, Socrates's pain as, in Hasker's words, only "...an inclination to avoid outcomes that seemed especially distasteful to us personally...an inclination...of questionable rationality, inasmuch as by preventing those outcomes we would also be preventing the occurrence of goods which are at least equal and possibly greater" (39). Where does the queerness lie? Here: by being moved by, treating, and alleviating (preventing) Socrates's pain as we did and with the motivation we had, *we are instantiating precisely those greater moral goods* for which, in this case, Socrates's pain is necessary — courage (given the known risk of contagion), compassion, prudence and so on. The point admits of generalization: preventing OGNE in cases such as the present is precisely the occurrence of the greater moral goods for which OGNE is necessary. Thus it is false to believe, *simpliciter*, that prevention of OGNE entails the prevention of those greater goods. Of course, as already observed, if we today alleviate (prevent) Socrates's suffering, we do prevent my alleviation of it tomorrow when it might be even worse and, accordingly, more difficult to alleviate. So, in that sense, we *do* prevent the occurrence of a greater good. But it is perverse to characterize this as only avoiding "outcomes that seemed especially distasteful to us personally... (and)...of questionable rationality." The perversity is twofold: first, if we avoid alleviating Socrates's pain today so that you or I can do it with greater expenditure of moral effort tomorrow, we are condemning Socrates to extra suffering in the meantime; second, *every* time anybody alleviates another's suffering, potentially the occurrence of greater moral good tomorrow is prevented.

My argument turns on, and may be expressed in terms of, a distinction between two kinds of prevention. For lack of better terms I shall refer to these as pre-emptive prevention and responsive prevention. If, in *W*, OGNE is pre-emptively prevented, then there never is any OGNE in *W*. Thus there could be no such moral goods in that world as courage, compassion, fortitude, and so on. And, given God's values in world-making, such a world could never be actualized by God. But now consider respon-

sive prevention. Pain and suffering occur in W and we respond by trying to alleviate them, that is, by trying to prevent their continuation and future occurrence. But, as we saw just above, this response (and prevention if we are successful) is precisely the realization of the greater moral goods at issue, thus it is the realization of God's *desideratum* in world-making, namely, significant morality. Furthermore, as pain and suffering are not diminishing resources, our alleviation (responsive prevention) of any specific instance is not the pre-emptive prevention of all future pain and suffering (which, in W as presently described, is future OGNE). Thus, ample opportunity is provided for future instances of courage, compassion, and so on. Thus Hasker's argument fails.

At this point we may anticipate the following objection. Although it is true that Socrates will suffer more if we do not help him than if we do, his extra suffering, while a natural evil, will not be a genuinely gratuitous natural evil, for, *ex hypothesi*, no natural evil is GGNE. And we, knowing that no natural evil is genuinely gratuitous, know that Socrates's extra suffering is not genuinely gratuitous. Thus, and this is the point of the objection, we are not morally obliged to help him.⁵ Nor, for the same reason, are we morally obliged to ever help anybody who is suffering. And so, the objection concludes, Hasker is right when he says

Surely the motivation to acquire and/or to respond in accordance with any or all of these goods [knowledge, prudence, courage, foresight, cooperation, and compassion] would be greatly reduced, if not eliminated entirely, if we *really believed* that God would prevent any natural evils which were not essential to the realization of still greater goods. (39, italics original)

Let us examine this objection. In the situation as described, our choice is between helping and not helping Socrates who is suffering. As described, the situation is one in which we must choose and in which, whatever we do, we either help him or not. The options before us bring two possible successor-worlds to W into prospect, W1 and W2, one alone of which will be set in process by our choice and action. W becomes W1 when we help Socrates, and W becomes W2 when we do not. The subsequent histories of these two possible worlds will diverge, but, notwithstanding any and all differences, W1 and W2 share an interesting ontological feature, namely, neither one contains any GGNE. The thinking reflected in the objection is that our knowing they are alike in that ontological respect means there is no significant moral difference between our options as we confront the suffering Socrates. But that is false. Let us see why.

In choosing, all we know for sure is that, whether we help Socrates or not, there will be no GGNE. This knowledge is the pivot of the objection that is before us. Now, if this piece of knowledge were the sole, or overwhelmingly the most important, factor relevant to the choice we must make, there would be something to the objection. But in fact this piece of knowledge is neither. Indeed it is arguably the case that our knowledge there will be no GGNE, whichever option we choose, is neutral between the two options. The reason for thinking this is the following. On the one hand there is the idea that,

because we know no GGNE will result from our not helping Socrates we are not obligated to help him, that we may, in good conscience, ignore his plight, even though we know he will have to endure extra suffering that we could have prevented. But, on the other hand, there is the idea that, because we know that, if we help him, we run no risk of inadvertently causing him (or anybody else) gratuitous harm, a possible inhibitor of our helping him is removed, namely, the fear that we might unintentionally cause him needless suffering. In my view the latter idea is at least as plausible as the former. If I am right about this, there is at least rough equality between, on the one hand, the tendency of our knowledge that there will be no GGNE to discourage our helping Socrates and, on the other, the tendency of that knowledge to encourage our helping him. If I am right about this, that knowledge is not a decisive factor. The question then is what factors, if any, are decisive. The following items are, and establish that, in the situation as described, our moral obligation is to help Socrates.

Notwithstanding the fact that there is no GGNE in either W1 or W2, and notwithstanding the fact that, in W2, Socrates' suffering is not gratuitous, Socrates (as well as everybody else) can still be harmed, and harmed more in one world than in the other. There being no GGNE in either world does not entail that Socrates's (or anybody's) lot will be equally happy in both. Furthermore, from the fact that there is no GGNE in either world it does not follow that there is not more natural evil overall in one than the other. In W2 we do not help Socrates, despite his suffering and our ability to help through prevention of his extra suffering. Suppose now that our failure to help Socrates is not just an *ad hoc* omission but instead that it reflects a maxim we live by: never help anybody in pain, for no pain is genuinely gratuitous natural evil. In W2, then, we do not exercise or develop those moral goods in question. Suppose now we are theists, thus committed to a life of trust in God and of doing God's will as we understand it. On the subject of what, in world-making, God wants to achieve, Hasker tells us that "...the maintenance of significant morality is an overriding concern in the divine governance of the world..."(36). But surely a world with significant morality is a world in which human beings *do* give preference to acting compassionately, prudently, charitably, courageously, and so on over not acting in those ways. In short, with the maintenance of significant morality being an overriding concern of God's in world-making and world-governance, God would want any world containing human beings to be a world with the best possible ratio of prudence, tolerance, compassion, courage, selflessness, and so on to imprudence, intolerance, un-compassion, cowardice, selfishness, and so on.

In now drawing together those factors I set forth above — knowledge that, despite the non-existence of GGNE, there can be, and *prima facie* is, more natural evil in one possible world than another, knowledge that Socrates, like any sentient being, can be harmed more in one possible world than another, knowledge that, *prima facie*, he is harmed more in W2 than in W1, knowledge that, if we are theists, God's will is that we practice and develop those moral virtues mentioned — we find them converging to show that our moral duty is to help Socrates and to not ignore his suffering.

In both drawing and buttressing this conclusion about what is the right thing to do in the Socrates situation, as described, it is worth noting Hasker's quotation of the following lines from William Frankena's *Ethics*,

[M]oral reasons consist of facts about what actions, dispositions, and persons do to the lives of sentient beings, including beings other than the agent in question, and the moral point of view is one which is concerned with such facts.⁶

Hasker then continues in his own voice, as follows:

This claim of Frankena's is not uncontroversial, but it seems to me that it enjoys strong intuitive support. Frankena's principle...say[s] that morally relevant reasons must *in some way* have to do with the tendency of the action in question, or the class of actions of that kind, to do good or harm to sentient beings. And it seems to me that this is correct — that if we become convinced that certain ostensibly moral requirements or prohibitions have *no connection whatever* with the weal or woe of any rational or sentient being, then we soon cease to regard such commands or prohibitions as morally serious.

If this principle of Frankena's is correct, it establishes a very close connection between the notion of a *morally wrong action* and the idea of *harm* to some person or other sentient being. And this, in turn, suggests two requirements which must be met in the lives of persons who have significant obligations towards others. First of all, it must be *possible* for these persons to act in ways that are significantly harmful to themselves and others...Furthermore, they must be able to *know* that it is possible for them to act harmfully... (28-29, italics original).

I agree with Hasker about Frankena's principle, and I emphasize that, in the Socrates test-case before us, both of Hasker's requirements for a morally wrong action are met, namely, the possibility of harming others and knowledge of that possibility. Thus, knowing all that we know in the situation as described, if we fail to help Socrates, we are harming him, notwithstanding our knowledge of the fact that there is still no GGNE in W2. Thus, in ignoring his extra suffering, we are committing a morally wrong action. Thus the objection to my argument fails. The objection defeated, let us return to our discussion of Hasker's argument that God and GGNE are not mutually exclusive in a world where both God prevents all GGNE and we know it.

Hasker's argument to that conclusion is open to a different objection. For the sake of argument let us agree with him that, in world-making and world-governance, God's overriding concern is the maintenance of significant morality. In W, then, that is God's overriding concern. In W, as now hypothesized, we know that no natural evil is genuinely gratuitous, that all natural evil is necessary to the occurrence of greater moral goods. Thus, in W, unless we respond morally to OGNE, God's goal in actualizing W — the maintenance in it of significant morality — cannot be met. For, while OGNE

is necessary for the occurrence of those greater goods in question here, it is not sufficient for their occurrence. Furthermore, knowing what we know, we know that, without our responding to OGNE in a certain way, God's goal could not be met. Thus we know that, in *W*, our responding to OGNE in a certain way really matters, that it has important consequences. Would not that knowledge enhance our motivation to respond to OGNE in that way? It seems to me clear that the answer is yes, inasmuch as we would not believe that, in the big scheme of things, our responding compassionately, courageously, prudently, tolerantly, gently, and so on does not amount to anything. Now it is a clear fact of our experience that a belief in the pointlessness or futility or inevitable failure of our action is a serious inhibitor of motivation to act. But in *W*, knowing what we would know, our motivation would not be inhibited in that way at all. Thus, contrary to Hasker, our moral motivation would not be sapped: arguably it would be strengthened.

Before switching to his two other arguments, a final thought on our knowing that, in *W*, there is no genuinely gratuitous natural evil. Is not such a world significantly akin to the actual world as the actual world is understood by the theist? That is, is it not a central precept of theism that in the actual world, notwithstanding its seeming to be genuinely gratuitous, all natural evil is really necessary to the occurrence of some balancing or greater good, that is, that all natural evil is really only ostensibly gratuitous, and so justified in a God-made world? Hasker seems to agree that this is a standard theistic belief, albeit one he thinks both unnecessary and unhelpful to theism, but, up till now, standard nonetheless. In his words, "...it seems to many [presumably theists included] to be almost self-evident that a good God would not allow gratuitous evil"(24). That is, the theist believes both that God and gratuitous evil are mutually exclusive and that, in fact, there is no gratuitous evil in the world. But the theist, believing that, in the final analysis, all natural evil is OGNE, is not robbed of motivation to acquire, or respond in accordance with, moral goods. Nor, as my arguments have shown, should he be. The obvious question to Hasker, though, is whether it is an intended consequence of his position that theists' moral motivation rests on a mistake?

IV

Let us now take up Hasker's two other arguments on the subject of God and gratuitous natural evil. Unlike the argument discussed in the previous section, the presumption in each of these arguments is that we do *not* know that all natural evil is OGNE, although it is. According to Hasker, this ignorance preserves our motivation to acquire moral goods, thus, in the possible world under consideration, this ignorance is of great importance to God. However, Hasker argues, our being and remaining ignorant of all natural evil's being OGNE in *W* would necessitate a certain strategy on God's part, a strategy whose principal component would be a disinformation campaign (39). But, he continues, it would be impossible for God to engage in such a campaign, as it would be simultaneously "morally dubious in itself"(39) and at cross-purposes with one of God's chief aims in creating rational beings (39). Thus Hasker concludes that God, consistent

with his nature or with his goals in world making, could not engage in such a campaign. Thus we would not remain ignorant of the fact that God (pre-emptively) prevents all GGNE in W. Thus, on the argument of Hasker's we considered in the previous section, morality would be undermined. Thus, again, God could not prevent all GGNE in W, leaving only OGNE. Thus God and GGNE are not mutually inconsistent.

The key to both of these arguments — the first leading to the conclusion of moral dubiousness, the second leading to the cross-purposes conclusion — is Hasker's assumption that, to assure our ignorance of his prevention of GGNE in W, God would have to pursue a strategy involving a disinformation campaign. Let us, then, examine that assumption. The assumption turns on the idea that, if God prevents GGNE in W, we will, in the normal course of events, know it, that is, it would be unnatural for us to not know it. As Hasker sees it, then, a possible world in which God prevents all GGNE will be, in its essentials, the possible world I shall call W3. W3 is a possible world in which the development and maintenance of significant morality is an overriding concern of God's: in it there is the same amount, variety and distribution of moral evil as in the actual world, and likewise the same amount, variety, and distribution of both OGNE and GGNE as in the actual world, assuming that the actual world does in fact contain GGNE. That is, to begin with, W3 is the actual world in respect of evil. Then God removes all the GGNE from W3 and prevents its recurrence. In removing GGNE from W3 God would be removing a large and significant amount of natural evil and so naturally, if events ran their normal course, we, the inhabitants of W3, would notice the absence of GGNE — how could we not? — and so would come to know that all natural evil is only OGNE. However, events do not run their normal course in W3, for God intervenes to prevent our knowing about his removal of GGNE. This intervention is the disinformation campaign.

The focus of my challenge to this argument is its central idea, namely, that, unless God prevents us by means of disinformation, we will know that God has prevented all GGNE. Here is a counter-example of a possible world, containing all the relevant divine *desiderata* that apply to both W3 and the actual world, but necessitating no disinformation campaign to conceal the fact that God has prevented all GGNE. Let us refer to this possible world as W4. W4 is a possible world in which the development and maintenance of significant morality is an overriding concern of God's: there is no, and never was any, GGNE, as, from the start, God pre-emptively prevented GGNE in W4. However, W4 does contain the same amount, variety and distribution of both moral evil and OGNE as both W3 and the actual world. We, the inhabitants of W4, never know that there is no GGNE in W4, nor is there any good reason to think that, in the normal run of things, we would ever discover it, for, in W4, things being the way they are would be perfectly natural to us.⁷ In W4 God does not inform us that he has prevented GGNE, just as, for instance, in the actual world God keeps us in the dark about the origin and ultimate fate of the actual world, and there is nothing morally shady about God's silence on any of these matters. W4, then, is a possible world in which all GGNE is prevented by God and in which we, without benefit of disinformation or any other kind

of deceit, do not know it. In W4 we would be as morally motivated as we are in the actual world, which is to say that morality in W4 would be no more undermined than it is in the actual world.

With W3 and W4 in mind, let us go back to Hasker's argument. Hasker is right that God could not actualize W3, for God, consistent with his nature, could not engage in deception. But from the fact that God could not actualize W3 it does not follow that God could not, without deception, actualize a world without GGNE but with full provision for significant morality, for God could actualize W4 (or the actual world, if the actual world contains no GGNE).⁸ Thus, in a world where all GGNE had been prevented, the dilemma Hasker foresees and on which his argument is predicated, namely, divine deception or no significant morality, is a false dilemma. Thus Hasker's argument fails.

The second of Hasker's two arguments predicated on our not knowing that God prevents all GGNE is that, in actualizing a world in which we do not know God prevents all GGNE, God would be undermining one of his own chief purposes in creating rational beings, namely, that those beings should come to knowledge of God, including knowledge that, as theism standardly tells it, "it is just *because* God is an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being that there cannot be [GGNE]" (39, italics original). Hasker thinks this because of his assumption that it is only by deceit that we can be kept from knowing that God has prevented all GGNE. The conjunction of these two points is that God would be in the impossible position of simultaneously wanting us to know and not know that he prevents all GGNE. So, as acting at cross purposes is an outcome of the disinformation campaign, God could not engage in any such campaign. But then we would know both that there was no GGNE and that all natural evil was OGNE, and, knowing this, we would be robbed of moral motivation (or so the argument of Hasker's that we considered in Section III tells it).

In response I shall make two points. First, if God does prevent us knowing he has prevented GGNE, then of course Hasker is right: God would be acting at cross purposes. But, in being predicated on the idea that God would have to prevent our coming to know he had prevented all GGNE, Hasker's present argument is committed to a conception such as W3. But, as we saw, with W4 and the actual world (assuming they are different) available as better alternatives, W3 is not a possible world that God could actualize. Hence this argument of Hasker's is undermined. Second, as we have already seen, given the availability of a possible world such as W4, all that would be required of God to insure our not knowing that he had preemptively prevented the occurrence of GGNE would be an *uninformation* campaign, and there is nothing morally dubious in that. So, consistent with his perfect goodness, having actualized W4, God could remain silent about it without moral shadiness. The relevance of this point to the present argument is now this: with God remaining silent about his prevention of GGNE, we, the inhabitants of W4, would be in precisely the same position with respect to God's desire that we should come to know him, including the fact that, from his nature, he prevents GGNE, as are we, the inhabitants of the actual world. Thus, in actualizing either W4 or the actual world, God would not be acting at cross purposes, and so Hasker's third argument fails.

V

It might be thought that Hasker's position can be saved after all. As follows. With all natural evil in W being OGNE, no natural evil in W is inconsistent with God or with W's being a God-made world. For, with all the natural evil in W being necessary to the occurrence of greater goods, there is a morally sufficient reason for God to permit all the natural evil that there is in W. With that being so, might not the following defense of Hasker's position be made? That, in granting OGNE in W to be consistent with God, I grant Hasker his case, namely, that God and gratuitous natural evil are not mutually inconsistent. But that defense, if made, would fail, for that conclusion, if drawn, would be unjustified. For OGNE is *ostensibly* gratuitous natural evil, that is, natural evil that seems to be gratuitous but which, in fact, is not, for it is evil that is necessary for the occurrence of some greater good. Thus it is not gratuitous, really or genuinely gratuitous, at all. It is only gratuitous natural evil *manque*. And so Hasker's position cannot be saved in this way.

VI

Hasker maintains, assuming for the sake of argument that he is successful in showing that genuinely gratuitous moral evil is not inconsistent with God, that he is not obliged to succeed with regard to genuinely gratuitous natural evil (38). But, even if he is successful with regard to genuinely gratuitous moral evil, he must still succeed with GGNE. Briefly, the reason is this. While the problem of evil comes in many versions, each of those versions, broadly speaking, is articulated in either a quantified or an unquantified form. The argument is put in unquantified form when what is maintained is that no evil is compatible with God, and it is in quantified form when the claim is that some specific type(s) or token(s) of evil are incompatible with God. Success in defense is measured in proportion to the argument (or attack) being defended against. That is a truism, but it is an important truism. Thus, in the former case, a successful defense is able to show that some evil is not incompatible with God, while in the latter case a successful defense is able to show that whatever type or token of evil is at issue is not incompatible with God. But a successful defense against the former does not entail success against the latter, nor, within the scope of the latter, does success with one type or token entail success with another. So, even if he succeeds with regard to genuinely gratuitous moral evil, in order to succeed against the quantified form of the argument from evil, Hasker must still show that GGNE is not incompatible with God. Success with one, assuming he has succeeded, does not give him a free ride on the other.⁹ Although neither of them refers to it as the quantified form of the argument from evil both Swinburne and Hick emphasize that it is in its quantified form that the argument from evil is most vexing.¹⁰

VII

Hasker's distinction between GGNE and OGNE unintendedly provides anti-theism with a somewhat new, *prima facie* vexing, formulation of the

argument from evil. As follows. We have seen that W3 is not a world that God, consistent either with his nature or his objectives in world-making, could actualize. That leaves W4 and the actual world, still assuming they are different. The possibility of significant morality is equally viable in each, as is our ability to come to knowledge of God. If W4 and the actual world are different, then, in our present context, the only significant difference between them is the absence from the former, and the presence in the latter, of genuinely gratuitous natural evil. But, if these two worlds are different in this way, then, given the availability and attractiveness of W4, given its full provision for all the relevant divine *desiderata* in world-making, the anti-theist can be expected to challenge theism to defend against the point that, in these circumstances, the existence of God is inconsistent with the existence of the actual world. As, *prima facie*, the actual world does contain genuinely gratuitous natural evil, the challenge would appear to be powerful.¹¹

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NOTES

1. William Hasker, "The Necessity of Gratuitous Evil," *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Jan. 1992), pp. 23-44. This being both the only work of Hasker's I shall cite and a work cited frequently, I shall incorporate my references to it in my text.

2. I doubt that Hasker's definition is either complete or uncontroversial. For instance, we might, with profit, understand gratuitous evil as evil not necessary to the *possibility* of the occurrence of some greater good. Throughout this paper, however, I shall put this reservation aside and stick to Hasker's definition. Indeed, this paper is set entirely on Hasker's terms.

3. Two points are worth making here. First, as neither Hasker's argument nor my counter-argument turns upon a distinction between our knowing/not knowing something as opposed to our believing/not believing it, I shall use the verb "to know" as my only epistemic verb here. This is no disservice to Hasker, for, (i) he also mostly uses only that verb as his epistemic verb and (ii) when he uses other epistemic terms instead, e.g. "really believe," it is clear that the substitution is not done for the purpose of downgrading the intended epistemic claim from knowledge to mere belief. See p. 39. Second, among the moral goods that Hasker thinks we would be robbed of motivation to acquire, if we knew that all the natural evil in W were OGNE, is knowledge, presumably the kind of knowledge necessary for moral choice to be possible. But that is false. For, even with no GGNE in W, there would still be ample evils from experience of which we could acquire the knowledge necessary for moral development, as there would be no less moral evil and OGNE in W than in the actual world. And there is no shortage of either in either of those worlds. On this see my "Swinburne on Natural Evil from Natural Processes," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (1991), pp. 77-89.

4. The implication in both (i) and (ii) is that we know God exists. Richard Swinburne has an argument that we would be robbed of moral motivation if we knew for sure that God existed. But it is not the same as the argument of Hasker's we are now considering, for Hasker's does not turn upon our knowing that God exists. See Swinburne's *The Existence of God* (New York: Oxford

University Press, 1979), pp. 211-12. For a counter-argument, see my "Swinburne on Natural Evil," *Religious Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1983), pp. 68-71.

5. I express my point here in the language of moral obligation. But essentially the same point will hold if, instead of such language, we use terms like "moral decency," "moral indecency," "moral indifference," "callousness," "good samaritanism," "bad samaritanism," and so on, that is, terms less immediately connotative of requirements and prohibitions than the terminology of obligations.

6. William K. Frankena, *Ethics*, 2nd edition (Englewood Cliff: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 113.

7. See Section III of my "On the Problem of Evil's Still Not Being What It Seems," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 158 (Jan. 1990), pp. 76-78 and the second part ("The Suppression Model") of Section III of my "On Failing to Resolve Theism-versus-Atheism Empirically," *Religious Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (March 1990), pp. 99-101 for a fuller account of W4.

8. Two points come up here. The first concerns the relationship between W4 and the actual world. Theism's standard view, as I understand it and as I have stated in this paper, is (1) there could be no GGNE in a God-made world and (2) there is no GGNE in the actual world, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. The conjunction of (1) and (2), predicated of the actual world, does not make the actual world and W4 one and the same, even though there is no GGNE in W4, for, to my knowledge, it is not a standard *credendum* of theism that there is no GGNE in the actual world because God pre-emptively prevented it. Rather, my understanding of the standard theistic view of the matter is that, all things considered, there is no GGNE in the actual world because, in the future, God will responsively prevent all GGNE. Thus the mechanism of prevention of GGNE might be different in W4 and the actual world, assuming that, in the latter, it is true that there is no GGNE. Here I shall not get into any discussion of which mechanism, overall, might be the better. I shall not address either whether natural evil that God responsively prevents is thereby natural evil that is justified. But, *prima facie*, as theism standardly concedes, the actual world contains GGNE, and on the strength of this point I sketch, in Section VII below, a possible challenge to theism.

The second point to address here is this. If there is no GGNE, but we do not know there is no GGNE, and if the non-existence of GGNE is so clearly a *credendum* of theism as I have been saying it is, and as Hasker seems to agree it is (see p. 24), why do we not know there is no GGNE? Perhaps the best answer is analogical. Our not *knowing* there is no GGNE is akin to our not knowing the world is God-made, or that human beings are God's creatures. These are central precepts of theism too, but the theist does not know them to be true, when knowledge is understood as some form of justified, true, undefeated belief. Of course, a different conception of knowledge could lead to a different outcome. But this too is a topic too large for discussion here.

9. See my "On the Problem of Evil's Not Being What It Seems," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 149 (1987), pp. 441-47 for more on differences between the quantified and unquantified formulations of arguments from evil.

10. See Swinburne, *op.cit.*, p. 219 and John Hick, *Evil and The God of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), Chapter XVII.

11. I am grateful to my colleague, Gerard J. Dalcourt, for valuable criticisms of an early draft of this paper, and to an anonymous referee for *Faith and Philosophy* for penetrating criticisms of the penultimate draft. The final product is the better for their help.