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“Bias as a Worldview Engine, the *Terminus A Quo* of the Problem of Evil”

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Thesis and Defense

by

Eric S. McCrickard

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## **Abbreviations**

Artificial Intelligence - AI

Cognitive Science – CS

Cognitive Science of Religion - CSR

CORNEA – Condition of reasonable epistemic access

Evidential Argument from Evil – EAE

The Naturalistic Functional/Teleological Theory of Mind - NFT

The New American Standard Bible - NASB

The New Testament – NT

The Old Testament - OT

The Problem of Evil – POE

## Introduction

Evil is a seemingly insurmountable problem for theism, specifically Christian theism. As posed in atheistic arguments, the existence of evil negates the existence of God, the creator of the cosmos. It has been said that this problem dealt a devastating blow to theism, specifically Christianity.<sup>1</sup> Yet arguments continue to stream into the dialectic arena articulating new positions, revamped language, and unique philosophies related to our changing world and humanity. Amidst this change, the one constant is evil. In this context, the presence of evil is a formidable stumbling block as evil is present in the world, but not a death knell as is posited by the evidential arguments from evil (henceforth the EAE) against God. The continual engagement between antagonists of God's existence and Christian philosophers, theologians, and apologists shows that this area of argument has not been closed. A simple search on various internet or news websites depicts acts of evil in the world, including the genocide of Uyghur Muslims<sup>2</sup> or natural disasters.<sup>3</sup> These are merely two examples of a wide array of evils present in the world.

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<sup>1</sup> John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problems of Evil* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 18, accessed August 3, 2021, [www.mywsb.com](http://www.mywsb.com).

<sup>2</sup> Deirdre Shesgreen, "The US says China is committing genocide against the Uyghurs. Here's some of the most chilling evidence," *USA Today News*, accessed August 3, 2021, [www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/politics/2021/04/02/is-china-committing-genocide-what-you-need-know-uyghurs/7015211002/](http://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/politics/2021/04/02/is-china-committing-genocide-what-you-need-know-uyghurs/7015211002/).

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Peipert, "Colorado Governor Plans Disaster Declaration after Mudslides," *U.S. News*, accessed August 3, 2021, [www.usnews.com/news/best-states/colorado/articles/2021-08-02/colorado-governor-plans-disaster-declaration-after-mudslides](http://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/colorado/articles/2021-08-02/colorado-governor-plans-disaster-declaration-after-mudslides).

Two categories of argumentation, logical and evidential, encase these various evils. These two categories form the schematics of argumentation for and against God's existence.

Understanding the two main categories of arguments lays the foundation for what atheists believe to be a staggering amount of data against God's existence. The logical argument, taken first, is expressed by three questions, 1) Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent, 2) Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent, 3) Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?<sup>4</sup> As atheists have insisted, the initial observation of this formula poses issues for the theist, constituting a concession to one or more of the points to alleviate the alleged contradiction.<sup>5</sup> This is untenable as evil exists, and God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent, thus the dilemma. The logical argument has been refuted on many occasions, with a decidedly sufficient argument coming from Plantinga,<sup>6</sup> this argument shifts the responsibility of evil from God to humanity. The argument from free will, a decisive refutation of the logical problem, relieves the stress of concession to one of the three points, shifting much of the debate to evidential evil.

Evidential evil is an encompassing title for moral evil, natural disasters, disease, famine, divorce, suffering, or other calamities in life that yield dissatisfaction or discernable discomfort. This area of evidential evil is the focus of this paper generally, including the argument posed by

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<sup>4</sup> David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Edinburgh: London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1907), 134, accessed August 3, 2021, Logos.

<sup>5</sup> Marilyn M. Adams, and Robert M. Adams, *Oxford Readings in Philosophy: The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1, accessed August 3, 2021, www.mywsb.com.

<sup>6</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), accessed August 3, 2021, Logos. Plantinga raises the Freewill Defense taking the onus of evil from God and placing it on the will of man or humanity. In this, there is no contradiction between the existence of evil and of God. This is the ability to choose or not choose an action based on the human will to decide.

William Rowe from evidential evil and contemporary treatments offered by Bruce Russell.<sup>7</sup> As it pertains to Rowe's essays from the EAE, the intent in this thesis is not to critique Rowe's argument (this has been done with enormity and success) but to look beyond the argument to the bias (confirmation bias) or presuppositional standing of the ethos of Rowe. The argumentation is God's nonexistence from the platform, or derivative of no greater good observed or known, of the justification or allowance of evil.<sup>8</sup> It is not a refutation of the premises, per se, but instead the biases associated with them are de facto statements of seeming certainty absent the claim of certain knowledge. In like manner, the contemporary work of Bruce Russell, specifically the 2018 essay "The Problem of Evil and Replies to Some Important Responses," will be critiqued in chapter three. This critique will point to a specific bias and evaluate this bias for objective discourse. This, then, is the heart of this thesis, the specificity of the ontology of bias as a worldview engine as it pertains to the Problem of Evil (hereto the POE) and addressing this bias to determine the incoherence to reality to instantiate warranted belief in God's existence.

### Statement of the Problem

Given the general to specific flow uncovered thus far, the problem lies in the bias which undergirds the individual's worldview as it pertains to and interacts with the POE. This worldview is the frame of life for an individual of how they fit into what is observed, felt, and understood, individually and in society. A worldview is an all-encompassing view of everything,

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<sup>7</sup> William Rowe's essay "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," was levied in 1979 exhorting the position of atheism through evidential evil in the world. It was this specific article that launched an onslaught of papers against and for Rowe's position. The relevance of this paper is as keen today as the day it was posted as scholars still reference this work upholding and refuting the evidential position espoused therein. A specific example, one to be treated in depth in a later chapter, is that of Bruce Russell, "The Problem of Evil and Replies to Some Important Responses." *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion: Journal of the Central European Society for Philosophy of Religion* 10, no. 3 (September 1, 2018): 105–31, accessed August 3, 2021, [www.https://doi.org/10.24204/ejpr.v10i3.2590](https://doi.org/10.24204/ejpr.v10i3.2590).

<sup>8</sup> William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1979): 335–41, accessed August 4, 2021, [www.jstor.org/stable/20009775](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20009775).

including the individual, society, culture, emotional support, decision making, and personal and community actions, to name a few.<sup>9</sup> A simple definition suffices to begin the conversation but quickly falls short in the face of the enormity of what constitutes a worldview. In this enormity lies biases that form basic beliefs and support the worldview. Bias is the *terminus a quo* from which the ethos or worldview of individuals emerges. Biases can have two definitions or may be better defined by two functions, both of which manifest in various evidential arguments from the POE. Psychology denotes bias as a systematic distortion in decision making and with distorted statistical data from an unknown factor operating unaccounted for.<sup>10</sup> A bias is also understood as prejudice or presupposition. Prejudice “refers to the maintenance of a prior attitude irrespective of new or contradictory information...may also refer to a predetermined favorable judgment by which the individual ignores relevant negative information.”<sup>11</sup> Psychology posits presuppositions, which are assumptions about reality that have a major impact on all the sciences.”<sup>12</sup> The presupposition does not lie in the science but the scientist. This assumption status is not restricted to merely scientists but to all peoples and worldviews. Presuppositions create the basis for various beliefs.

The presuppositions that form the foundations of beliefs are often *a priori*. The *a priori* position often causes a refusal to objectively review or accept evidence to the contrary, keeping the original position intact or held as correct. This biased position is observed in the numerous

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<sup>9</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 29, accessed August 5, 2021, [www.proquestbookcentral.com](http://www.proquestbookcentral.com).

<sup>10</sup> N. Hayes and Stratton, P., *A Student's Dictionary of Psychology and Neuroscience*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 35, accessed August 5, 2021, [www.taylorfrancis.com](http://www.taylorfrancis.com).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Hayes, *A Student's Dictionary*, 261.

<sup>12</sup> David G. Benner, and Peter C. Hill, eds., *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology and Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 959, accessed August 5, 2021, Logos.

arguments of the POE. What seemingly rests on linguistic changes fails to account for the basic premise that 1) If there is an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good God, He would remove suffering. 2) There is suffering observable in the world. 3) There is no God. There have been many revisions to this argument which amount to changes in language that leave the premises basically the same at the presuppositional level. The arguments from the EAE against God's existence have grown in complexity. This is a complexity partly cloaked in language concealing the bias that determines "no known reason" for the allowance for the evil in the world. This bias has been exposed in convincing refutations by Christian apologists and philosophers<sup>13</sup> and seems evident by the refusal to evaluate offered evidence objectively. The presupposition/bias should be changed or altered from the revelation of contrary evidence yet fails to do so, which is the focus of this thesis. When the specific bias or biases that produce worldviews denying God's existence from the POE are identified and confronted with credible evidence or evidence of a faulty, biased argument, this should cause the faulty bias to realign with the presented warranted evidence. Isolating the bias failure in this process and offering a solution or method for addressing the failure is the overall intent of this thesis. It is not an easy task and a position or question that could be asked of the theist. The theistic response, I believe, would be that the theist does look at and evaluate the atheistic evidence. It is from this evaluation that refutations are generated. The crux lies in how the evidence stands up to scrutiny in a non-biased evaluation that will be undertaken in chapter three. This evaluation can and should be applied to all worldviews.

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<sup>13</sup> It is the contention here that the work of Alvin Plantinga and Stephen Wykstra have demonstrated the bias in Rowe's original arguments and the faulty epistemic range of the language used to defend Rowe's position of no known reason to justify allowing the amount of evil in the world that there is. These Roweian refutations will be elaborated in some detail in a later chapter.



## Statement of Purpose

The faulty logic based on bias is the crux of the problem, including presuppositional assumptions as they are intertwined and work with a bias to form the basis of belief. Rather than only refuting another essay, the intent here is to attempt to isolate or identify the bias causing the refusal of what is seemingly commonsense. The example can be found in a recent article written by Bruce Russell. Russell contends on similar ground as Rowe, so the substantive elements of the argument will not be addressed in this section. A more in-depth treatment will be handled in the last chapter. For now, the basic contention is a known reason to allow evil in the form of “excessive, unnecessary suffering.”<sup>14</sup> Russell contends that because there is this level of suffering, there is no God. The same problems that plague Rowe’s arguments appear to be here but cloaked in language. Greater detail will be taken to engage this essay in the last chapter as the epistemic range of suffering and the heuristics of excessive, unnecessary suffering will be evaluated from this EAE paradigm.

The paradigms formed from beliefs rest on biases and are subject to identification. It is important to note that identification does not necessarily transfer to justification. This endeavor lies in the field of Cognitive Science. Cognitive Science (hereto CS) is the study of how people think.<sup>15</sup> Specifically, conclusions made and the formation of beliefs are the focus of CS.<sup>16</sup> In this arena, the problems that plague *a priori* belief will be studied and confronted to determine a

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<sup>14</sup> Bruce Russell, “The Problem of Evil and Replies to Some Important Responses,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion: Journal of the Central European Society for Philosophy of Religion* 10, no. 3 (September 1, 2018), 106, accessed August 3, 2021, [www.https://doi.org/10.24204/ejpr.v10i3.2590](https://doi.org/10.24204/ejpr.v10i3.2590).

<sup>15</sup> Justin L. Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology: From Human Minds to Divine Minds* (West Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 2011), 6, accessed August 5, 2021, [www.proquestbookcentral.com](http://www.proquestbookcentral.com).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology*, 7.

resolution so dialectic engagement may follow. Thus, identified biases in arguments denouncing God's existence can find resolution so that coherence with what is real may uproot a faulty bias removing obstacles to belief. The true research battleground for this activity lies in a subset field of CS known as the Cognitive Science of Religion (hereto known as CSR). This branch of CS seeks to explain the formation, transmission, and acceptance of religious beliefs based on cognitive function.<sup>17</sup> This new field of study shows great promise in engaging belief mechanisms enhancing apologetic CS and CSR.

### Statement of Importance of the Problem

The importance of this thesis project lies in plowing the field for obstacles deterring belief in God. The plowing metaphor is observed in the parable of the Sower and Soils (Mark 4). The scattering of the seed on various soils yields results equivalent to the soil accepting the seed. The seed cast on the roadside was eaten by the birds (Mark 4:3-4, NASB).<sup>18</sup> The seed never had a chance. This endeavor looks to give the seed a chance, at a minimum, by the illumination of human finitude concerning rational thought compared to the ways of God as it pertains to the POE and suffering. Research has uncovered similar tacts but does not explicitly address the bias to change, remove, or lessen the impact on belief paradigms.

Two such examples are Stephen Wykstra and Francis Schaeffer. Wykstra, responding to

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<sup>17</sup> Sa'īd Mahdī Biyābānakī, "The Cognitive Biases of Human Mind in Accepting and Transmitting Religious and Theological Beliefs: An Analysis Based on the Cognitive Science of Religion," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 76, no. 1 (2020), 1, accessed August 5, 2021. [www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/cognitive-biases-human-mind-accepting/docview/2377841293/se-2](http://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/cognitive-biases-human-mind-accepting/docview/2377841293/se-2).

<sup>18</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references will be from *The New American Standard Bible* (La Habra: The Lockman Foundation, 1985).

Rowe's argument from evil, noted the bias from the epistemic qualification of CORNEA.<sup>19</sup> Essentially, Rowe was challenged on his statement of "does not appear" about how one obtains knowledge about something which cannot be seen. This is a callout on a bias exhibited by Rowe in the understanding of what can and cannot be seen and the relation to true existence in the absence of perception. This is a clever use of epistemic acquisition or the lack thereof but did not address the assumption that there was no apparent reason behind "does not appear." This thesis attempts to take on this challenge. Another example is that of "Taking the Roof Off."

Francis Schaeffer engaged interlocutors with a strategy of "Taking the Roof Off."<sup>20</sup> The essence of this strategy lies in the self-construction of a metaphoric roof, supported by walls, which shield a man (or woman) from the reality of the world.<sup>21</sup> This is not as much a shield from religious belief but one from a reality opposed to the biases of humanity. Anything which conflicts with an *a priori* belief is shielded by the roof. Removing the roof allows for meaningful communication, which leads to a Gospel testimony. This approach does not penetrate the bias as a whole but identifies it, removing communication obstacles. Both of these champions of truth forged new ground in their approaches but, in my opinion, did not go far enough.

Per my research thus far, numerous examples of CS and CSR are available in published text of either books and articles. As this is a new field, CSR research is in its infancy but shows tremendous promise to engage CS to understand religious belief and unbelief better. In juxtaposition to philosophical and apologetic treatments of the POE, there are more than can be

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<sup>19</sup> S. J. Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of "Appearance", " *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 16, no. 2 (1984), 87, accessed August 5, 2021, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fhumean-obstacle-evidential-arguments-suffering-on%2Fdocview%2F1297952575%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

<sup>20</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who is There* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 156, accessed August 5, 2021, Kindle.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, 156.

counted. As these two fields could converge or combine to form a cohesive argument, my research has not yet yielded work of this nature. Therefore, the importance of this research is unparalleled as it would work within this specific arena, the POE, and other facets of rhetorical engagement with Christian apologetics. Generally, addressing bias in argumentation is a cornerstone of many, if not most apologetic engagements, regardless of the topic. Specifically, bias undergirds beliefs and decision-making, which acts to undermine the interlocutor's intent when given evidence that contradicts their held bias. This attempt to treat the bias rather than refute the argument based on bias can be used in any engagement.

Both men (Rowe and Russell) were and are giants in philosophy. In contrast, I am merely beginning. But the education and growth in apologetics and logical and critical thinking have laid this tact on me for exploration. Additionally, and most importantly, this notion of engaging bias is an idea born to me through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is not my own but God's who tasked me with the work. I intend to represent Him in this thesis, for the glory is His.

#### Statement of Position on the Problem

The intent has been uttered several times throughout thus far, to uncover the underlying bias in an attempt to alleviate this bias so that rational understanding can be made, ushering in belief. This does not follow without contention or issue, which will be addressed in the next section, nor is this approach to correct previous resolutions. I believe that previous treatments of the POE have been successful for the position of theism, specifically Christianity. Yet, the arguments still flourish against the existence of God from evidential evil in the world. Looking at the hearts and nature of humanity, it seems commonsense that what is divulged is an ill, faded heart. Humanity is on a collision course to an evil end. The irrational, noncoherent view of the world apart from what is real is a paradox. This paradox seems to be based on faulty assumptions

that lead to ill-conceived paradigms forming faulty worldviews that question man's place in the creation. Presuppositional beliefs in physicalism/naturalism, humanism, evolution, Scientology and other ontological worldviews seem to skirt away from the explanation of what coheres with objective reality. It is here upheld that clearing the obstacles to view true reality is the research emphasis of this thesis, a study of cognitive faculties which foster biases in forming worldviews.

#### Limitations/Delimitations

There is a multitude of limitations and delimitations in this project. To begin, the glaring limitation is based on the cross-discipline study. My academic credentials are on the Christian Apologetics side, even though there is a crossover with the philosophy of religion, specifically epistemology, and the philosophy supporting CS and CSR. Nevertheless, research capabilities allow for the increase of knowledge and discovery in the growing field of CS. Polling data from psychological experimentation will not be undertaken.

The idea behind gathering fresh data or data through experimentation with focus groups does not appeal in this research. Partly due to the youth of CS and CSR and the specialized field of psychology and the study of the mind mechanism would not yield to a lesser trained participant. Any needed data will be mined from existing studies and experimentation. Analyzing this information and synthesizing the results will suffice if such is required. As far as analytical presence goes, further treatment of Rowe's evidential argument from evil will not be undertaken. The main reason is that it has been critiqued with such enormity on the whole that additional critique seems tautological. A further limitation, and probably the most difficult to synthesize, is faith and reason. We cannot reason someone to faith as faith is a gift from God (Eph. 2:8). How then does one correct a bias with the intent to bring someone to faith? The key here, I believe, is that I am moving people in a direction to be able to receive the truth; it is up to them if they reach

for it. Here, the conflagration seems to fester for those who do not believe. I believe in my heart that God exists and believe in my mind the same. It seems apparent that unbelief lies somewhere within this foot of physical space and immeasurable existential space, causing the conflict between heart and mind. This conflict results in a faulty sense of reality and the individual's place within it. Removing the objective and abstract spaces noted is the key to the true, correct belief and a limitation, the bias which is the focus is also present in me.

Lastly, it seems counterintuitive to attempt to treat bias in others and not recognize my presuppositions. My biases forge my understanding of reality and how I fit into this realm. They are theistic, specifically Christian, holding to God's precepts and that there are aspects of God that are difficult to explain. Even though difficult, these aspects still speak to reality and make sense of all there is and humanity's place within it. The best way I know how to combat my bias in this project is to look objectively at data and research with fairness and humility. To represent those cited fairly and as they state their case. The questions I ask along the research trail should equally be asked of my own beliefs, then wage the answers in a matrix that results in equal, fair treatment. I cannot remove my bias but must recognize its presence in my position so that it can be accounted for.

## **Method**

### **Research Methods**

The research method for this project is simple in that a search for available scholarly treatment will be culled out and analyzed. The areas to be treated will relate to philosophy, apologetics, psychology, aspects of sociology, and anthropology. In these areas, biases are formed on the individual level, corporate (being community), and ethnically. Otherwise, a literature review and synthesis should suffice. The literature survey will encompass bias and the

cognitive mechanism that form basic assumptions guiding the thought and belief process. It has been discovered thus far that a sizeable portion of research in this area focuses on the corporate and business world as attempts to reduce bias are engaged to increase productivity and market share as it pertains to employer/employee relations and consumers, which herald the various products. This material will be evaluated for its contribution to the overall use in bias development and synthesized into the finished product. The forming of biases may be so due to varying circumstances, but the result is useful in this research. This is the same for scholarly work in Christian apologetics and philosophy.

In like fashion, a detailed search of contemporary POE arguments and refutations will be undertaken to surmise the current climate of the issue being treated here. The philosophies that undergird the platforms of those submitting arguments will be compared to those existing in history and how they have or have not progressed to the current position. This information will then be synthesized into a composite frame to critique the POE's contemporary notion against God's existence.

This appraisal of available data and research will be the project's backbone, including available studies conducted by psychologists, psychiatrists, philosophers, apologists, and others in the relevant fields that have furthered the study of bias and formal argumentation.

#### Tests or Questionnaires

The intent here is not to engage in tests or questionnaires related to bias. As noted in the Limitations section, the lack of formal training warrants not conducting surveys or questionnaires about bias. I do not believe some parameters can be met from my position in a non-clinical environment. Research yields a plethora of clinical results performed by qualified professionals, which will be utilized to support findings and positions. This may prove to be a

liability in that research thus far shows that bias forms from infancy. Therefore, the upbringing of a given individual would have definitive causality on long-held presuppositions or assumptions about aspects of reality. If the need arises, bibliographic data will be sought to attempt to account for this needed information should it become so. Additionally, I cannot rule out the potential need for such data collection; therefore, accommodations, if required, can be evaluated for practicality.

### Data Collection

Data collection is the heart of this project. The use of the Jerry Falwell Library at Liberty University will be the primary source. Additionally, academic journals featured in philosophy and religion, psychology, counseling, and anthropology, including archaeology, will form the nexus of collection and review. From cross-discipline studies, various clinical and focus group data will be leveraged for contribution to this project. This is and will be an ongoing endeavor to update this project with emerging research for the entirety of this project.

### Data Analysis

Analysis of the researched and collected material will yield insight into bias formation. It will also prove valuable in determining which biases conform the mind to assumptions about religious belief or disbelief. The field of CSR will be the focus and bulk of the material used to formulate an apologetic, engaging the bias of unbelief. This aspect falls on the review and analysis of contemporary POE arguments.

The Epicurean dilemma has served unbelievers for millennia and is present in modern arguments from evil against the existence of God. A robust counterargument focused on the conception of a bias requires a careful, diligent, and fair analysis of existing arguments and those that wage them. Therefore, each argument in question must be treated respectfully and fairly as



Christians are mandated in Scripture (1 Pet. 3:15). A corollary effect, which is anticipated, is strengthening the faith of existing believers. This assists the believer in why they believe rather than simply stating blind faith. It will also serve the church well in discipleship programs pertaining to evangelism.

### **Proposal for Chapter Division**

The proposed division of material gives a progression for the thesis. The overview of the POE including the essential elements of the problem, purpose, and goals, lays out the groundwork that the reader can follow. Chapter one introduces the study of cognitive science and the discovered truths about bias, including methodology and Christian apologetics. Chapter two is a cursory look at previous arguments from the POE, isolating the bias to be evaluated. Chapter three is a detailed critique of Russell's 2018 essay and the work previously assembled and put into action, engaging the bias at the formation level. This arrangement is believed to give the best reading functionality and coherence.

### **Proposed Summary of Each Chapter**

The proposal for the chapters is simple in philosophy and construct. Beginning with the basic overview of the evolution of the POE, it begins broadly and gradually constricts to the thesis statement. Once the thesis statement is introduced, the work of the thesis gets underway. The introduction contains the necessary information for the reader to gather the project's intention. It is a guide to what will follow based on the problem and purpose and the expected outcome, including the research methodology. It is, in essence, litmus to determine the structure and goal so the reader can unite with the work. This unity will allow an amalgamation of the material with the reader to foster an internalization of the POE and a potential solution. Once this relational aspect is established, the journey begins with understanding CS.

## Chapter One

Chapter One holds the necessary information regarding bias and its connection to this thesis. The chapter unfolds a young field of study explaining the mechanisms of the mind and how beliefs are formed, held, updated, and changed. As the purpose is to expose a specific bias or biases, it is critical to understand the platform of bias. It is also essential to narrow down the bias to a particular or small subset of biases that generally account for belief, specifically, *a priori* belief and unbelief. Additionally, CS has branched out into a subset field of study known as the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR). This field is dedicated to those beliefs, presuppositions, assumptions, and biases which regulate religious belief. This is the target area and thus needs room for growth and understanding for the reader. The *a priori* belief is a crucial component relating to metaphysics and language.

The latter portion of chapter one engages the metaphysics of belief and the use of language. The metaphysics of belief and the practical understanding of language are espoused through the writings of Wittgenstein, C. S. Lewis, and Francis Schaeffer. These philosophies will be applied to bias and tested by a worldview evaluation system by Douglas Groothuis. This pragmatic system is the foundation for identifying and isolating bias and will be directed at the writings of Bruce Russell in chapter three.

## Chapter Two

Chapter two is an overview of the EAE, focusing on Rowe's arguments from evidential evil and beginning broadly with the categories of evil (logical and evidential), narrowing to three arguments posed by Rowe and select refutations which accompany them. It is important to note that this section is not another critique of Rowe's work. This has been done adequately. Instead,

a closer look at the refutations against the argument will entail the root of what is refuted in bias, epistemic flaws, and the use of language. Additionally, Rowe's work acts as an anchor for the contemporary models of the EAE. The work in the first two chapters culminates in chapter three, where the understanding of CSR is put into action to treat the bias which fuels the worldview engine.

### Chapter Three

Chapter three is a critique of Bruce Russell's offerings of the EAE and looks to synthesize the information gained from CSR and the POE biases to form an apologetic.<sup>22</sup> The intent is to engage the bias at a level where it can be isolated then disentangled to be tested against reality for coherence; this is on the level where bias forms. The bias will be engaged through the philosophies of Wittgenstein, the apologetics of Lewis, and the coherence evaluation model from Groothuis. This engagement will occupy the EAE in various forms to achieve a successful result. The chapter section will evaluate the process and critique the performance and yield.

### Conclusion

The research aims to identify the specific bias of an author in a penetrating approach to exposing the fallacy brought on by the bias, to go deeper than merely invalidating an argument. I do not wish to leave the bias intact only to refute or engage in another similar argument. It would be presumptuous and excessive hubris to suggest that the goal here would be the death knell of the POE. That mindset, I believe, is absurd, but it is humbling to engage the bias to change the

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<sup>22</sup> Bruce Russell is a Professor of Philosophy at Wayne State University. He holds a PhD in Philosophy earned at UC Davis. He is an accomplished author writing many journal articles dealing with the POE refuting the existence of God.

structure that formed the bias. Does disentangling a bias mean an unbeliever will believe? Is it possible to change or alter a bias creating a mental reform? The research to this point suggests that bias reformation does occur. Even if the bias is not changed, the ramification of what could be a return to rational thought could open the field to less relativistic interaction between Christians, non-Christians, and peoples of other belief systems. As a Christian, establishing meaningful communication is a step forward in reaching people with the Gospel of Christ (Matt. 28:19-20).

## Chapter One - Cognition: A Psychological Endeavor

### Introduction to Cognitive Science, Cognitive Science of Religious, and Language

Thinking and reasoning are living. It is a window into existence as Descartes understood, *cogito ergo sum*, I think therefore I am.<sup>23</sup> This Latin phrase involves epistemic certainty, but the ability to think is the underlying rationality of existence. Above any other creature, this ability sets humanity apart and allows questioning reality and humanity's place within it. This cognition is the focus of Cognitive Science (CS). This field of study endeavors to understand how humans think, process, and store data. CS studies the mind and its function; how it thinks.<sup>24</sup> Narrowing this field to certain aspects or areas of thinking ushers in the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR). Here, specific elements of thought entail regarding belief, specifically religious belief. The biases that form a secular worldview from a religious (biblical) worldview are the focus of this field of study. It is here that CSR seeks to illuminate the cognitive mechanisms which synthesize data of religious nature through the acceptance, transmittance, and importance of belief.<sup>25</sup> This chapter will give an understanding of CS in general, including a brief history and a broad view of the field of study. The CS subfield, CSR, will be espoused as it is the foundation for bias and the human perception of reality, forming secular and biblical worldviews.

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<sup>23</sup> Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 2: The Reformation to the Present Day* (New York: Harper One, 2010), 238, accessed August 31, 2021.

<sup>24</sup> Justin L. Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology: From Human Minds to Divine Minds* (West Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 2011), 5, accessed August 31, 2021, [www.proquestebookcentral.com](http://www.proquestebookcentral.com).

<sup>25</sup> Sa'īd Maḥdī Biyābānakī, "The Cognitive Biases of Human Mind in Accepting and Transmitting Religious and Theological Beliefs: An Analysis Based on the Cognitive Science of Religion," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 76, no. 1 (2020), 1, accessed August 31, 2021, [www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/cognitive-biases-human-mind-accepting/docview/2377841293/se-2](http://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/cognitive-biases-human-mind-accepting/docview/2377841293/se-2).

## Cognitive Science

This chapter may seem dreary and even mundane, but necessary. In a way, it is a dogmatic pedagogical method to introduce a field of study to those unfamiliar with the breadth and depth of the field and even ignorant of the existence of the field of CS. Understanding CS must be a foundational element to understanding the onus of this thesis. As the thrust of belief comes from the cognitive process, understanding this process is paramount, more so the mechanisms used in forming knowledge, tactile and theoretical. The field of CS is vast; therefore, this introduction is merely an appetizer to lay the foundation of clarity for further chapters. It is wise to break down various areas of CS and then reproduce them in a cohesive approach to processing data. Cognition is generally defined as “thinking and conceptualization, memory, representation and mental imagery, perception, attention, reasoning, and decision-making.”<sup>26</sup> Cognition is making sense of what is observed in the world and how the individual is affected by and contributes to this information. These various areas can be further parsed into cognitive processes. These processes are reasoning, memory, language interpretation, and perception, to name a few.<sup>27</sup> There are other sciences that contribute to or work into CS. Such disciplines are “psychology, linguistics, artificial intelligence, anthropology, philosophy, and neuroscience.”<sup>28</sup> It is paramount to note that CS is not the same as or equivalent to neuroscience. A computer analogy makes better sense of this position. Neuroscience is more about the

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<sup>26</sup> N. Hayes, and P. Stratton, *A Student's Dictionary of Psychology and Neuroscience*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), C 59, accessed August 31, 2021, [www.taylorfrancis.com](http://www.taylorfrancis.com).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, Hayes, *A Students Dictionary*, C 60.

<sup>28</sup> Rafael Núñez, et al., "What Happened to Cognitive Science?" *Nature Human Behaviour* 3, no. 8 (08, 2019), 782, accessed August 31, 2021, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fwhat-happened-cognitive-science%2Fdocview%2F2369911737%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

hardware (the central processor, hard drives, RAM, and the motherboard are akin to the physical brain and pathways). CS is more akin to the software (the programming that runs by the hardware work akin to the cognitive systems that allow for reaction and reason to percepts or stimulus).<sup>29</sup> This is an analogy rather than a physiological melding of mind and body. Before exploring the breadth and depth of CS, a cursory look at the history of this science is needed.

## History

There is a somewhat definitive starting point in time for CS. It is understood that the origins of CS fall within the eras of the 50's and 60's on the heels of the computer revolution from the decade after WW II.<sup>30</sup> The mid-twentieth century was a time of philosophical newness and technological advances, which undoubtedly contributed to the field of CS, bringing it to its current form and function. From a cognitive aspect, it could be argued that CS, at least the cognitive portion apart from science, has been studied since the creation of humanity. This can be conceptualized in parents' minds when ascertaining why their child committed a specific act and what thought process was at work in deciding that this act was rational or excusable. From a biblical perspective, one need only look at Eve's consumption of the forbidden fruit to ask the question of what she was thinking (Gen. 3:1-6). The intent here is not to exegete the passage but to show that people, since creation, have done things that bring questions of why and what for. Looking deeply at this event in history questions the cognition used in perception, reason, and representation. Also, this passage plays heavily on language when the serpent questions the words God said and plants a seed of deception in the crafty use of language. The dawn of Greek

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<sup>29</sup> Justin L. Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology: From Human Minds to Divine Minds* (West Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 2011), 7, accessed September 1, 2021, [www.proquestebookcentral.com](http://www.proquestebookcentral.com).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Núñez, "What Happened," 782.

philosophy is a pointer to cognition. If the philosophical age is the dawn of humanity's ability to reason the world around them, this would also be a time of cognitive identification. Gardner posits, although more for reflection than a certain CS beginning, that cognitive investigations are observed in ancient Greek thinking as far as the extent of knowledge.<sup>31</sup> Gardner continues through time forward into the Middle Ages, where theologians postulated the origins of knowledge, continuing into the age of enlightenment and the weight of human reason.<sup>32</sup> It is not to say that the intent of these ancient thinkers endeavored to engage in CS; instead, to demonstrate that the quest to understand why has been a staple of thought since the beginning of humanity. It was in the last half of the twentieth century to present that the field of CS was born. Still, it is essential to understand the history that brought the current cognitive understanding into observable processes. This brief existence is replete with literature and ranging disciplines from the physical brain, philosophy, psychology, the social sciences, and computer science with artificial intelligence (AI); a fascinating area of study and application is computer/mind computation and robotics.

### General Application

The implied need to model thought processes of the mind in the neuro connections and mapping of the brain places a heavy reliance of artificial intelligence on CS. With a beginning in 1956, at the outset of the computer revolution, a new language emerged, understood as the computational hypothesis.<sup>33</sup> Understanding how the brain and mind compute data, yielding

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<sup>31</sup> Howard Gardner, *The Mind's New Science: A History of the Cognitive Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 3-4, accessed August 31, 2021, Kindle.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, Gardner, *The Mind's New Science*, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Kenneth D. Forbus, "AI and Cognitive Science: The Past and Next 30 Years," *Topics in Cognitive Science* 2, no. 3 (2010), 345, accessed September 1, 2021, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1111/j.1756-8765.2010.01083.x>.



knowledge is the focus of AI. The somewhat reverse engineering allows for more intelligent AI and what may someday be autonomous AI. The same onus is in robotics.

The area of robotics is closely intertwined with CS in the same manner as computer-based technologies. But rather than a desktop computer, a whole AI body functional to perform short-term and long-term tasks using tactile sensory input, memory, and positional knowledge of the world is the intended symbiosis of the two fields of study.<sup>34</sup> Here there is a seeming detachment from a dualist system where the mind and body (brain) are not distinct but function as one and one form, a cognitive architecture. This system incorporates “a set of representational constructs, information processes, and control structures that implement the invariant structure of the cognitive system” to construct a platform to combine intelligence structures and intelligent behaviors.<sup>35</sup> There is a paradox here in that intelligent design begets intelligent design. From studying the neuropathways and cognitive systems, mimicking the human construction will somehow ultimately relate to autonomous sentient beings. Looking at this platform, the construction of a self-thinking robot is possible because it can conduct simple and, at times, complex movements and actions. This is based on the complexities of memory and the cognitive process which constitute or represent prior experiences.<sup>36</sup> This is a marvel of science and engineering, and the potential is astounding. It also raises philosophical questions such as free will and choosing good or evil. It is one thing to pattern an action from previous experiences but quite a different thing to choose to act or not. This is the juncture away from neuroscience and

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<sup>34</sup> Unmesh Kurup and Christian Lebiere. "What Can Cognitive Architectures Do for Robotics?" *Biologically Inspired Cognitive Architectures 2* (2012), 88, accessed September 1, 2021, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212683X12000333>.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Kurup, “Cognitive Architecture,” 89.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Kurup, 89.

into the underlying presuppositions studied in CS. These presuppositions form the biases which determine belief, unbelief, and knowledge.

### Cognitive Bias

Bias lies in decision-making. Decisions are made continuously every day, all day long. The most mundane rudimentary actions or inactions result from decision-making. These decisions can be conscious or unconscious. Many decisions are made in a day, too many to count; therefore, the brain makes shortcuts to simplify these decisions and to quicken the response. This leads to speed but also errors in decisions which are defined as cognitive biases.<sup>37</sup> As bias underlies decision-making, it is easy to see why so many corporate structures utilize bias studies in marketing. The decision-making process is studied, and strategies are formulated to take individual and group biases into account for advertising and merchandising. In this economics is a large consumer and examiner of biases. To use individual bias to sell merchandise based on the shortcuts relies on quick decisions by the consumer to increase sales. This shortened pathway leads to cognitive bias or an error in decision-making. This error does not mean failure, but the purchase of a candy bar is a likely outcome, given certain circumstances rather than others, when another item would be a better choice. These shortcuts are present at first thought or apprehension of information observed around us. In his Nobel Prize work *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Kahneman defined this action in terms of system one and system two.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> David Thomas, *Design for Cognitive Bias*, 1st ed. (New York: A Book Apart, 2020), no page num., accessed September 1, 2021, [www.learning.oreilly.com](http://www.learning.oreilly.com).

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2011), 20, accessed September 21, 2021, Kindle.

As Kahneman deduced, system one is fast action or reaction, while system two requires attention.<sup>39</sup> It reduces to comfortable decisions with little effort or more robust computations with directed attention to the data and outcome. System one carries no doubt and is pointed to creating stories meeting the criteria for coherence.<sup>40</sup> System two is somewhat opposite in that doubt is possible, and the potential for conflicting data to be maintained can occur.<sup>41</sup> Whereas these systems are a focal point in Kahneman's research, they are the brainchild of Keith Stanovich and Richard West.<sup>42</sup> Given these systems, the obvious question is which one is more likely to yield errors or cognitive bias? The answer is both. The two systems, also understood as intuitive and reasoning, utilize intuitive data to form reasoned explicit judgments.<sup>43</sup> Here what is initially perceived and intuitively understood is rationalized, reasoned, and stored in the memory as a judgment. This is seemingly easy to do based on the accessibility. Accessibility is "the ease (or effort) with which particular mental contents come to mind."<sup>44</sup> It is this ease of effort which fosters cognitive bias, therefore, errors. Additionally, if there is an event in system one that is not deemed inaccurate, it will proceed as if it were true.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 20.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., Kahneman, 114.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>42</sup> Keith E. Stanovich, and Richard F. West, "Individual Differences in Reasoning: Implications for the Rationality Debate?," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 23, no. 5 (2000): 645–665, accessed September 2, 2021, <https://doi.org/doi:10.1017/S0140525X00003435>. Kahneman uses the reference to the two systems while giving credit to the research and work done by Stanovich and West in the area of intuitive and reasoning decision making.

<sup>43</sup> Justin L. Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology: From Human Minds to Divine Minds* (West Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 2011), 46, accessed September 1, 2021, [www.proquestebookcentral.com](http://www.proquestebookcentral.com).

<sup>44</sup> Daniel Kahneman, "A Perspective on Judgment and Choice: Mapping Bounded Rationality," *American psychologist* 58.9 (2003), 699, accessed September 1, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.58.9.697>.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 114.

The foundation of the errors is that it is easier to believe rather than compute the doubt.<sup>46</sup>

Although these errors can be reduced or eliminated by skill or practice, the average person is subject to false judgments.<sup>47</sup> As exciting as this field of study is, there is a belief that it has not materialized as it was believed or hoped. This amalgamation of disciplines into one unified field of study or program seems to have missed the mark.<sup>48</sup> It is unclear why this is the case, but there have been uses of CS in various other platforms, such as religion. This subfield of study is the focus of and related to this thesis. This field is known as the Cognitive Science of Religion.

### The Cognitive Science of Religion

Cognitive Science looks to answer questions such as what the mind is and how it functions. The Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) is an emerging field of CS that looks to answer questions regarding the “formation, acceptance, transmission, and prevalence of religious beliefs based on the function of the mind and its cognitive mechanisms.”<sup>49</sup> This section deals with beliefs, reflective/non-reflective, and the biases that accompany them. These biases lie in context and content, thus deposited first, and heuristics ultimately lead to confirmation bias. As it pertains to argumentation from the Problem of Evil, it is taken here that a significant influence on the atheistic position is that of confirmation bias.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 114.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., Kahneman, “A Perspective on Judgement,” 700.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., Núñez, “What Happened,” 789.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., Biyābānakī, “The Cognitive Biases,” 1.

## Context Bias

Context bias, as understood here, is the form or source of something or source of information. This pertains to the reliability of the source of information.<sup>50</sup> There has been considerable work in this area substantiating reflective religious belief. A communal action or transference of information via other people or a person is a significant factor in belief formation and retention.<sup>51</sup> This transference occurs in three areas of bias; conformity, prestige, and similarity biases.

## Conformity Bias

Conformity bias is a belief based on what others believe. A common renunciation of Christianity is that you are a Christian because your parents are. Sadly, in many cases, undisciplined Christians do not refute this as they are confronted with another conformity bias in unbelief. Lacking in the knowledge of their Christian faith, doubt sets in, and the statements refuting Christian faith as propagated generationally cause a conflict in information. A recent study engaged the physical interdependency of two areas of the brain about conformity bias via society and private interaction.<sup>52</sup> This performed test yielded a connection between the striatum and the dmPFC, where emphasis was found to be present in both exposures and shared between

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., *Biyābānakī*, “The Cognitive Biases,” 3.

<sup>51</sup> Helen Cruz, “Cognitive Science of Religion and the Study of Theological Concepts,” *Topoi* 33, no. 2 (October 2014), 489, accessed September 3, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-013-9168-9>.

<sup>52</sup> Researchers Li, King King Li, and Jian Li performed a test using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) on volunteer participants to determine the emphasis of social interaction conformity bias and private information conformity as a determinant to connect the sharing of function between two areas of the brain, the striatum, and the dorsomedial prefrontal cortex. The tests revealed that these areas do work in conjunction with decision-making involved in conformity bias and that when validated the resulting beliefs are strengthened.

these two regions of the brain.<sup>53</sup> This study goes beyond the lines of this thesis (neuroscience), but it can be understood that conformity bias is prevalent and that good and bad information can be shared and received. Of greater importance is the validating process to strengthen the shared data and source. Another bias within the context arena is prestige bias.

### Prestige Bias

Prestige bias is brought from the lack of consensus. This term, consensus, is becoming more ubiquitous and will play a future role in this thesis by way of confirmation bias but for now, it is important to understand that in the lack of consensus, prestige bias latches onto a source, singular or group, who has prestige or power and authority.<sup>54</sup> This is akin to center stage with the use of celebrities to endorse a product or a sports figure to engage in a societal endeavor to feed the homeless or take care of abandoned and mistreated animals. The caliber of the individual or group is used to bias the hearer to engage in the proposed action. This same bias has been observed in chimpanzees like human children. In either genus, the younger adapted or learned from those with higher prestige in the group or society.<sup>55</sup> Lastly, as is related to context is similarity bias.

### Similarity Bias

Similarity bias is, as it seems, the yearning to like someone or a group collectively incites this bias. This can be understood in people who think alike or look alike. Here the bias lies in the

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<sup>53</sup> Li, King King Li, and Jian Li, "Private but Not Social Information Validity Modulates Social Conformity Bias," *Human Brain Mapping* 40, no. 8 (2019): 2473, accessed September 3, 2021, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1002/hbm.24536>.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology*, 43.

<sup>55</sup> Adrian Viliami Bell, "Evolutionary Thinking in Microeconomic Models: Prestige Bias and Market Bubbles," *Plos One* 8, no. 3 (03, 2013), 1, accessed September 3, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0059805>.

likelihood of relevant information by way of likeness.<sup>56</sup> Although this area of bias is extensive, a glaring postulate is gender similarity. The phrase all men think alike is foundational to this area of similarity. This statement may not be factual, but there are similarities in the way men think about various subjects. This group of people is based on similar characteristics that share a common ideology or action based on similarity. The biblical response to this grouping of bias suggests that what is known and studied today was prevalent from antiquity and espoused in Scripture. The previous, succinct listing belongs to a larger category of testimony<sup>57</sup> and the leverage placed on the trustworthiness of that which is given in religious parlance.

#### Scriptural Response in the Old Testament

The virtue of teaching or passing information, specifically religious ideology, to other individuals, family, friends, or coworkers has a rich biblical history. The passing on of knowledge, being the primary means of the testimony of biblical truth, is most magnanimously observed with God's special revelation of Himself to humanity. An example of God's special revelation is known as the Shema. Deuteronomy 6 begins with loving God with all your being and progresses into teaching His precepts: "You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." This pericope broadens the scope of testimony to the verbal and written form of God's revelation to the nation of Israel. Here the emphasis is on personal testimony to smaller groups such as families. The book of Proverbs probes the depths of wise counsel as well.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology*, 43.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., Barrett, 41.

The book of Proverbs is wisdom in written form. The book itself is a contrast or comparison of right and wrong or good and bad information and actions.<sup>58</sup> It is not a self-help handbook but a truth in life that answers the tough questions.<sup>59</sup> This Old Testament (OT) book of wisdom is replete with instructions about life and reality. In the many areas of imparted wisdom, a few verses in chapter four give credence to the acquisition of wisdom. In contrast to chapter three, chapter four does not list the name of God, but parallels are drawn from the extensive reference to God from chapter three in like manner.<sup>60</sup> The first verse, “Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father, and give attention that you may gain understanding (Prov. 4:1).” Here we can see the prestige and similarity bias. Prestige in the information is coming from a father who would naturally be a figure of significant influence in a child’s life. As for similarity, they are family, but not in the sense of conformity bias. Doing something or thinking a certain way is predisposed by familial relation but by kinship in blood and passing of wisdom. One additional verse to explore is Proverbs 4:20, “My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings (Prov. 4:20).” The call to attentiveness echoes a discernment as well. Here, the dissecting of information to an attentive ear is akin to a medical inspection or a physical.<sup>61</sup> It is a guarding against sickness. Among others, this sickness is an intellectual sickness, one that comes from within.<sup>62</sup> The emphasis on context bias here is a good thing because discernment and attention

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<sup>58</sup> Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, Vol. 17, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1964), 55, accessed September 5, 2021, Logos.

<sup>59</sup> Paul E. Koptak, *Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 19, accessed September 5, 2021, Logos.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., Koptak, *Proverbs*, 143.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., Kidner, 64.

<sup>62</sup> Tom Constable, “Daniel,” *Plano Bible Chapel*, 2021 ed., 47, accessed September 5, 2021, <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/daniel.pdf>.



are stressed. Forgoing an exegesis of all the prevalent passages in proverbs or other books in the OT, a cursory look at context bias in the New Testament will conclude the biblical excursion.

### Scriptural Response in the New Testament

Like the OT, the New Testament (NT) is replete with wisdom as it is passed down from person to person or through generations in verbal and written form. Two passages that draw attention are in Hebrews and Titus. Each speaks to a different platform of information sharing, one being the church or corporate gathering, and the other generational instruction not necessarily within a family setting. In first-order, Hebrews 10:22-25 instills in the believer the need to meet as an assembly. This meeting engages the mass to learn how to espouse faith, hope, and love.<sup>63</sup> In effect, to learn those things that foster truth, solidarity, and life from each other. Conversely, Titus 2:1-8 speaks to generational teaching. The older men are to teach the younger men and likewise for the women of age and youth. Each generation is to be of sober mind and doctrine. Verses 1-5 implore the older generations to be sensible to teach that which is of worth. Verses 6-8 instantiate the same for the younger generation to be taught; they should be sensible and upright. Here, the individual task of testimony is also met with examples to include what is being taught, correct doctrine. This is a biblical example of the context biases combined with content bias. This sampling is brief but gives insight into context bias. This also plays into content bias in similar ways.

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<sup>63</sup> D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, and G. J. Wenham, eds., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1344, accessed September 5, 2021, Logos.

## Content Bias

As context speaks to the source of information, content is the information or data specifically. The synthesis of this data is assimilated in various ways. Tactile engagement through empirical perception is a prevalent mode in which cognition makes sense of what is around us. As such, this is natural cognition and maturational.<sup>64</sup> Memory has a key role in this natural cognition and is finite in several ways. One is the amount of active memory, which is engaged or involved, approximately seven chunks at a time, give or take.<sup>65</sup> The other rests in the sheer amount of knowledge or memory we all have. Much like a hard drive for a computer, there is only so much space that can be filled with data. A specific influence on this storage issue is intuitive knowledge.

At the risk of oversimplification, intuitive knowledge is tantamount to commonsense. Procreation in living things brings this to mind: humans have human babies, primates have primate babies, and chickens have chicks.<sup>66</sup> It is counterintuitive for horses to have pig offspring. This is intuitive knowledge formed in part from what is observed in the world. This creates a shortcut in the memory process, allowing for space otherwise taken up with tacit facts to be supplemented with intuitive cognition. Another way of seeing intuitive knowledge is instinctive. Mental heuristics produce instinctive knowledge and is understood as ongoing interpretive learning.<sup>67</sup> Described as intuitive ontologies, these beliefs or understandings of life are “not the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology*, 35.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., Barrett, 31.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>67</sup> A. D. Banasiewicz, *Evidence-Based Decision-Making: How to Leverage Available Data and Avoid Cognitive Biases*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2019), xii, accessed September 4, 2021, [www.taylorfrancis.com](http://www.taylorfrancis.com).

product of deliberate reflection or scientific investigation.”<sup>68</sup> It stands to reason that these intuitions are present in infancy and are the mechanisms that situate an individual to the world around them. As it is a progression of ongoing learning, what is understood forms a basis in knowledge that is then compared to new data of the content, then compared to what is stored in memory or prior experiences for relational equivalence. Content bias is dependent on coherence.

Internal and external coherence is the checks and balances system of content bias. What is understood must be coherent with what is observed and real. This comparison yields credence to what is being perceived or information being transmitted. The closer or matching quality of the data increases the likelihood of acceptance. For internal coherence, a statement offered must be constituent within itself, or the suggestion of falsity or lying is immediately suspected. An example would be a human with proper cognitive function, stating they are a bird and flapping their arms, saying they are flying. This statement lacks internal coherence as this person is not a bird and their proper cognitive function suggests otherwise. This same statement lacks external coherence. The statement recipients understand what a bird is and that this person’s statement does not match external knowledge. Cruz rightly notes this as a conflict with beliefs already held about a given topic or subject.<sup>69</sup> The culmination of what has been discussed thus far lays the foundation for beliefs, these being the elements for forming worldviews through reflective and non-reflective beliefs.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., Cruz, “Cognitive Science of Religion,” 489.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., Cruz, 490.

## Reflective/Nonreflective Beliefs

The results of system one and system two form beliefs through intuitive reaction and reasoned input stored as judgments becoming beliefs. In similar but different relations, reflective beliefs are reasoned, and nonreflective are intuitive. This position is also referred to as a dual process about religious belief.<sup>70</sup> This approach is necessary as the initial data, spanning the early decades of research regarding religious belief, believed that such belief was born from the intuitive or non-reflective belief.<sup>71</sup> This stance postulated a non-reasoned approach to religious belief, contradicting more contemporary research and experiment. Reflective beliefs are propositional relating to apparent descriptions of various objects or entities.<sup>72</sup> An example would be the car is red, or the jar is round. As Barret notes, these propositions do not necessarily need to be true, false, or otherwise.<sup>73</sup> In conjunction with reflective beliefs are non-reflective beliefs.

Nonreflective beliefs are intuitive. They are present without much effort, somewhat commonsensical, and automatic in reaction. They are natural and often unknown, not requiring intentional reflection for formation.<sup>74</sup> A non-reflective belief would be that a frowny face would be bad to an infant or that a smiling face is good. These examples show that intuitive knowledge (belief) is understood without prior experience, even in infancy; it seems to be innate. Here lies

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<sup>70</sup> Lluís Oviedo, "Religious Cognition as a Dual-Process: Developing the Model," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 27.1 (2015), 32, accessed September 2, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-12341288>.

<sup>71</sup> Onurcan Yilmaz, and Ozan Isler, "Reflection Increases Belief in God through Self-Questioning among Non-Believers," *Judgment and Decision Making* 14, no. 6 (11, 2019), 649, accessed September 2, 2021, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Freflection-increases-belief-god-through-self%2Fdocview%2F2320138213%2Fse-2>.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology*, 48.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, Barrett, 48.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

the need for a dual system as it is observable that beliefs occur in the conscious and unconscious. The interesting aspect of these belief systems is how they intertwine.

A symbiotic paradigm better understands the relation between reflective and non-reflective beliefs. In other words, one is the basis for the other. The non-reflective (intuitive) beliefs form the basis of belief, which is confirmed through reason.<sup>75</sup> Unless there is information that negates the belief, it will stand. This relates to another bias and is critical to this thesis, confirmation bias.

### Confirmation Bias

Worldviews are comprised of information understood about the world and how a given person fits within that paradigm. As attested here, the cognitive faculties that collect and analyze this information are vast and somewhat complex, although it is understandable with a bit of commonsense. This area draws the impetus of this thesis and how the position of confirmation bias lends continued arguments against God's existence from the problem of evil (POE).

Confirmation bias is defined as discounting information that conflicts with held beliefs.<sup>76</sup> Confirmation bias is observable in the myriad arguments against God from the existence of evil in the world. Not that evil exists, but that God does not is the fundamental belief of atheists, and when confronted with information to the contrary fall into the confirmation bias. This bias is exhibited in the writings of Rowe and Russell and will be engaged in chapters three and four. The demonstrated confirmation bias is vexing in that when contrary evidence is posited for

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology*, 49.

<sup>76</sup> Andreas Kappes, et. al., "Confirmation Bias in the Utilization of Others' Opinion Strength," *Nature Neuroscience* 23, no. 1 (01, 2020), 130, accessed September 4, 2021, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fconfirmation-bias-utilization-others-opinion%2Fdocview%2F2330058419%2Fse-2>, doi:<https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1038/s41593-019-0549-2>.

God's existence; it is dismissed in a confirmatory notion of held beliefs.<sup>77</sup> Confirmation bias is further defined as "the tendency to search for, interpret, focus on, and remember information in a way that confirms one's preconceptions."<sup>78</sup> In a consumer setting and a simple basis of understanding, confirmation bias yields purchasing the same food from the grocery or ordering the same meal at a favorite restaurant. There is an unwillingness to deviate from held beliefs even in the marketplace of eating. There is a tendency to evaluate information more stringently when it is consistent with existing beliefs and, in contrast, disconfirms when this information is contrary.<sup>79</sup> This bias ranges in efficacy from everyday people to scientists and academicians.

Confirmation bias is not bound by vocation or education. It has been observed in scientists and academicians, including theologians and philosophers.<sup>80</sup> An example given by Cruz is the Kalam Cosmological argument and natural theology.<sup>81</sup> As posited in arguments that span antiquity, what becomes must have a cause. Cruz uses the following syllogism: 1) Everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence; 2) The universe began to exist; 3) Therefore, the universe has a cause of its existence.<sup>82</sup> Cruz then exhorts the plausibility and empirical support for premises one and two but insists that theologians and philosophers of religion dissent on the conclusion (3).<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, it is also posited that acceptance of this

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<sup>77</sup> Max Rollwage, et. al., "Confidence Drives a Neural Confirmation Bias," *Nature Communications* 11, no. 1 (2020), 1, accessed September 4, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-020-16278-6>.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, Banasiewicz, *Evidence-Based Decision-Making*, 258.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, Cruz, "Cognitive Science of Religion," 490.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, Cruz, 493.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 493.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 493.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 493.

argument is based on confirmation bias on a presupposition or prior religious beliefs.<sup>84</sup> This is contrary to what Barret rightly asserts about intuitive knowledge in youth from infancy to preschool-age.

Barret, citing previous studies of intuitive knowledge in infants through preschool-age children, shows the innate understanding that an object will not move unless force or another source of motion causes the object to move: this understanding is understood as quickly as merely a couple of months into life.<sup>85</sup> Extending this proven information to cosmology would suggest the same as extrapolating movement into existence or being. If something did not previously exist or remained motionless, something occurred to bring this into existence or create movement. This intuitive knowledge is not dependent on prior religious beliefs but rather innate knowledge or understanding. The position of acceptance of a cosmological argument may yield support from a prior religious belief but is not solely dependent. Here lies a dissent within Christendom as to the involvement of evolution and Big Bang cosmology in the creation of the cosmos instead of biblical creationism as espoused in the book of Genesis. It is a seemingly abject disregard of data contrary to a held position. The confirmation bias is prevalent in arguments where the present sense perception of the world, specifically the POE, is only as far as can be pontificated internally or personally. This position cannot possibly account for the whole.

### **Language and Cognition**

Language is the vessel of communication for the mental representation of our cognitive understanding. As noted, representation and imagery are nodes of cognition. This locus is where language instantiates cognition, forming knowledge into word and deed. A highly influential

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., Cruz, "Cognitive Science of Religion," 493.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology*, 62.

agent in this area is Ludwig Wittgenstein. His system of language in cognition sought to unify “agreement,” this being the praxis of life.<sup>86</sup> This philosophy of language would eventually give way to a postmodern paradigm that touted subjectivism.

### Ludwig Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein asserted that language was constrained within a metaphysical belief boundary.<sup>87</sup> This means what is pictured in the mind is the product of interpretation of the data perceived through interaction and intuitive knowledge. In this, a proposition is a thought, which is a metaphysical subject.<sup>88</sup> This metaphysical subject is beyond justification as it is a limit of the world (and cosmos) or that which can be thought. Here lies a distinction between proposition and presupposition. Gilman masterfully juxtaposes Wittgenstein and Collingwood’s philosophies to draw out implications in Wittgensteinian thought. This instantiates Wittgenstein’s notion of the metaphysical subject as equating with what is a boundary or beyond the limits of language or sense.<sup>89</sup> An important distinction is needed in that the limitations of sense do not reduce to nonsense; instead, it is the limits of language to convey the thought (metaphysical subject). This specifically speaks to the phenomenology of spirituality. In comparison to Collingwood’s

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<sup>86</sup> Frank Scalambrino, *Philosophical Principles of the History and Systems of Psychology: Essential Distinctions*, (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 197, accessed September 7, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74733-0>.

<sup>87</sup> James Gilman, “The Metaphysics of Belief: A Wittgenstein and Collingwood Convergence,” *An International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 53, no. 4 (Dec. 2017), 499, accessed September 16, 2021, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fmetaphysics-belief-wittgenstein-collingwood%2Fdocview%2F1960508952%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, Gilman, “The Metaphysics of Belief,” 501.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, Gilman, 501.



absolute presuppositions, Wittgenstein's metaphysical subject is the mystical or transcendental.<sup>90</sup> As they are beyond the limits of the world (language of thought), they need no justification. This is due to the metaphysical subject not being constitutive to the world.<sup>91</sup> This leads to an interesting position Wittgenstein endorses and one that Bertrand Russell notes in the introduction of *Tractatus*. This position is the action between language (thought), speech, and demonstration.

In this, the caveat of action is the ideation of language. As Russell states "shown" about the nature, lies in the language and the structure.<sup>92</sup> Here is a delineation of two forms of show or shown. One lies in the definition and the other in action. Both are essential to Wittgenstein's position of language and the metaphysical subject. As the definition goes, how do you define appearance, such as beauty or ugliness? It is not necessarily definable other than to show what beauty is or, in contrast, what is ugly. The use of language does little to define what is beautiful outside of the boundaries of language. To speak the representation of a mental picture of beauty needs a connotative example so that "shown" goes beyond the limits of language. In contrast, action is also a means of description of definition. The "metaphysical beliefs are transcendental and absolute, originating and regulating a way of thinking and living in the world, a way of seeing and behaving."<sup>93</sup> This action, right living, is the onus of justification. It is argued that many unbelievers live moral lives. Granted, this is so, but what is the onus of this lived life? Does it lie in a social contract? Is the terminus based on an allowance from society or other individuals? The intent here is not to wage a discussion of morality or ontic responsibility, but

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., Gilman, "The Metaphysics of Belief," 502.

<sup>91</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, ed. C. K. Ogden (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Press, 2010), 75 (5.641), accessed September 17, 2021, [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 8.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., Gilman, 509.

rather to show that from this right living is a metaphysical subject (belief) which is a *terminus a quo*. This, where Wittgenstein rejects the precepts of justification, is where the action of “shown” carries the weight of belief or a practical justification.<sup>94</sup> This practical justification is in the form of worldview and practice or praxis. As a worldview, or as stated by Gilman, a world vision,<sup>95</sup> this entails a culmination of all there is in the field of view of an individual. If this worldview does not need to be justified by the metaphysical subjects of which it is comprised, it surely must be able to answer questions about life, reality, and right action (praxis). Before engaging this act of worldview authenticity, a needed parallel between metaphysical subjects (beliefs) and intuitive knowledge must be structured.

As argued, the metaphysical subject (belief) is not subject to justification. It is there but transcendent of what can be formed linguistically. This primitive ontology is an action apart from cognition; it is, at times, intuitive.<sup>96</sup> This means there is an action within the individual that initially acts apart from cognition but is not void of cognitive apprehension. Here lies the foundational element of intuitive knowledge and where it is believed that the metaphysical subject is the same as intuitive knowledge. As argued, this intuitive knowledge is a commonsense understanding, an acquisition not from hypothesis or theory but intuition; it is just there without explanation or justification. These intuitions work together to form the basis of a worldview placing the individual in a working model of the world around them and how they function and interact within the bounds of that environment. These fundamental intuitions, according to Wittgenstein, are not subject to justification but can and should undergo

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., Gilman, “The Metaphysics of Belief,” 512.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., Gilman, 512.

<sup>96</sup> Danièle Moyal-Sharrock, “Wittgenstein Today,” *Wittgenstein-Studien* (Berlin, Germany) 7, no. 1 (2016), 2, accessed September 17, 2021, <https://web-p-ebsohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=f14a0ea2-8cbc-43db-9484-4043f558144a%40redis>.

authentication as it reflects reality. A cognitive representation of the world and worldview of the individual should respond and interact with reality, coherence, and praxis. Herein lies the hermeneutic espoused by Wittgenstein of the representation of the individual's experiences or mental pictures of knowledge. This signals the use of hermeneutics to explain the meaning, actions, and life,<sup>97</sup> also known as the "linguistic turn."<sup>98</sup> This turn would depart from rationality and reality in the postmodern dialectic.

### Postmodernism

As Wittgenstein fostered a hermeneutic (interpretation) of mental representation and cognition and praxis, postmodern ideology focuses on the use and interpretation of this hermeneutic by way of the objectivity and subjectivity of language.<sup>99</sup> More so on the subjective horn, and what is known is by way of culture. Here, knowledge is a social and linguistic system reflected by society or organizationally rather than a representation of reality based on cognition.<sup>100</sup> An example is morality. Many opine that morality is a social construct, an agreement via arbitration where parties, individual or societal, make assertions and concessions to establish proper behavior. Aspects of this are actual, but conversely, where does the root of what is right come from? It cannot be a construct of agreed behavior as there is a "Natural Law" which every human has intuitive knowledge of.<sup>101</sup> Concerning knowledge, intuitive knowledge,

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., Scalabrino, *Philosophical Principles*, 183.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., Scalabrino, 196.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>100</sup> Paul Copan, and William Lane Craig, *Come Let Us Reason: New Essays in Christian Apologetics* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2012), accessed September 20, 2021, Logos.

<sup>101</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 1980), 3, accessed September 20, 2021, Kindle.

this intuition is the *terminus a quo*. Morality is not the focus but an insight into the basis of bias in cognition. As it pertains to knowledge, true knowledge cannot be had because the holder of said knowledge is biased as a participant or recipient of that knowledge; therefore, further espousal of the origin is question-begging in one's own favor.<sup>102</sup> This is a smokescreen denying objective reality. Moreland rightly notes that reality is merely an assertion grounded in community linguistics and background theory.<sup>103</sup> Moreland distinguishes epistemic and ontic postmodernism, with the former indicated in conjunction with knowledge and the latter with reality. In both categories, the cognitive function is reduced to a societal or communal system and an assertion-based statement or belief outside present perception. Both distort the truth, if not outright reject it. This is observable today as a societal push seeks to redefine or reject the orthodox understanding of gender. While not the focus here, the rejection of male and female, or the position of changing one's gender to anything that can be thought of, is the essence of this mindset. Not specifically married to gender concerns alone but the false reality that an individual can be whatever they wish simply by saying so. In contrast and contrary to Wittgenstein, language is an emotion-based representation of feeling and an imaginary projection of reality rather than a means to communicate knowledge. The philosophy has changed from answering a basic question such as "why is there something rather than nothing?," to not just something but whatever can be thought of is an individual's reality. This is the epitome of confirmation bias. As argued, the question's origin is akin to and proportional to one's ontological commitment.<sup>104</sup> This commitment lies in academic, societal, organizational, and scientific or the science

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., Copan, *Come Let Us Reason*, 47.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., Moreland, *Love Your God*, 36.

<sup>104</sup> Andrew Brenner, "What do we Mean when we Ask "Why is there Something rather than Nothing?,"" *Erkenntnis* 81, no. 6 (December 2016), 1308, accessed October 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26164549>.

community. Here, the ontological commitment<sup>105</sup> of belief presupposes answers to questions and is supported by confirming the beliefs held in these genres of people groups. It is a reinforcement of beliefs by others who have the same or similar beliefs, thus akin to question-begging and, at minimum circular reasoning based on a group or consensus thought alone. This same statement could be and is waged against theologians and Christian believers in the same manner. But the difference lies in the presentation and evaluation of information that instantiates a specific belief. If this data supports a belief, then instantiation follows. If the data does not support the belief, then an examination of the belief for credence should follow. The postmodern connection lies in language change rather than an objective data review. It is a repackaging of an idea instead of a change in bias resulting from the presented evidence. It is this philosophy of psychology, changing bias, which fueled the evangelistic efforts of Lewis, Schaefer, and Groothuis.

### **Contemporary Era: A Methodological Change**

The intent of this thesis is more than pointing to a bias in an argument. It is isolating the bias and attempting to change the bias. The goal is not to win but to seek an objective evaluation when credible evidence is offered in support of a position opposing the repackaging of an old argument with a new language. The basic argument is the same with the same faults under revised language. It seems the arguments themselves are circular, falling back on the pre-existing arguments against God's existence. The onus then becomes a new argument that seeks to remove the bias fueling a worldview and faulty stances based on language, not for victory but for clarity in the face of what is real and true. Among the myriad of modern and contemporary Christian philosophers, three men stand out as taking positions to engage their interlocutors in more

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<sup>105</sup> As understood the ontological commitment is existence not of people, per se, but of ideals and beliefs as is conformed from relational associations with groups, or fields of study and expertise. This being the origin of the thought about a given subject or topic.

meaningful ways going beyond negating an argument to identifying a bias and attempting to initiate a change in a worldview engine. This section seeks to illuminate the efforts of C. S. Lewis, Francis Schaeffer, and Douglas Groothuis, with each contributing a specific action of engagement which, when fused, creates an apologetic for identifying, isolating, and changing the bias *terminus a quo* of a worldview.

### Clive Staples Lewis

C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) was an academician renowned for his allegorical writings depicting the truth of Christianity.<sup>106</sup> Lewis being highly philosophical, was not a philosopher; instead, he engaged in literary criticism and interpretation.<sup>107</sup> This academic calling, par excellence, would be the foundation from where Lewis would reach untold numbers of nonbelievers and demonstrate Christian truth through persuasive writing. In contemporary times, Lewis may be known best in the mainstream through his writings of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, His most persuasive writing for apologetic impact is *Mere Christianity*.<sup>108</sup>

*Mere Christianity* is arguably Lewis' greatest apologetic work. A simple search places

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<sup>106</sup> Mark Galli, and Ted Olsen, *131 Christians Everyone Should Know* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 133, accessed October 21, 2021, Logos.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, William, 481.

<sup>108</sup> C. S. Lewis published roughly forty books, articles, and poetry. His gift of writing in common and imaginative ways was a catalyst for igniting thought in the hearts and minds of his readers. Seeking to establish truth and belief in Christianity he produced many works directed at the falsehoods of the faith. His use of allegory, metaphor, and commonsense led to works such as *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Abolition of Man*, and *A Grief Observed* to name a few. His style of writing brought a commonsense approach to defending Christian belief, one which could be understood by laypeople and non-academics.

this book on the top ten lists of many polling organizations; most place it in the top five.<sup>109</sup> The clear communicated message in this book stems from commonsense and from an intuitive knowledge that is understood without formal instruction. Lewis' use of symbolic and metaphorical imagery spawns a clarity imparting light on what is otherwise a dark or skewed understanding of truth. In other words, a metaphor with the analogy is more than decoration; metaphors are the bulwark of Lewis' rhetorical approach.<sup>110</sup> In this simplicity is an elegance that plays on the sensical. This, otherwise believed to be intuition, is prevalent in the mind and in understanding mental symbols, linguistics.<sup>111</sup> As this is rooted more in subjectivism, specifically the use of language, the parallel is the avoidance of cognitive honesty. An individual wants something to be true and uses the mental pictures that communicate cognition to support the initial want. This intellectual dishonesty begins in the self and is fostered through the confirmation previously held philosophical commitments.

As this pertains to the POE, rather than concede that there are unknown things that are beyond the capability of human thought and cognition, it is easier to say that something does not exist. But, because there is no path of communication to describe the intuitive cognition of the

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<sup>109</sup> Share Faith Blog assigns *Mere Christianity* in the number two spot of the most influential Christian books, [www.sharefaith.com/blog/2015/05/top-10-christian-books-time/](http://www.sharefaith.com/blog/2015/05/top-10-christian-books-time/). TCK Publishing does not give an order of placement but notes this book is second behind *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, [www.tckpublishing.com/best-christian-books/](http://www.tckpublishing.com/best-christian-books/). The Christian History Institute and Magazine lists *Mere Christianity* as number eight looking at two thousand years of church history, [www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/blog/post/the-best-of-the-best-the-top-10-writings-in-christian-history/](http://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/blog/post/the-best-of-the-best-the-top-10-writings-in-christian-history/). It is clear *Mere Christianity* has had and continues to delve into the minds and hearts of readers, Christian and non-believers alike.

<sup>110</sup> Jerry Root, *C. S. Lewis and a Problem of Evil: An Investigation of a Pervasive Theme*, eds. K. C. Hanson, Charles M. Collier, and D. Christopher Spinks (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), xv, accessed October 21, 2021, Logos.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, Root, *C. S. Lewis and a Problem*, 17.

Anselmian “being than which nothing greater can be conceived”<sup>112</sup> does not mean this being does not exist. In like manner, to suggest that God does not exist based on no known reason for an evil act to exist is dishonest to the intuition that He does. Through this simplicity, Lewis guides his reader to true reality. Humans being finite, have a limited lingual capacity, therefore they are unable to fully communicate the intuition of the supernatural God of the Bible.<sup>113</sup> This inability does not instantiate that God does not exist, only that humans cannot explain His existence in full detail. In juxtaposition to Wittgenstein’s metaphysical subject, the intuitive knowledge does not need justification; it just is.<sup>114</sup> It is this position that Lewis works to show the rationality of true reality, also known as metaphysical reality.<sup>115</sup>

As posed by Lewis, the metaphysical reality lies in the daily reality we all face. The opening of Book One in *Mere Christianity* begins with a scene where the reader is introduced to the storyline through a quarrel, or better, the act of quarreling.<sup>116</sup> This event is readily understood and known to the reader as they have likely seen or been involved in such activity. This realism of life is the venue Lewis used to convey truth coherent with reality. This truth gives essence to the metaphysical reality akin to Plato’s forms.<sup>117</sup> The metaphysical is existent rather than a

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<sup>112</sup> Sidney Norton Deane with Saint Anselm, *Proslogium; Monologium; An Appendix, In Behalf of the Fool, by Gaunilon; and Cur Deus Homo* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1939), 7, accessed October 25, 2021, Logos.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., Root, *Lewis and a Problem*, 19.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 75 (5.641).

<sup>115</sup> Bruce Little, “Reality and Evangelism in the Life and Works of C.S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer,” *Linguaculture* 10, no. 2 (July 2019), 102, accessed October 25, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.47743/lincu-2019-2-0148>.

<sup>116</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 1980), 3, accessed October 25, 2021, Kindle.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., Little, “Reality and Evangelism,” 103.



product of the mind; they are separate.<sup>118</sup> This is observable in Lewis' writing and communication about beliefs that correlate with reality rather than convey an opinion. The metaphysical subject does not need justification; it just is, like the quarreling people understood by the reader. This reality is the seat from which Lewis engages the unbeliever. First, by placing the topic of discussion into a reality frame with which the reader is familiar. It is this familiarity that breeds correct logic as it is in reality. Then, the espousal of a specific belief emerges, not in an attempt to convert<sup>119</sup> but to demonstrate rationality that matches reality. This sensical appeal to logic through real life is the foundation of engagement of the POE, and common refutations of God's existence based on evil appeals to the realism of what could be known apart from what can be known and is known. It is the latter that acts as a hanger for contemporary arguments against the existence of God. This metaphorical accoutrement is supported by confirmation bias and the warmth given in a group of like-minded people who seek to fully know something, avoiding the reality that complete knowledge of something is not always attainable. Exposing this bias as Lewis does through real events opposing what merely relates in the mind to reality shares space with Francis Schaeffer in what Schaeffer defines as "taking the roof off."

#### Francis Schaeffer

Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984) was an apologist and theologian. U.S. born and educated, Schaeffer and his wife spent many years in Europe, ultimately founding L'Abri (the shelter) in Switzerland.<sup>120</sup> This was a place for pontification of beliefs, a quest for answers on matters of life and faith. It was the home of Francis Schaeffer and his wife Edith, which they opened to

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., Little, "Reality and Evangelism," 102.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, viii.

<sup>120</sup> Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology: Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 1060, accessed October 26, 2021, Logos.

travelers and seekers. The life story of Schaeffer is not the intent here; instead, the love expressed for his fellow man is the root of Schaeffer's apologetic appeal. It is in love that Schaeffer operated in exposing individual bias, not to tear down but to build up in love towards evangelism of the Gospel. Love in truth is a hallmark of Schaeffer's work.<sup>121</sup> In opposition to a sterile emotionless engagement of fact presentation, love proceeds with truth: they must know you care before they care about what you know. In this vein, Schaeffer operated in communicating his beliefs through compassion.

There is a curious notion from Schaeffer as it pertains to Wittgenstein's philosophy of language; that is, communication. The Wittgensteinian position of language as the venue to communicate mental pictures of knowledge is furthered by Schaeffer's position of communication being a conduit of ideas from one mind to another.<sup>122</sup> In this arena, things turn in a postmodern world where language is more subject to emotion and feeling than objective truth. Additionally, change in language over time affects the delivery and reception of the idea communicated. The Christian vernacular is understandable to those who believe but not necessarily those who do not.<sup>123</sup> A mechanical, sterilely perceived approach does little to bridge a relationship with an unbeliever as the ability to communicate is hindered due to the inflexibility of language. In essence, one must become all things to all people (1 Cor. 9:22). The starting place for this, as Schaeffer argues, is love.<sup>124</sup> This compassion for humanity was emphasized in

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<sup>121</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Excellence: The Character of God and the Pursuit of Scholarly Virtue* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 229, accessed October 26, 2021, Logos.

<sup>122</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who is There* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 145, accessed October 26, 2021, Kindle.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, 146.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, 146.

Schaeffer's methodology as a presuppositional evangelist.

This methodology must first be separated as Schaeffer envisioned himself as an evangelical rather than an apologist.<sup>125</sup> His approach was presuppositional but not necessarily in the classic understanding of the word, but from an understanding that each individual has presuppositions with which they perceive the world around them.<sup>126</sup> This is in contrast to the classical understanding of presuppositional apologetics; that is, the belief in the truthfulness of the Bible is the starting point to engagements.<sup>127</sup> This foundational diagnosis where Schaeffer's methodology blazes the trail of pre-evangelism. Rather than pose an argument for God's existence, probing the interlocutor's existing presuppositions reveals the part that needs to be replaced. An example would be automotive repair. A fault in an automobile must first be diagnosed before the repair can be made. Often this repair requires the removal and replacement of the faulty part to resume normal operation. Exposing this fault leads to correct function. As it is with cognition and bias, Schaeffer's approach seeks to isolate the fault for repair so that the truthfulness of the Bible can be evaluated. This approach is coined "taking the roof off."

The simple fact is that everyone has a set of presuppositions, whether they acknowledge them or not; this is where the chasm begins between what is true apart from presupposed belief.<sup>128</sup> The emphasis here is the continuation of logic to a conclusion based on one's

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<sup>125</sup> Jerram Barrs, "Schaeffer's Apologetics," *Unio Cum Christo* 6, no. 1 (April 2020), 226, accessed October 26, 2021, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAIe8N200626000504&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., Barrs, "Schaeffer's Apologetics," 225.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., Forrest, *The History of Apologetics*, 500.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, 147.

presuppositions, walking an idea or belief further down the road to see where it leads. Here exist two planes, one of reality in the created world and the other is man's self, as Schaeffer states, his "mannishness."<sup>129</sup> One's presuppositions provide the explanatory power behind this worldview between the world and humanity. Schaeffer's position is that Christianity coincides with the truth of what is (reality), and non-Christian beliefs, when followed to a conclusion, do not provide truth. Therefore, what is perceived as truth changes leaving the root presuppositions unchanged. There is no consistency between truth and non-Christian presuppositions versus what God created; here lies the tension.<sup>130</sup> The stress of the tension is magnified when presuppositions (bias) are not corrected based on a faulty conclusion, which results in the holder living in falsehood, changing the language, or denying the truth. This is the creation of a shell or structure with a roof to shield the individual from reality. This is a particular example but can be extrapolated to a larger group. In the case of the argument here, the roof is constructed through confirmation bias within a group or individual to shield what is reality from a faulty presupposition.

The roof is a shield from the point of tension.<sup>131</sup> The roof shields ideals of the world as well as those about humanity. An example is being whatever you want to be, or that at the core, humanity is good. The Christian response is that the world has limits and that each person is given gifts to work with (Rom. 12:6-8). Additionally, the root of humanity is not good; the heart is deceitful and wicked by nature (Jer. 17:9). Calvin espoused that the heart is an idol-making

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, 148.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., Schaeffer, 148.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 156.

factory: “a perpetual forge of idols.”<sup>132</sup> The non-Christian worldview sees the possibility of anything limited only to the individual's creativity and that people are good at heart. The reality is that no matter how much someone wants to fly to the moon, without some technological support, this is not possible. Likewise, given certain situations, the first response to pain, hurt, or attack is a wicked one, not one from goodness. The roof shields the individual from these truths. Schaeffer then explains, “The truth that we let in first is not a dogmatic statement of the truth of the Scriptures, but the truth of the external world and the truth of what man himself is.”<sup>133</sup> This pre-evangelism is an engagement with the individual's presuppositions from their secular or non-Christian worldview. The confirmation bias negates any information contrary to the presupposition as a shield from reality. Only when this shield, “roof,” is dismantled can truth be spoken. Then biblical truth demonstrates humanity's need for saving, and this salvation in Christ alone (John 3:36; 1 Cor. 15:22). Schaeffer's method stresses the psychology of bias, presupposition, and the metaphysical subject, not just as justification but in truthfulness. The fault is exposed by taking the presupposition to a conclusion, leading to objective truth. There is a clever way to expand this methodology through a litmus test of sorts devised by Douglas Groothuis, which can establish beliefs against what is reality.

#### Douglas Groothuis

Thus far, several methods of engaging bias, confirmation bias, have been explored, which engage on a psychological level at the origin of belief. The picture of engagement is becoming more apparent, but the question remains as to how to change a bias? One additional method will

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<sup>132</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997), I, xi, 8, accessed October 26, 2021, Logos.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, 156.

hopefully shed light on this question, paving a path of pre-evangelism through the continuation of a belief to a conclusion. The mechanics of this endeavor lies in what Douglas Groothuis terms a “worldview hypotheses evaluation.”<sup>134</sup> This method engages the worldview and, most importantly, pierces the nucleus of the matter, the human heart.<sup>135</sup> In the interest of fairness and avoiding special pleading, the same questions must be asked of Christianity to determine the foundational truth which the Bible espouses.<sup>136</sup> The evaluation engages worldviews and the bias, *terminus a quo*, which people hold to in the face of contrary information. The resulting test is eight pronged.

As it is adduced as a worldview evaluation, it covers eight aspects or questions for a given worldview levied against that belief structure.<sup>137</sup> The questions cover basic sustainability loci for the worldview. Without these, the worldview would not meet coherence with reality. The questions are explanatory power, internal logical consistency, coherence regarding beliefs within the worldview, factual adequacy, existential viability, intellectual and cultural fecundity, radical *ad hoc* readjustment, and lastly, simple rather than complex explanations.<sup>138</sup> As this authentication process is intended for use in the whole of an ideology, it seems very prudent to utilize this schema with a singular idea or smaller grouping of beliefs within the bigger whole. Various biases can be identified, which could relate to a failure in one or more authenticating questions. Failure in an area does not necessitate a total failure in the worldview but should

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<sup>134</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2018), 49, accessed October 26, 2021, Logos.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 49.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., Groothuis, 51.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 52-59.

induce weariness of the total coherence within the belief system or the individual belief. This section is not intended to be a complete excurses of this authenticating system. A more in-depth look and application will wait for a further chapter. Nevertheless, what is noted here is of value to the whole as a strategy for uncovering faults in a worldview. It is a basis for the Christian response, apologetically engaging bias and unbelief philosophically and psychologically.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has been challenging to compose, not merely in terms of the content of CS or CSR but the vastness of each. In the vastness, the attempt was made to simplify the topic without oversimplification or a reduction that removes the onus of the science of cognition. Life is diverse and yet divergent in cognition. This divergence sets humanity apart from any other creature. The study of cognition is a young science and yet, has not penetrated the mysteries of what is intuitive apart from acquired knowledge. The working of the mind and that of the material brain yields challenges as to how these entities relate to each other in a dualist perspective. Neuroscience is making fascinating gains in this field, and still, there is a mystery of causation. The field of CSR looks to understand religious belief and its understanding and assimilation into the culture. The biases exposed through CSR are not exclusive to this field but are prevalent in all areas of cognition. This chapter concluded with confirmation bias, specifically how it pertains to evaluating evidence contrary to existing beliefs and the onus to continued argumentation of the POE. This statement has an air of hubris to suggest that every argument against God's existence could or would be extinguished by abolishing confirmation bias. This is not the case. It is the position that isolating this bias to evaluate contrary evidence objectively answers philosophical questions which cannot be answered otherwise. The next

chapter will seek to understand this position and the mystery of intuitive knowledge, and the philosophical architecture of cognition, specifically that of religious belief.



## Chapter Two: The Problem of Evil (POE)

### Introduction

Evil is present in the world; to say otherwise is an avoidance of reality. The myriad essays and papers, thesis, and dissertations depict the solid presence of evil in the world and humanity. These submissions detail the quest to disprove and prove the existence of the God of the Bible. This, in the simplest form, is the war over the existence of YAHWEH, and each written document is a battlefield. They are battles fought through words, ideas, emotion, and experience. Philosophy and logic govern the parameters or the limits of the field where theology and science engage dialectically, establishing each position for or against the existence of God. Each side's strategy examines the same information and has access to the same scientific findings but comes to vastly different conclusions. Here lies the exchange of rhetorical blows showing fallacies that negate the other's argument.

The imagery of war and battle espoused does not preclude that victory is the intent; it is not and should never be. Instead, correcting a misunderstanding or faulty logic is the basis for orthodox thought in objectively evaluating information. Showing truth coherent with reality is the goal in any refutation of an argument, most notably by compassion, dignity, and respect for those involved in the engagement with love (1 Pet. 3:15). The following pages will define the Problem of Evil in its major categories (logical and evidential) and evaluate papers submitted by William Rowe.<sup>139</sup> The evaluation of Rowe will be cursory and targeted at the specific refutations made by other philosophers and Christian apologists in epistemology, language, and bias. The intent is to determine the cognitive basis from which the fault emerges, the bias which refutes

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<sup>139</sup> William Rowe, born July 26, 1931, died on August 22, 2015. He was 84. References to his work will be in present tense to escape the tediousness of changing tenses which strain readability. It should be understood that Dr. Rowe is no longer with us.

God's existence. It is to be noted that a second philosopher, Bruce Russell, has also produced significant work in this area. Rather than devote space in this chapter, a detailed treatment will ensue of his work in chapter three.

### **Issues with Evil**

The problem of evil carries many varieties. As related here, the two main categories, logical and evidential, will be the focus. Affirming the presumption that the reader is familiar with the POE, a brief review will aid in establishing the venue for this chapter. The logical position will first entail the refutations that have effectively dealt with this criticism. Then, the cause of evidential evil will be examined, with emphasis placed on the arguments presented by Rowe.

#### Logical Evil

Evil is a difficult conundrum for theologians and Christian philosophers as problems go. In fact, for everyday Christians who share their faith, the dreaded questions of evil in the world are a formidable obstacle. Additionally, evils endured by faithful Christians (death of loved ones, divorce, victims of crime, etc.) place a strain on their devotion to God, causing a “religious crisis.”<sup>140</sup> This Evil is “the most influential consideration against the existence of God.”<sup>141</sup> The “most influential” thrust lies in humanity’s exposure to evil. One does not need to be directly affected by evil to understand the impact on life and the world. The despair of war, crime, death, natural disasters, and self-inflicted agony are visible. In this vein flows the full force of arguments from evil, logical and evidential. In this section, logical evil will present a scant

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<sup>140</sup> Feinberg, John S., *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God, The Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), accessed October 28, 2021, Logos.

<sup>141</sup> Keith E. Yandell, *Philosophy of Religion: A Contemporary Introduction*, Second ed. (London; New York;: Routledge, 2016), 100, accessed October 28, 2021, [www.taylorfrancis.com](http://www.taylorfrancis.com).

remedial discourse. A look at the basic argument gives understanding to the position of those who refute God's existence in the face of evil.

### The Basic Logical Argument

No matter where the dialog begins on the timeline of human existence, the logical argument from evil entails three premises: 1) God is omnipotent, 2) God is "wholly" good, 3) and yet evil exists.<sup>142</sup> The basic argument is the locus of all logical evil arguments. Mackie insisted that a defender of theism would have to concede one of the three points to resolve this issue.<sup>143</sup> This would mean giving up that God is all-good, all-powerful, or evil exists. Neither of these options is acceptable, as it is plain to see that to negate the affirmative form of any of the premises would be creating a fallacy of the truth of each. Mackie states the theologian holds to inconsistent doctrine, making the theological position irrational.<sup>144</sup> The inconsistency lies in the characteristics of God as posed in the basic argument; He is all-powerful, He is all good. These are inconsistent with evil's existence, a presupposition based on Mackie's belief that God does not exist. The argument is then structured and supported by a bias of unbelief that propagates information and argumentation that flows from a confirmation bias. Confirmation bias is visible in the arguments and solutions given by Mackie by way of what he believes is the case with human epistemological finitude. He examines the free will aspect and surmises a paradox of omnipotence; God is all-powerful but created something He could not control.<sup>145</sup> This form of

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<sup>142</sup> J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind* 64, no. 254 (1955), 200, accessed October 29, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2251467>.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, Mackey, "Evil and Omnipotence," 201.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, Mackie, 200.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

the argument has been maintained through time and has been squarely placed on God for cause and effect. The free will aspect is offered, but a foundational element not probed is the will of God to His end of what has been created, and those things, evil, which act against the will of God and is pervasive in that which exists. A full examination of Mackie's argument is not necessary here, merely a rough overview of the logical horn of the dilemma of evil. In this regard, the argument has effectively refuted the logical problem of evil, although this atheistic argument seems to be gaining support in recent times. Therefore, new perspectives of this horn of evil argumentation promulgate fresh written discourse.

One recent argument offered by Kenneth Pearce delves into the natural functional/teleological theory of the mind in support of the God of the Bible or, more so, the logical consistency of God and evil. This topic denotes an expansion of mind study and venue use in computer science areas; hence, as Pearce frames it, cognition is "intentionality."<sup>146</sup> This piece has a connection with CS, so a more detailed treatment will be given later in this section. For now, its presence is for contemporary enlightenment to demonstrate what was once considered a settled topic, logical evil, was not settled after all.<sup>147</sup> Pearce views the foundation of his argument in the thrust of Plantinga's free will defense.

In what may be an oversimplification of the basic understanding of his argument, Alvin Plantinga states that God is not responsible for evil. This rests on the choices of humans based on their free will. As noted previously, God and evil are not incoherent or incompatible, as Mackie insists. The Plantinga defense is labeled the "Free Will Defense." He posits that humanity has

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<sup>146</sup> Kenneth L. Pearce, "Intentionality, Belief, and the Logical Problem of Evil," *Religious Studies* 56, no. 3 (2020), 419, accessed October 28, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412519000088>.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, Pearce, "Intentionality," 422.

free will, meaning to choose to do a thing or to choose not to do that thing.<sup>148</sup> This is a free choice by a free person, which yields an action in the positive or the negative. This is an aspect of being created in God’s image (Gen. 1:26). Aside from the literal physical appearance position of “image,” the intent here is to demonstrate freedom or free will as part of this image. As “image” is understood, one facet entails being able to choose our actions about causal reaction and intentional action based on our ability to reason and cognition of the world which produces emotion fueling want or action. Causal in reaction does not mean determined or antecedent conditions which place the action or inaction contingent on causal laws.<sup>149</sup> This is an area of self-awareness and reflection embedded in the image of God bestowed on people.<sup>150</sup> This premise shifts responsibility from God to people. A cursory examination of the defense reveals the basic methodology.

There are two significant planes of this argument, free will, and possible worlds. It is not the intent here to delve into the full breadth of all that pertains to each of these planes; rather, a cursory examination is applicable here. Plantinga solidifies terms, specifically free will (as defined above) and significantly free. The distinction between free will and significantly free lies in moral action versus nonmoral choice. This translates to stealing or having dinner for breakfast. The latter does not carry a moral tone. It is merely a choice to have a pot roast in the morning rather than in the evening. Stealing is an amoral act, not only from secular law but also from intuitive law, which implies that taking something that belongs to another is wrong. Another example is breaking a promise. When you say you will do something by action or with someone

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<sup>148</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 165-166, accessed October 29, 2021, [www.oxforduniversitypressscholarship.com](http://www.oxforduniversitypressscholarship.com).

<sup>149</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Cambridge U.K.: Eerdmans Publishing, 1977), 29, accessed November 4, 2021, Logos.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, Davis, *Paradise to Prison*, 80-81.

else and do not execute this intention, the other involved party receives this as a violation of a “natural law.”<sup>151</sup> Here, the onus is on the “significance” of the individual’s free will. Even if she chooses wrong, the ability to choose either way is more significant than not having a choice at all.<sup>152</sup> The next course is “possible worlds.”

Plantinga poses that “possible worlds” lie in counterfactuals, what could have been given certain states of affairs juxtaposed to what is the actual world. This “state of affairs” lies in the complexity or fullness of such states.<sup>153</sup> It is not merely from point A to point C or even a chain of events that encompasses every alphabet letter. It is much larger than that. Plantinga notes it is “so large as to be complete or maximal.”<sup>154</sup> Another perspective to demonstrate the enormity is to consider that this “state of affairs” goes beyond a single individual or event but is about all events in the whole of “states of affairs.” This leads to the position of “possible worlds.” A “possible world” is all “states of affairs” which could occur if the given circumstances are such that a subject can choose A or not choose A. God, being omniscient, knows what will happen in that situation (arguably also what will happen in every other state of affairs in that possible world), all with the condition of free will: a given individual is free to choose a given action. In this understanding, the actual world, this one, is such that in God’s omniscience and omnibenevolence, what has been actualized was good with humanity’s free will, which brought evil. In this, the premises 1) God is all-powerful, 2) God is all-good, 3) and evil exists does not obtain an inconsistency or contradiction. The “Free Will Defense” was effective against the

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<sup>151</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 1980), 3, accessed November 4, 2021, Kindle.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 30.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., Plantinga, 35.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 35.

logical argument from evil. It is credited as being a philosophically adequate response to this issue by some.<sup>155</sup> The adequacy does not entail a lack of difficulty. This difficulty is the springboard from which Kenneth Pearce launches a new argument aimed at the logical problem demonstrating the consistency of God and evil existing through the creation of intentionality of the mind.

Kenneth Pearce has developed an argument moored in philosophy, cognitive science, and theistic belief, which goes beyond supplementation to existing arguments (namely Plantinga's free will defense) but offers another path to disprove the logical problem of evil. The essence of the argument rests in the intentionality of the creaturely mind and that this intentionality exists due to, at least, some evil in the world. In other words, without some evil, there would be no creaturely intentionality of the mind. The notion behind the defense is the naturalistic functional/teleological theory of mind he terms NFT (for the purpose here, this acronym will be maintained).<sup>156</sup> A more in-depth study of this rationale is beyond the scope here; thus, a brief exposition of Pearce's position will suffice. The proposition which exemplifies the argument is as follows.

(M) God decided to create minds although it is impossible that created minds exist in the absence of evil.<sup>157</sup>

The premise gives a footing for the bulk of the argument, which implies that God and evil are consistent. As is explained, this theory maintains, "a state of an organism has representational content if and only if that state has the function or purpose of indicating a certain state of the

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<sup>155</sup> James Beilby, *Thinking About Christian Apologetics: What It Is and Why We Do It* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 81, accessed November 5, 2021, Logos.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, Pearce, "Intentionality," 424.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, Pearce, 424.

world to the organism, and it aims to give a fully naturalistic account of the ‘function’ or ‘purpose’ involved.”<sup>158</sup> Hinging on the original intentionality of human thought, the mental acuity of being in a state of affairs gives meaning.<sup>159</sup> How does this apply or explain God and evil? This lies in the meaningfulness of the system in which the mind interacts with what is perceived and understood.

For the sake of space, a brief examination of the argument will ensue. Part of the requirement of NFT is that it is a progression of sorts through various states only so with a causal-historical explanation in processes of selection or adaptation (natural selection, evolution, learned knowledge), such as a beaver giving an alarm of the presence of a predator.<sup>160</sup> The animal’s survival is predicated on the ability to sense danger (a state of affairs) and react to it. The intent is not to demonstrate natural selection through survival but to surmise the threat which caused the reaction, this danger being an evil of sorts. The intentional mind functioned based on the representation of the evil (predator) and the ensuing good of safety. It took the evil to bring about the preferable state of affairs. Pearce also notes that this intentionality also perpetuates misrepresentations of states of affairs (also evils).<sup>161</sup> This provides a historical setting as is required by NFT, which instantiates the good as a progression, or learning tool, from an evil (fear of the predator or the resultant death of the beaver from the predator). What is tangibly observed is that a desired state of affairs (a good) is obtainable through some amount of evil or a state of affairs less desirable than that which is to obtain. As Plantinga used the free will defense to show God and evil are not in contradiction, Pearce uses cognitive science and the

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., Pearce, “Intentionality,” 424.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., Pearce, 425.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 427.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 427.



intentionality of the mind to demonstrate the truth that God and evil are consistent. This impacts this thesis through belief and the mechanisms which produce it. This pertains to the logical argument from evil in that an intentional mind grows or matures through some bit of evil and the genuine mind produces belief which seeks what is true and avoid what is not.<sup>162</sup>

Belief would also coincide with intentionality, as it is required by NFT to show the practice as selective through means of evolution, natural selection, or learning.<sup>163</sup> For humans, what has been shown to develop early in infancy of what is real and true versus what is false is a complex culmination of cognitive function. The process incorporates evils for discernment of what is good. This is a micro picture of a macro problem dealing with evil in all its forms but shows the underlying problem of bias stemming from misrepresentation, which according to Pearce, is an evil.<sup>164</sup> With new treatments of the logical problem of evil, the onus and more robust arguments retain a position on the evidential horn.

### Evidential Evil

The work applied to the logical issues with God and evil has given way to the evidential evil arena.<sup>165</sup> More so with the gratuitous impact and the enormity or volume of evil present in the world. Evidential evil is that which can be seen or felt, death, physical injury, amoral acts against people, suffering, and anything opposite of good. It is unnecessary to define the terms good and evil other than to say an individual in her correct faculties would understand the

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., Pearce, "Intentionality," 430.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., Pearce, 430.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., Pearce, 430. It is encouraged for the reader to examine Pearce's article to understand the full scope of what it entails as what is offered here merely scratches the surface of cognition, belief, and the consistency of God and evil.

<sup>165</sup> Benjamin K. Forrest, Joshua D. Chatraw, and Alister E. McGrath, eds., *The History of Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 704, accessed November 4, 2021, Logos.

difference. In this, to discuss the broadness of evidential evil would undergo an exposition not suited to this thesis. Thus, the suffering endured by humanity will be the focus in evaluating the basic evidential argument.

The basic argument from evidential evil follows what can be observed in the world as pointless, excessive evil, and the inability to know or an absence of a good reason to allow such evil to exist. This is a thorny issue with a force based on the reality that there is evil in the world and a large amount of it. This issue is compounding over time into the contemporary setting with arguments from atheists tilling the ground with assaults on theism from the evidential problem from evil: it is more pervasive than ever. This does pose a serious concern for theism, specifically Christianity. As the world is perceived with an abundance of evil, the question stands, is this the best possible world? Leibniz believed it was,<sup>166</sup> and others believe it is not.<sup>167</sup> The locus of this question lies in the notion of “best.” This word seemingly has no other connotation than subjective as who or what determines “best?” The “best” to one could be the worst to another. In this context, what is “best” as God observed all possibilities and actualized the one present. One can pontificate and hypothesize on what could be removed so that the present world would be better, but there is no way to know for sure what degree and amounts of something (evil) need to go.<sup>168</sup> Tooley posits this notion when considering arguments from the POE. His position is that removing evils from the world falls on ontic responsibility; God has an

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<sup>166</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Freiherr von and Lloyd Strickland, *Leibniz's Monadology: A New Translation and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 118 (para. 55,) accessed November 5, 2021, [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org).

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 33.

<sup>168</sup> It is the position here that what is, is what delivers the end goal according to God's will and purpose. It is, after all, His creation to do with as He wills. This is not arbitrary actions or randomness, it is intentional and purposeful action on the part of God, rather than man's interpretation of what should be.

obligation to remove the evils He can, rather than axiological or by value.<sup>169</sup> The ensuing state of affairs which would follow if the evil requested were to be removed must be considered.

Schlesinger offered that a world without choice or diversity in “states of affairs” is unjust. It is a degree of desirability in contrast to justice or injustice; the denial of access to the fullness of life is an injustice.<sup>170</sup> This is a proportional proposition akin to Leibniz’s position that the present is the best possible world. Aside from agreement or not with this position, it stands that what is, is seemingly proportional when surveying the good in the world. As this is, specific areas of evil are propagated in the more infamous evidential arguments against God’s existence.

### **The Evidential Problem of Evil: Three Arguments against God’s Existence**

It is challenging to isolate specific arguments against God from evidential evil, not due to the lack of written or oratory discourse but rather the impact of such arguments on the mind and faith. In this, two esteemed philosophers have had such impetus in this rhetorical exchange that their contributions have fueled exchanges that have lasted for decades and whose work will continue to support future engagements. These men are William Rowe and Bruce Russell. Rowe’s arguments have garnered much attention and fostered a thought incursion deep into what can be understood in the finite mind. Therefore, his offering to the discussion will be evaluated, rather than critiqued, for his contribution to more contemporary positions. Russell’s offering will be the focus of the critique, to include parallels to Rowe through language, and tone, focusing on

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<sup>169</sup> Michael Tooley, *The Problem of Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), accessed November 5, 2021, [www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org).

<sup>170</sup> G. N. Schlesinger, “The Problem of Evil and the Problem of Injustice,” *Tradition* 13, no. 2 (Fall 1972): 51, accessed November 5, 2021, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000725215&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

the detected bias and the form the bias takes in relation to presuppositional positions against the existence of God.

William Rowe: "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism"

Settling, or at least solidly answering the logical problem of evil, led to propagating the evidential argument from evil. These arguments' pervasive nature is akin to the volume of evil in the world. The twentieth century yielded an onslaught of evidential arguments which continues to gain momentum. Of particular interest here is the work of William Rowe. Rowe's efforts laid the foundation for many contemporary arguments and refutations, which fostered a deeper analysis of Christian faith, the mind, and knowledge of what is and could be. It is a rampart of today's evidential arguments from evil. The basic premises of Rowe's initial work is as follows.

P1: There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

P2: An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

P3: There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.<sup>171</sup>

Rowe metaphorically supports these premises with a story of the gratuitous suffering of a fawn in the woods, trapped by a burning tree that fell onto the fawn, who succumbs to the grievous injuries days later.<sup>172</sup> There are two points Rowe insists on in this story. One is the unabated

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<sup>171</sup> William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1979), 336, accessed November 9, 2021, [www.jstor.org/stable/20009775](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20009775).

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil," 337.

pointless (gratuitous) suffering and the shortened duration of said suffering or a quicker death bringing an end to the suffering.<sup>173</sup> It is here that Rowe places a stipulation that if God existed, He would end the suffering in one of the two ways suggested. But, as this suffering went unimpeded, P3 (God does not exist) follows. The force of Rowe's argument is an inference from P1 to P2 and the lack of appearance that there is a greater good which can be obtained as a result of the fawn's suffering. Rowe himself appeals that this alone cannot prove the truth of this inference.<sup>174</sup> He induces a rationality of belief based on what he perceives as a reasonable position. This may be true in many instances, but it cannot be true in all instances. Here is a quantity of occurrences. Rowe's example of presidential candidates cites two people that will not likely be elected president, and this is true. Still, the example is exceedingly narrow compared to the fawn in the woods. The narrowness compounded with the scope of knowledge of Goldwater and McGovern and the broad absence of knowledge of the fawn, the wood, and the weather (that specific ecosystem) is incomparable based on what is not known about the fawn scenario. The underlying bias of the inexistence of God rings through the argument.

Section II of Rowe's argument looks at the potential theistic refutations. One specific refutation is to negate P1 through insufficient reason, or other reasons conjoined, lack justification to accept P1.<sup>175</sup> This would be the "direct attack," which would, of course, fail for two reasons: 1) the theist cannot know the goods and evils which would obtain, and 2) theistic tradition holds that we, humanity, cannot know all the reasons God allows certain actions such as

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., Rowe, "The Problem of Evil," 337.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., Rowe, 337.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 338.

suffering.<sup>176</sup> Here the bias is observed, especially with a statement at the end of section one where Rowe uses the term *all* to illustrate the evil in the world.<sup>177</sup> It is a paradox how Rowe can claim *all* but disallow the theist the same epistemic function. Rowe is claiming a broader playing field for his argument and restricting the field for theists. This does not elicit a stalemate but instead demonstrates Rowe's confirmation bias in the face of counter-information (or acquisition of information) to his position. The converse of this argument from evil would be to establish the same premises with the use of good, a move not allowed by Rowe or others. Not so evil does not exist or that there are no known reasons for allowance, but good exists in volume. The difficulty in this position would be the connection of said goods to the continuation of evils. This hinges on the same epistemic issues of Rowe's argument from the narrow scope of known reasons or the lack of appearance of a reason to allow certain circumstances. This demonstrates evil as a *privatio boni* (a privation of the good).<sup>178</sup> It makes sense that what is good should come first to determine the bad. This is a reverse of Rowe's position. It does not infer that Rowe does not see the good in the world, which would be absurd. But it does point out a lack of good in his arguments or allowing this position in the theist's refutations along the same boundaries as Rowe instantiates his position against God. Confirmation bias is the adhesive that binds Rowe's argument and fuels his worldview of existence without God. This similar cement is observable in Rowe's subsequent POE offerings.

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., Rowe, "The Problem of Evil," 338.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., Rowe, 337.

<sup>178</sup> Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. by E. B. Pusey, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996), 3.7, accessed November 9, 2021, Logos.

## William Rowe: “Evil and Theodicy”

Over four decades, Rowe engaged the POE arena with numerous offerings.<sup>179</sup> As space does not permit a review of each instance, his initial position (above) will be augmented with his introduction and development of human suffering or agent action in his 1988 paper “Evil and Theodicy.” Here Rowe adds human suffering, as was endured by a young girl dubbed “Sue,” which is a true account of an incident in Flint, MI., in 1986. This incident was the sexual abuse and murder at the hands of the girl’s mother’s boyfriend. Without going into the details of the case, the thrust is that this is an extreme agent-caused action where “no good state of affairs we know of” necessitates the allowance of this heinous act.<sup>180</sup> There is a difference between the 1979 and 1988 versions as far as the addition of human suffering and language denoting what can be surmised by Rowe regarding allowances for this evil. The language change is from the “appearance” of a justifiable reason to “no known reason” for the justification of this evil. The wording is different, but the onus of epistemological capability is the same.

It is a claim to knowledge that cannot be justified and one that Rowe concedes to but with no change in the claim. He outlines his counterarguments, or responses, regarding “known reasons” in three parts, each dealing with an aspect of knowledge acquisition.<sup>181</sup> Particularly the response C, which speaks to no known reason in respect to Q (no good reason for O [God] to

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<sup>179</sup> From 1979 until his death in 2015, Rowe wrote extensively on the evidential problem from evil, of which only a scant few will be featured in the following pages: the sheer number far exceeds the space, scope, and tenor of this thesis. Additional papers of Rowe for expanded reading are as follows but not considered a complete rendition of his work on the matter: “Ruminations about Evil,” (1991), “Skeptical Theism: A Response to Bergmann,” (2001), *God and the Problem of Evil* (2001).

<sup>180</sup> William Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy," *Philosophical Topics* 16, no. 2 (Fall, 1988), 120, accessed November 9, 2021, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fevil-theodicy%2Fdocview%2F1294891525%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., Rowe, “Evil and Theodicy,” 121-122.

allow the fawn suffering E1 or the girl E2) that these reasons would be ones not known.<sup>182</sup>

Surprisingly this is the counterpoint indeed. It is understood that affirmation of what is known or believed to be known is a starting point. Still, it does not eliminate the possibility of an unknown reason which, if known, would cause belief in a justifying reason for O to allow E1 or E2 instead of a greater good or the prevention of a further or greater evil. Therefore, the absence of a known reason does not negate the existence of a reason outright. It is simply unknown but must be considered in the epistemic spectrum. This is the point of contention of this thesis, Rowe's refusal to accept the potential of a reason not known but still possible. This position is referred to as Skeptical Theism, a point which will come to bear later in this chapter. For introduction purposes, skeptical theism is a defensive position against evidential arguments from evil. Due to cognitive incapability, we cannot know whether there are genuinely unknown reasons for the allowance of evil.<sup>183</sup> Another noteworthy expose of Rowe's is his essay involving the use of probabilities.

#### William Rowe: "The Evidential Problem of Evil: A Second Look"

This essay employs Bayes Theorem to show the improbability of theism. The premise is based on a "level playing field" from which Rowe initiates his argument showing that the probability of God's existence is low, therefore not God.<sup>184</sup> The onus of this essay is the Bayesian calculus derived to determine the values for the premises. This also is a point of refutation from theistic scholars. The argument is more simplistic as there are less premises, but

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy," 122.

<sup>183</sup> William Hasker, "All Too Skeptical Theism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 68, no. 1/3 (2010), 15, accessed November 21, 2021, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1007/s11153-010-9252-7>.

<sup>184</sup> Daniel Howard-Snyder, ed. *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 271, accessed November 16, 2021, [www.proquestbookcentral.com](http://www.proquestbookcentral.com).



the simplicity is obscured in the complexity of probability calculus. The argument by Rowe's account is a combination of inductive to deductive based on conjunctive goods and shared agreement in some instances between the theist and atheist. The formulation of the argument is as follows:

P: No good we know of justifies an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being in permitting E1 and E2; therefore,

Q: no good at all justifies an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being in permitting E1 and E2; therefore,

not-G: there is no omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being.<sup>185</sup>

The inductive move comes from P to Q and deductive from Q to not G ( $\sim G$ ).<sup>186</sup> Here is the first of what would be a torrent of dissent. Rowe's inductive move is based on a generalization from no known good to a deduction of this generalization to no good. It is here that this method does not work well as the first premise; being inductive to the second can yield falsity. This means that the premise does not, with certainty, entail the conclusion (Q then  $\sim G$ ). An example would be a pocket full of change. A coin is removed three times, and each time the coin is a nickel. Therefore, all of the change in the pocket are nickels. A nickel was indeed removed from the pocket on three occasions, but that does not mean with certainty that the change in the pocket is nickels. The second step, deductive (Q to  $\sim G$ ), is based on a faulty premise P, or at a minimum, not certain which is necessary for the inferential move from Q to  $\sim G$ . Rowe acknowledges this potential and seeks to clarify his intent.

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., Howard-Snyder, *The Evidential Argument*, 263.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., Howard-Snyder, 263.

Rowe engages two specific refutations in clarifying his intent with P. One refutation lies in what he terms a conjunctive good,<sup>187</sup> the other in the move from P to Q inductively. The conjunctive or conjunction is that of the concession that there is at least one good for E1 (the fawn) and E2 (Sue) that we know of, which would nullify P. Rowe further deduces that this good must be actual rather than not.<sup>188</sup> Rowe emphasizes the actuality of a known good and that if this good were not to occur, then P would be true. The inductive move lies in this good not being actually based on God not existing ( $\sim G$ ).<sup>189</sup> Rowe opines that God not existing makes P true thus, the argument sound. This seems question-begging in that Rowe's statement about the truth of God's inexistence making P true would amount to the negation of God's existence, the prerequisite of the argument. It would be like:  $\sim G$ , P, therefore Q. The confirmation bias of Rowe's position overshadows the argument placing an undue emphasis on the truthfulness of P. In either engagement, the soundness of P or the inductive move from P to Q is not warranted. The force of the argument is compounded through the probability factor.

Rowe introduces the Bayesian calculus in an attempt at equity where numeric values are given to the premises, including known evils that calculate the end product, giving the mathematical probability that God does not exist or that this probability is low. The equity is noted as a "level playing field."<sup>190</sup> The leveling agent is predicated on the assessment and assignment of the numeric value of 0.5 for existence and, in the same manner, 0.5 for God's

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., Howard-Snyder, *The Evidential Argument*, 264.

<sup>188</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2000), 466, accessed November 16, 2021, [www.proquest.com](http://www.proquest.com).

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., Howard-Snyder, 264.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 271.

nonexistence.<sup>191</sup> The formula Rowe uses for this is  $\Pr(G/K)$  and  $\Pr(\sim G/K)$ , each having a value of 0.5, which negates the emphasis of k (known evils in the world) for or against the existence of God. This is based on what Rowe believes is in agreement between theists and nontheists and an attempt not to question beg, or foster a presuppositional conclusion for the nonexistence of God.<sup>192</sup> The specific refutation of this model will be undertaken in a following section. Still, it should be noted that the equation brings value only to the evils in the world as they impact the end function of God not existing. Rowe acknowledges the positive aspects or evidence for God's existence but negates the use of said evidence in the equation.<sup>193</sup> Foregoing the tediousness of the Bayes formula, the product of the probability ensuing from the calculation is that the likelihood of God existing is .333, which leaves a margin of nonexistence at 2/3, affirming P.<sup>194</sup> This for Rowe is enough. But some aspects are lacking or absent from this calculation and Rowe's other arguments. These arguments have been refuted epistemically, mathematically, and through the exposure of the confirmation bias exhibited by Rowe in the premises of his arguments.

### **Refutations of Rowe's Evidential Arguments from Evil**

The literary list of refutations is as long as the list of evidential arguments from evil. No space here would permit an exhaustive exposition of such a list in this capacity. Therefore, what follows here is an abbreviated journey of what may be considered the top tier of refutations; the responses to Rowe's arguments that have fostered the most, or a large portion of the captivating essence from which subsequent denials have flowed. A brief cursory look at several authors will

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., Howard-Snyder, *The Evidential Argument*, 265.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., Howard-Snyder, 265.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 272.

give a balance, or better a counterbalance, to the evidential argument from evil. Philosophers and theologians such as Stephen Wykstra and Alvin Plantinga have laid foundational work for contemporary offerings from Jeff Jordan and Kenneth Pearce. Here in these halls, the refutations excel in the denial of the arguments against God from evidential evil.

### Wykstra and CORNEA

One particular point of contention in all of Rowe's arguments is the perceived acceptance of the first proposition or premise, which relates to not seeing or having knowledge of a good or a reason for the permission of evil in the world. This premise hangs on intense or gratuitous evil, but for brevity, here, these references will be noted as evil. In the refutation of Wykstra, he concentrates on the use of CORNEA. This is an epistemic condition, as Wykstra denotes the acronym as "the Condition of Reasonable Epistemic Access."<sup>195</sup> This, according to Wykstra, is a condition of the difference between necessary and sufficient.<sup>196</sup> This leads to the lack of entitlement of saying there are no reasons or there is no appearance of a reason for the various perceived evils. Wykstra gives three examples in section 3.1: 1) a hanger like building filled with clutter such as vehicles, construction equipment, and the like, with the intent to locate a table but not seeing a table; 2) the determination of soured milk while enduring a head cold which detracts the olfactory ability to smell sour milk which impairs the ability to determine sourness; 3) a Dean at college ruminates on granting tenure to a young philosopher, while the Dean has no

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<sup>195</sup> Stephen Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of "Appearance"," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 16, no. 2 (1984), 74, accessed November 16, 2021, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fhumean-obstacle-evidential-arguments-suffering-on%2Fdocview%2F1297952575%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle," 85.

experience in philosophy he determines the awarding of said tenure on a few sentences offered about a topic he does not understand.<sup>197</sup>

These examples are given in refutation of the principle of credulity, this being what is observed is likely what is.<sup>198</sup> It is curious that when looking at these instances posed by Wykstra, each has a blinder. The first is blinded by the inability to see everything in the room clearly. The second affirms the belief of soured milk with a head cold and diminished, if not eliminated, capacity to smell odors. And the third is a judgment made from a position of ignorance of the topic. Each requires a response, and each has a hindrance that negatively impacts the outcome. In applying this to Rowe's argument of appearance or no known reason, what blinder hinders Rowe's acquisition of the entitlement to make the claim? As is posed here, Rowe's hindrance is his presupposition that God does not exist. His confirmation bias triggers him to say there is no known reason or the lack of the appearance of a reason for the evil in the world. Here CORNEA is applied to Rowe's argument.

If understood correctly, CORNEA beckons that the position of knowing something does not necessarily lie in cognitive ability, "what we can't see (p.143) can't hurt your theory, so long as it's something you shouldn't expect to see even if it's there,"<sup>199</sup> more still, a connection. Three parts exemplify this culmination, inclination, cognition of situation, and evidential connection.<sup>200</sup> As is argued, the premise of Rowe with "appears" is based on the first two pieces mentioned here

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle," 84.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., Wykstra, 83.

<sup>199</sup> Trent Dougherty, and Justin P. McBrayer, eds., *Skeptical Theism: New Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 143-144, accessed November 17, 2021, [www.oxforduniversitypress.com](http://www.oxforduniversitypress.com).

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 85-86.

and that CORNEA adds the “connective” condition, which would allow the entitlement of such a statement. It is here that what is needed is lacking. The evidential connection is, in part, based on positioning, mentally, physically, and existentially. There are things beyond our ken not solely based on cognitive ability but in other physical and metaphysical applications that we may be lacking in various situations. Such a situation would be the appearance of no know goods which justify an evil. Just as with the examples given of the hanger, milk, and tenure, the deciding nature of what each entailed lacked the evidential connection to justify the entitlement to say with certainty that something is or was what its purported to be. As this pertains to known goods which would justify the evil or prevention of something equal or more heinous, the value of the parts may not outweigh the worth of the whole as they are combinatorial goods.<sup>201</sup> It is a compelling argument by Wykstra that Rowe’s argument fails under this criterion. CORNEA and the combinatorial goods are different approaches to the same end. The inference that God does not exist due to the appearance of no reason or known reasons that justify the occurrence of evil is a faulty point of differentiation. In this measure, Rowe utilizes the probability factor of Bayes Theorem, which Plantinga refutes.

### Plantinga and Degenerative Evidence

Rowe’s use of probability functions in his essay “The Evidential Problem of Evil: A Second Look” is yet another attempt to demonstrate the inexistence of God, this time through a mathematical equation. This occasion elicits the engagement of Alvin Plantinga in what is a

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<sup>201</sup> Edward N. Martin, “The Evidential Argument from Evil in Recent Analytic Philosophy,” (Doctoral Dissertation) *Purdue University*, (December 1995), 48, accessed November 17, 2021, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertations-theses%2Fevidential-argument-evil-recent-analytic%2Fdocview%2F304224725%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

convincing argument against Rowe's new formula showing the nature of the assignment of value to be prejudiced, cloaked in the guise of fairness. Plantinga demonstrates this with the same formula used to show the probability of God's existence rather than the improbability posed by Rowe.

From the start of Plantinga's discourse, he notes the inconceivability of the value Rowe assigns the probability of  $\Pr(G/K)$  or  $\Pr(\sim G/K)$  as being 0.5.<sup>202</sup> Whereas Rowe asserts this value is the level playing field, Plantinga cannot see how the value can even be surmised. Given all the possible states of affairs which would be good, how can this be quantified as a numeric value? The assessment of these states of affairs is the contention raised against Rowe's sequence of arguments about appearance and no known reasons. Plantinga continues positing a stacked deck against theism by restricting what is only agreed upon by theists and atheists.<sup>203</sup> This is a tilting of the probability in the direction of Rowe's conclusion that God does not exist, which is the bias, to begin with, exemplified in Rowe's disallowance of religious experience as it would raise the probability of God's existence in the calculus.<sup>204</sup> Plantinga seizes this position by noting that the denial of Rowe's P (no good we know of justifies God in permitting E1 or E2) is warranted by religious perception.<sup>205</sup> As this relates to CORNEA or the combinatorial goods, Plantinga is advancing a more encompassing argument, a broader sample of what is, by removing the blinders that Rowe is attempting to apply. Plantinga then constructs a counterexample through the probability calculus, which raises the end quotient in favor of God's existence to 2/3.

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<sup>202</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "Degenerate Evidence and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," *Noûs* 32, no. 4 (1998), 532, accessed November 17, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2671874>.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, Plantinga, "Degenerative Evidence," 535.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, Howard-Snyder, 266.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 536.

The premise then reflects that which Rowe disallows, religious experience (although this is not explicit in Plantinga's explanation of the new premises but is implicit). This is stated as such:

P\*: Neither E1 nor E2 is such that we know that no known good justifies a perfect being in permitting it.<sup>206</sup>

In contrast to Rowe's premise, this entails God's existence, thus a higher value of probability. In this counter-argument, it is established, with similar mechanics, that the basis is the same as Rowe's but with an affirmation of the probability of theism being 2/3, which, as arguments go, is as strong as Rowe's and as relevant.<sup>207</sup> As Plantinga notes, this is an argument from "degenerative evidence."<sup>208</sup> In simple parlance, if a proposition is supported with evidence and additional evidence negates the proposition of equal value, the argument is devalued. Therefore, Rowe's argument is of little value, if any at all. Jeff Jordan makes a compelling argument looking at quantitative vs. qualitative values as is pertinent to the Bayesian argument.

#### Jeff Jordan; a Level Playing Field Indeed

Jeff Jordan appealing to Rowe's admission of a weak argument<sup>209</sup> takes a specific tact regarding Rowe's attempt at a level, or fair, playing field. In advancing from a weaker to a stronger argument, Rowe adopts what Jordan refers to as going from a two-step to a one-step argument.<sup>210</sup> The difference between two and one is in Rowe's 1988 argument Q is inferred from

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., Plantinga, "Degenerate Evidence," 536.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., Howard-Snyder, 237.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., Plantinga, 540.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>210</sup> Jeff Jordan, "Blocking Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," *Religious Studies* 37, no. 4 (December 2001), 437, accessed November 18, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20008376>.



P then  $\sim$ G. As this is the weakness to which Rowe refers, the one-step, according to Jordan, is P to  $\sim$ G. This simplified argument is fueled by the probability assignment of 0.5, which ultimately yields a quotient of the existence of God being 0.333. Jordan focuses his attention on Rowe's intentionality of a level playing field by examining quantitative vs. qualitative values.

The thrust of Jordan's argument lies in the essence of the level playing field posed by Rowe. What Jordan initially deduces from this is the impotence of what lies behind the criteria for what is level. Here, quantitative versus qualitative elements are considered. The boundary determined by Jordan is that the one-step argument (P to  $\sim$ G) is quantitative or epistemic based on non-objective probability selection.<sup>211</sup> The assigned probability is by way of reason rather than an experience to avoid favoritism or bias, thus creating a level playing field. This is likened to the Rawlsian veil of ignorance, which conceals the initial position from a specific bias.<sup>212</sup> The problem here is that, while such a utopian existence is noble, the overarching issue of bias is so prevalent in Rowe's position the attempt to reduce or eliminate bias only intensifies the bias noted in the elimination of known goods, what Jordan refers to as G-goods,<sup>213</sup> or possibly the religious experience restrictions of what can be considered when affirming or denying P.<sup>214</sup>

Removing this aspect "loads the dice against theism."<sup>215</sup> If correct, another analogous referent is CORNEA and epistemic access. The missing ingredient, experiential association, which Wykstra pointed to, is also what Jordan highlights through the guise of a level playing

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., Jordan, "Blocking Rowe," 441.

<sup>212</sup> John Rawls, *Justice As Fairness: A Restatement* (Cumberland: Harvard University Press, 2001), 15, accessed November 18, 2021. [www.proquest.com](http://www.proquest.com).

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., Jordan, 445.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., Howard-Snyder, 266.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 448.

field. Rowe's initial argument of the appearance of known goods is absent a qualitative conjunction. It seems Rowe is attempting to keep this conjunction absent in the level playing field while enabling the same for atheism in P. This, as Jordan sums, would negate P ( $\sim$ P), which, of course, is disallowed, combined with the disallowance of G-goods (goods involving God which are actual) eliminates an individual in denying P ( $\sim$ P).<sup>216</sup> In other words, the inability to deny P does not instantiate that P is true, which is the basis of the premise. This causing a catastrophic failure in the argument. This failure cloaked in the restriction of known goods (G-goods) would be blocked, therefore unknown to those examining the validity of P.<sup>217</sup> The conclusion is that the guise of a level playing field is not level after all and if even it were the disallowance of specific information which support known goods is not knowable per P thus the argument fails soundness.

### **Conclusion**

It stands to reason that arguing from something to nothing is a contradiction of sorts. To argue something does not exist must entail that that which does not exist exists, or there is no point in the argument. I say this about the intuitive belief in the supernatural present in infancy. The childlike faith is present through the early years, only to be uprooted (for some) as they grow older and take in the various premises against a certain paradigm of belief pertaining to a specific worldview beginning with something. Here, something to nothing does not negate something; instead, it instantiates it. In like manner, evil is the privation of good, or for evil to exist, there must be good from which its existence derives. The arguments posited here by Rowe over his distinguished career demonstrate the continuous discourse between atheism and theism from

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., Jordan, "Blocking Rowe," 446.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., Jordan, 448.

evidential evil. Refutations seek to expose failures in the arguments, each argument having an underlying bias. The application of CORNEA, the converse calculus of the Bayesian Theorem, or the biased “level playing field” is all exposure tools effectively used to isolate the bias. A bias starts with God’s inexistence and precludes referents to God or goods connected with evil events or those works by God which prevent equal or greater evils. In this negation of goods, the biases which seek to eliminate them from the forum are magnified. Here lies the essence of this thesis. The difficult work is not necessarily identifying the bias but what to do with it once exposed. This is the task set out in the next and last chapter.

## Chapter Three - Strategy

### Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to build the strategy to turn the argument rather than merely negate it. In context, turn means to show the interlocutor where their position meets incoherence and introduce evidence that speaks to warranted belief (a contested point by many, specifically here from Bruce Russell)<sup>218</sup> to share the Gospel or, at a minimum, remove obstacles that impair meaningful conversation about the truthfulness about Christian faith. An exposition of two of Russell's more widely known articles will be offered in the following pages.<sup>219</sup> These Russellian arguments cover a broad range of topics within the area of evidential evil. His first argument is more pointed, with the second encompassing various rebuttal arguments from his interlocutors. In these arguments, clues to his "background knowledge (bias)" are the key to engagement. The intent here is to show the bias exhibited in his writings as it pertains to his position that the theist has not offered evidence to support rebuttal arguments against atheism, specifically evidential arguments. The first article involves the event of a young girl in Flint, Michigan. Russell redefines the argument's premises to what he believes is more sustainable, avoiding Plantinga's free will defense. Russell engages CORNEA and proper basic belief (Plantinga), attempting to illustrate its failure to negate his premises. The second argument opens more doors of opportunity as Russell engages the argument through its progression of language from Rowe to

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<sup>218</sup> Dr. Bruce Russell is a professor in the Department of Philosophy of Wayne State University. He has a storied history in the philosophy of religion and has produced much work in this venue. Most notably, and under scrutiny here, are his positions from the evidential problem of evil. He earned his Ph.D. in philosophy from U.C. Davis in 1977 entering the realm of higher education thereafter. He is esteemed by his colleges and his accolades go far beyond what can be recorded here. He is a genteel academician with a passion for his position against the existence of God from evidential evil. This information was gleaned from the curriculum vitae of Bruce Russell located at [www.clasprofiles.wayne.edu/profile/ad6025](http://www.clasprofiles.wayne.edu/profile/ad6025).

<sup>219</sup> The two articles under review are Russell's "Persistent Problem of Evil," (1989) and "The Problem of Evil and Replies to Some Important Responses," (2018). Full citations will be offered for specific references to both works.

present, skeptical theism, young-earth creationism, warranted belief, and a form of the Bayesian argument from Swinburne. In each instance, Russell asserts that no evidence supports these positions. It will be the argument here that there is credible evidence, and such that it exists, so too does God. The vexing issue then ensues: how does this counterargument allow the removal of belief obstacles to turn an engagement toward the truth of the Gospel? It is not a single argument but a cumulative case effort.

The vehicle of this action will be a cumulative approach incorporating orthodox arguments for the existence of God, traditional logic, philosophy, theology, and discourse with CSR that will provide the framework for this endeavor and provide the mechanism for a proper evaluation of Bruce Russell's position. Ultimately, seeking to show an objective look at what can be known leads to the existence of the God of the Bible.

### **Evidential Arguments from Evil: The Long Road**

The argument from evil is not new; it has been around for millennia. It has, however, gained significant momentum in the last two centuries, specifically the previous half-century. Sharp divisions between the various types of evil have constructed a bifurcated attack against the existence of God stemming from logical and evidential evil. Specifically, the evidential problem of evil as it pertains to quantity and a believed gratuitousness. Two arguments from Bruce Russell will be the focus of this section, "The Persistent Problem of Evil" and "The Problem of Evil and Replies to Some Important Responses." The intent is to show the progression of Russell's arguments that demonstrate confirmation bias disallowing, or better to say avoiding or ignoring, the evaluation of evidence that counters his position. The expectation is to isolate the bias and counter with credible evidence to remove obstacles that hinder belief.

## Tragedy

A 1989 paper offered by Bruce Russell details his argument from evil against God's existence through the tragic suffering and death of a young girl from Flint, Michigan. He begins the conversation by establishing the problematic issue of evil pertaining to adherents of philosophy and everyday, regular people.<sup>220</sup> In this, the debated issue in academia reaches out to the public to demonstrate that evil affects everyone regardless of convictions for or against the existence of God. Initially, Russell briefly espouses some basic arguments and abandons them in lieu of various failures within the premises of the arguments.<sup>221</sup> Evaluating these first series of arguments seems to show a progression from logical to evidential arguments, which is partly why Russell does not progress their position. The first is as follows.

1. If God exists, there would be no evil in the world.
2. But there is evil in the world.
3. Therefore, God does not exist.<sup>222</sup>

The second.

4. If God exists, then no unnecessary evil exists.
5. Some unnecessary evil exists.
6. Therefore, God does not exist.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Bruce Russell, "The Persistent Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (1989), 121, accessed November 30, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.5840/faithphil19896221>.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., Russell, "The Persistent Problem," 121-123.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., Russell, 121.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 122.

Lastly, in this section.

7. If God exists, then nothing happens which he should have prevented from happening.
8. If something happens that any human moral agent should have prevented if he knew about it and could have prevented it without serious risk to himself or others, then something happens which God should have prevented from happening.
9. Something has happened that any human moral agent should have prevented if he knew about it and could have prevented it without serious risk to himself or others.
10. Therefore, God does not exist.<sup>224</sup>

The basis for the progression of these arguments lies in the affirmations and refutations which Russell utilizes in the actual argument that he proposes. I will briefly critique what he has offered, as certain aspects will prove helpful in a refutation of his final position.

The first argument demonstrates a logical flaw that evil exists so God cannot, but this is not the focus Russell undertakes. His position of not working specifically from this argument is that certain goods are correlative to some evils.<sup>225</sup> He expands this thought by conceding and connecting virtues such as compassion, sympathy, heroism, and the like to various evils which produce them or serve as the platform from which these virtues are realized.<sup>226</sup> This is a valid point that coheres with reality but on a seemingly individual level or point of insertion. I will expand on this more in a later section. But for now, the virtues Russell speaks to can also be observed on a corporate level or by a group. In some instances, compassion from a distance, or further removed from the epicenter of the event, is quite different from what is experienced at the

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., Russell, "The Persistent Problem," 123.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., Russell, 121.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 121.

core or direct involvement. In each instance, or relational connection, the affected virtue is slightly different. Nevertheless, Russell does not progress this version of the argument due to this invalidating response.

Through language, the second argument suggests a positional change, logical to evidential. The addition of “unnecessary” replaces general evil from the first argument.<sup>227</sup> Again, Russell chooses not to utilize this form of the argument based on the “free will defense,” which negates premise (4).<sup>228</sup> The “free will defense” has been propagated by Plantinga and successfully refutes the existence of evils and the existence of God together.<sup>229</sup> The ability to choose to do something or not choose to do in the same circumstances is an outweighing good from that which would result in an evil. Therefore, the argument does not suffice for Russell’s purposes. This leads to the third argument and its issues.

The third argument advances much different language and perspectives on what this language entails. It is a shift from general evil and natural, such as the fawn dying in the distant forest or a natural disaster, to moral evil involving a moral agent. This type of evil is then held in juxtaposition between what an all-powerful God would do compared to what a human would do in the same position with the same ability and knowledge.<sup>230</sup> There is another subtle progression of language which differs from the original language in Rowe’s argument, which is “would

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., Russell, “The Persistent Problem,” 122.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., Russell, 122.

<sup>229</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), accessed November 30, 2021, Logos.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 123.



prevent”<sup>231</sup> to “should” or “should have prevented.”<sup>232</sup> There is a tense change, and the comparison of what God should have done juxtaposed to what a human agent should have or could have done. This is a more forceful argument and introduces the “Sue” case. The force of the argument lies in the use of language coinciding with the tragic events which came about on New Year’s Day 1986 in Flint, Michigan. Despite the addition of moral evil in the case of “Sue,” Russell elects to abandon this form of the argument based on a relational issue of God to His creation of humans.<sup>233</sup> Not specifically the “Sue” case but the essence of the relationship which would be afforded in the general premises offered in the argument. This special relationship of Creator to created is a negator of premise (8) and is believed to result from Wykstra’s parent-child analogy.<sup>234</sup> The fourth and standing argument Russell does advance is the murder of “Sue” as the event that happened in the third argument. The difference, other than a specific event, is that it lacks an outweighing good that fosters this event.

#### “Sue”

“Sue” is the name given to a five-year-old girl who was beaten, raped, strangled, and murdered on New Year’s Day 1986, killed by her mother’s boyfriend.<sup>235</sup> This tragic event is the foundation for the argument Russell advances where he posits “no outweighing good,” which justifies this event. His argument is as follows.

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<sup>231</sup> William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1979), 336, accessed November 30, 2021, [www.jstor.org/stable/20009775](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20009775).

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., Russell, “The Persistent Problem,” 123.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., Russell, 124.

<sup>234</sup> Daniel Howard-Snyder, *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 129, accessed November 30, 2021, [www.proquestbookcentral.com](http://www.proquestbookcentral.com).

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 123.

11. If there was no outweighing good that morally justified letting the little girl in Flint be brutally murdered, then God should have prevented that murder from happening.
12. There was no outweighing good that morally justified letting the little girl in Flint be brutally murdered.
13. Therefore, God should have prevented that murder from happening.
14. If God exists, then nothing happens which he should have prevented from happening.
15. Therefore, God does not exist.

Russell then begins his perusal of the potential defeaters of the argument's premises. As this is not a compatibility issue, premises (11) and (14) are not approachable.<sup>236</sup> It is not a question as to the existence of God and evil; instead, it is with the allowance of a given evil and an outweighing good for that evil to be allowed. Continuing, Russell then engages what he believes to be the only questionable premise (12). This seems a miss, as the onus of premise (11) is "if" there is no outweighing good. The word "if" leaves this premise open to some form of scrutiny as it goes to the inference of (11) to (12), "There was no outweighing good."<sup>237</sup> This same issue plagued Rowe's E1 and E2 argument, which many have successfully engaged.<sup>238</sup> Wouldn't this same

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., Russell, "The Persistent Problem," 125.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., Russell, 125.

<sup>238</sup> Edward Martin engages the inference issue of Rowe's argument (P to Q) with success demonstrating that this is a bad inference, negating the results. For an extended reading see, Edward N. Martin, "The Evidential Argument from Evil in Recent Analytic Philosophy," (Doctoral Dissertation) *Purdue University*, (December 1995), accessed November 30, 2021, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertations-theses%2Fevidential-argument-evil-recent-analytic%2Fdocview%2F304224725%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

issue plague Russell's inference from (11) to (12)? A defense to this position lies in the negation of Russell's belief that there are no outweighing goods. He posits that there could be outweighing goods, such as preventing the murder could have had greater issues in other places, or that her acquisition of complete felicity<sup>239</sup> being in the presence of God would hit the mark.<sup>240</sup> This, as is criticized by Russell, merely shows the potential or possibility but does not speak to "are" such goods.<sup>241</sup> He is looking for those reasons which are actual rather than possible, but how does one establish this without having full knowledge of all circumstances of an event which penetrate the event itself and any corollary events which result? It seems this is not possible, not in a skeptical theist way, but in a reasonable way. Therefore, the possibility factor waged from experience is what should suffice. Russell is asking for proof of a negating reason but offers no proof of his position other than the existence of evil events. He is hampered by the same constraints as the theist but refuses to concede this allowance. Nevertheless, there are possible reasons and reasons I would offer as evidence ("are") of outweighing goods from my experience in the criminal justice system.

This is a case of good over evil: the ability for what is right to triumph over what is wrong. Given the "Sue" case, there is no doubt that the responding officers and detectives felt the victim's suffering, not in the same physical sense, but without question emotionally through compassion and sympathy. Russell notes these virtues as having to have the presence of evil for maturation. This compassion transfers to the investigation to bring justice to the aggrieved through placing charges and then the proceeding trial. At this point, the attorneys, the courtroom

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<sup>239</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "Degenerate Evidence and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," *Noûs* 32, no. 4 (1998), 534, accessed November 30, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2671874>.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, Russell, "The Persistent Problem," 125.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, Russell, 125.

personnel, and the jury all wish to serve justice for the loss of life, that evil act of another perpetrated against, in this case, an innocent. Holding an individual responsible for their actions is a noble endeavor, which is a good. This vindication of the lost, for those vicariously affected, is individual and corporate. It is the stance against what is evil; in this case, humanity is rising against evil, which is an outweighing good. One that is directly connected and distant for those who know of the event and resulting proceedings.<sup>242</sup> The counter to this position could be that the criminal justice system sometimes gets it wrong through faulty convictions or biased investigators, which leads to a faulted process. This is true in certain aspects, but the overarching tenant is that the justice system is good and right. Often, court proceedings do not yield the outcome expected; the accused are found not guilty, as is the case with “Sue.”<sup>243</sup> The communal effort is one example of an outweighing good; others would be political and war. Looking at the whole, what would be noted as a combinatorial good is a good that thwarts evil, as is here the heinous act against “Sue.” This is a moral justification of the allowance of this evil.

Russell stated that (12) is the only approachable premise but that rather than possible reasons, what must be demonstrated is those reasons which “are.”<sup>244</sup> I believe that what has been produced “are” reasons for the allowance of, at least, this evil. It was true then and continues to be true now as the case of evil does not subside over time. Therefore, this outweighing good is a

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<sup>242</sup> I, the author of this thesis, served twenty years in law enforcement. During that time, I served as a patrolman, K-9 officer, detective, and sergeant of patrolman completing my years of service supervising a detective unit. This background information is critical to my position here in that I know these assertions to be true as I have lived them in all aspects and still carry the scars physically and emotionally. These scars are an evil as well but outweighed by the good which entailed defeating that evil. Additionally, I am an inactive United States Marine having served our country in the early nineties in Iraq, Somalia, and Cuba. In this capacity, I understand the pains of war and the goods which come from fighting and overcoming evil.

<sup>243</sup> Bruce Russell, “The Problem of Evil,” Contemporary Moral Theory and the Problem of Evil Conference held at the University of Notre Dame, March 2014, *YouTube* (June 2014), 34:23, accessed November 30, 2021, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXj8iTyZiRA&t=440s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXj8iTyZiRA&t=440s).

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, Russell, “The Persistent Problem,” 125.

continuous act of good over evil. It does not follow then that this position is hardly the all-time end of evidential arguments from evil. Answering a specific event does not entail the same answer would suffice for all evil events/acts. They must be weighed individually. But it does, I believe, answer the question of what an active, current, outweighing reason would be, which is connected to the specific evil committed against “Sue.” Russell quasi deals with this reason in Section II of his piece.

### Objections and Replies

Section II of “The Persistent Problem of Evil” deals with objections and replies. Russell asserts that what I have presented is false, as there is not enough outweighing good for others involved to justify the suffering of “Sue.”<sup>245</sup> There is some merit to the lack of outweighing goods if considered on a one-to-one basis. But, as I have suggested, the outweighing good is broader in scope and encompasses a community. As also offered, the fight against the axis powers of WW II involved the world in the defeat of this evil. Although I believe this is an outweighing good, it has its difficulties. It is a dangerous move to begin comparisons of pain and suffering from one to another, which gathers in a greater force in numbers to stop an evil or bring justice to an evil done. Russell then progresses to tackle CORNEA.

### CORNEA

Russell believes CORNEA to be false based on question-begging. His example is rooted in the discernable good which would be revealed to us is hinged on the existence of God.<sup>246</sup> Suppose this position is question-begging, and the theist needs to argue a position contra God’s

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid., Russell, “The Persistent Problem,” 130.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., Russell, 132.

existence. In that case, the question still stands as to the discernability of an outweighing good that would likely be revealed. Even in the absence of God's existence, CORNEA applies and is successful as the base situation (S) still requires more than is allowable through the principle of credulity. This principle states that a situation is likely true without defeaters as it is and is *a priori*.<sup>247</sup> Of course, Swinburne qualifies this principle by investigating (S) further by way of memory recall or other sensory or perceptual experiences that are filed away in memory.<sup>248</sup> By CORNEA standards, an additional step must be undertaken to establish an appropriate locus for making a knowledge claim, in this case, an "outweighing good." That step is an evidential connection of the inclination to believe (S) and the cognitively understood situation which instantiates that belief.<sup>249</sup> If understood correctly, this evidential connection would be something standing which is confirmed or defeated by or with external considerations. Wykstra makes this caveat before critiquing Rowe's initial argument by CORNEA, and where I use external, Wykstra uses the word "other."<sup>250</sup> Whereas this critique is pointed at Rowe's argument, what is critiqued here by Russell holds the same premise of the knowledge of an "outweighing good." The language is different but holds the same onus or force of what is known or reasonably known to be an outweighing good. As has been argued, an outweighing good (known through experience and direct knowledge in like instances) is that of the triumph of good over evil. The

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<sup>247</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Mind, Brain, and Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 42, accessed December 2, 2021, [www.oxforduniversitypressscholarship.com](http://www.oxforduniversitypressscholarship.com).

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, Swinburne, *Mind, Brain*, 42.

<sup>249</sup> Stephen J. Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of "Appearance"," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 16, no. 2 (198487), accessed December 2, 2021, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fhumean-obstacle-evidential-arguments-suffering-on%2Fdocview%2F1297952575%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle," 87.

furtherance (maturation) of the virtues exhibited by those directly involved in the “Sue” case through the investigators, jurors, and court personnel, to right a wrong is a collective good surpassing the single or the individual. Russell argues against CORNEA by using a logical fallacy of question-begging. It is a curious response. As Russell applies CORNEA, he offers a revised premise. It is as follows.

16. On the basis of there being no outweighing good within our ken served by the relevant suffering, we are entitled to claim "It appears that the suffering is pointless" only if it is reasonable to believe that, given our cognitive faculties and the use we have made of them, if the suffering was not pointless, some outweighing good would likely be discernible by us.<sup>251</sup>

Using the consequent of CORNEA, those outweighing goods are beyond our ken (pieces of information, reasons, or data to support an action or allowance of an action beyond the finite human mind). Russell inserts this as the antecedent of the premise (16), then argues that no known outweighing good is discernable to us. It seems as though this is now a circular argument relying on the inability to know beyond our ken as the very reason why there are no known outweighing goods. This ignores what lies beyond our ken, of which we have no knowledge, which is the contingent of CORNEA. But this is what Russell is doing through confirmation bias, arguing from the presupposition that God does not exist; thus, his premises show this bias. It is this bias that is to be engaged. If successful, the engagement will pivot on a modified/expanded CORNEA, which goes beyond cognitive epistemic sense to a sensory epistemology based on CS/CSR combined with various evidence for God’s existence. This will

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., Russell, “The Persistent Problem,” 132.

come in a later section of this chapter as the last critique of Russell opens the door to the expanded argument.

### **The Problem of Evil: A Continuation with Some Important Responses**

In this, Russell's most recent argument categorizes four moral arguments into one moral argument and then places his final argument on one premise, that premise being the last.<sup>252</sup> The argument which follows is arranged from least to greatest, as Russell believes is the flow of the sophistication of each.<sup>253</sup>

(1A) If God exists, there would be no suffering.

(1B) If God exists, there would be no unnecessary suffering.

(1C) If God exists, he would not allow unnecessary suffering unless allowing it is needed to bring about a greater good or prevent a greater bad.

(1D) If God exists, he would not allow excessive unnecessary suffering.<sup>254</sup>

Russell parses out the issues with each of the premises giving a further treatment to 1C and refutations offered from Van Inwagen.<sup>255</sup> Russell reviews Inwagen's refutations levied on the boat captain and a judge, with the judge receiving a fair amount of the ink. It is the counter-example of the sentence issued by the judge (be it in incarceration or monetary fines levied as

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<sup>252</sup> Bruce Russell, "The Problem of Evil and Replies to Some Important Responses," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion: Journal of the Central European Society for Philosophy of Religion* 10, no. 3 (September 1, 2018), 105, accessed December 2, 2021, [www.https://doi.org/10.24204/ejpr.v10i3.2590](https://doi.org/10.24204/ejpr.v10i3.2590).

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., Russell, "The Problem of Evil and Replies," 105.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., Russell, 106.

<sup>255</sup> Daniel Howard-Snyder, *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), accessed December 3, 2021, [www.proquestebookcentral.com](http://www.proquestebookcentral.com). Van Inwagen has two chapters in this book (8, 12) dedicated to refutations of the EAE. It is recommended reading as this volume collects papers from participants on the forefront of this rhetorical area of discourse in one tome.



punitive for the committed crime) that I wish to isolate. Specifically, Russell comments that “The trouble with the examples of the judge and the captain is that they involve finite human beings.”<sup>256</sup> What is at stake here is experience, specifically with the judge analogy. Yes, as a human, the judge is finite in noetic ability, but what is apparently disallowed by Rowe is the individual's experience, which adds to the instantiation of an action, belief, or cognitive acquisition. Assigning 365 days in jail rather than 364 could have pivoted on the judge's experience with other like offenses and offenders. Through the judge's experiences on the bench, it could be held that the length of incarceration is proportional to the recidivism rate.<sup>257</sup> If a more stringent punishment lessens the recidivism rate, then a great good has been accomplished.<sup>258</sup> A counter-argument is what are the gradient factors of too much? Granted, this ideation's parameters exceed this thesis, but the judge's experience must be considered in what would be construed as excessive or unnecessary punishment. The excessive and unnecessary aspect is what Russell adopts in his working argument.

Russell settles on an argument from (1D). This argument is:

(1D) If God exists, he would not allow excessive unnecessary suffering.<sup>259</sup>

This argument is further parsed out as follows.

(1) If God exists, he would not allow excessive unnecessary suffering.

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid., Russell, “The Problem of Evil and Replies,” 107.

<sup>257</sup> Georgia Zara and David P. Farrington, *Criminal Recidivism: Explanation, Prediction and Prevention* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 5, accessed December 3, 2021. [www.taylorfrancis.com](http://www.taylorfrancis.com).

<sup>258</sup> Matthew R. Durose and Leonardo Antenangeli, “Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 34 States in 2012: A 5-Year Follow-Up Period (2012–2017),” *Bureau of Justice Statistics* (July 2021), accessed December 3, 2021, [www.bjs.ojp.gov](http://www.bjs.ojp.gov). According to this brief report (bare minimum information), the recidivism rate for prisoners released in the 34 states in question was 6 in 10 rearrested within 3 years of release and 7 in 10 within 5 years of release.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., Russell, 108.

(2) But there is excessive unnecessary suffering.

(3) Therefore, God does not exist.

The level of sophistication alluded to by Russell must lie in the use or progression of language, as this is the difference from least sophisticated (1A) to most (1D). This is observed with the progressive parlance from suffering to unnecessary suffering to excessive, unnecessary suffering. It is important to note that Russell concedes that God could allow unnecessary suffering, at least in the counterargument offered by Van Inwagen regarding the judge, as long as it falls within a certain parameter.<sup>260</sup> This concession does not seem to demonstrate an abandonment of the outweighing good. Still, it does show that there would be instances where God would allow a degree of suffering above what is necessary in Russell's mind. Therefore, the clause of “excessive unnecessary” is added to the premises (1 and 2), which presumably takes the place of the outweighing good. As the basis of the argument seems consistent with other arguments (beyond language), the question of what determines excessive, unnecessary suffering is apparent. Is this argument's evil more excessive and unnecessary than previous arguments? If so, what is the standard of measure for this scale so that all can be aware and proceed with judgments from the same position? In a recorded presentation for an EPE conference at the University of Notre Dame, Russell responds to what “excessive” is to accomplish when added to unnecessary. He simply states that excessive is way more suffering than would be expected.<sup>261</sup> This is tantamount to the outweighing good as the same or similar reasoning behind it is the ability to see a reason

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., Russell, “The Problem of Evil and Replies,” 108.

<sup>261</sup> Bruce Russell, “The Problem of Evil,” Contemporary Moral Theory and the Problem of Evil Conference held at the University of Notre Dame, March 2014, *YouTube* (June 2014), 2:07, accessed December 3, 2021, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXj8iTyZiRA&t=440s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXj8iTyZiRA&t=440s).

or, in this case, to understand what is excessive and unnecessary. Russell, in lieu of this, engages skeptical theism.

### Skeptical Theism/CORNEA

Russell's onslaught of skeptical theism (ST) has a locus in CORNEA, because the same reasoning adopted by skeptical theists (STs) is that it is not possible to determine what lies beyond our ken.<sup>262</sup> Russell concedes that CORNEA is sufficient in certain instances but does not offer necessary conditions.<sup>263</sup> Russell does not delineate these conditions, so clarity is lacking. He does provide two examples, each with a different reality, which presumably provides the necessary conditions he stated were missing from CORNEA. Looking at each example can be further quantified or qualified. The Matrix or demon world is the first example given of which Russell says he has no doubt he is not in either of those worlds. This is based on what is normally conceived from the real world he is actually in.<sup>264</sup> His following example is that of looking for a friend in a restaurant. The friend's presence is not apparent, so the friend is not there.<sup>265</sup> Because CORNEA does not yield the necessary conditions, it cannot be used as Russell asserts. Thus, the perlocution of Russell's unmet conditions rests in what is reasonable to believe in the absence of not seeing something.<sup>266</sup>

It seems adding a condition may open avenues of further dialog. Such a condition could be a sensory connection or an evidential connection, evidential from the point of additional

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid., Russell, "The Problem of Evil and Replies," 109.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., Russell, 110.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 110.

sensory acquisition such as feel or a positional change which would allow a greater field of view. If these conditions can be met, it seems unlikely that the original data (the friend is not there because I cannot see him) would be incomplete, lacking a positive connection that would yield a more conclusive answer. This notion is building on NFT as espoused in chapter two. What could be the answer Russell gives as the friend is not there could be a misrepresentation of what is understood. The friend may be in the restroom at the time of the observation. Or maybe the friend dropped an eating utensil and stooped to pick it up, thus removed from the field of view. The bridge needed is meaning which is part of the necessary condition of naturalistic functional/teleological theory of mind (NFT).

How is meaning acquired in this example to provide a necessary condition? An observation is merely data without meaning. This meaning is derived from the representation of the organism to the world around that organism and how they interact.<sup>267</sup> Without the meaning, what is observed could be sensory deception rather than connection. Russell gave an example of the barn facade in “The Persistent Problem of Evil.”<sup>268</sup> If, when looking at the ninety-nine barns, it is believed that they are, in fact, barns (although only one is actually a barn), a sensory connection would complete the notion of what is real from what is a false understanding of the situation. A change in position can realize this connection; a different angle may provide a better depth perception of the situation. Another example would be a flat earth instead of the spherical earth that actually is. Foregoing technology, space flight, and satellite photographs imagine standing on a plain and looking in any direction. You can only see as far as the horizon. Despite physical limitations (we can only see so far), if you take a forward step in the direction, you will

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid., Pearce, "Intentionality, Belief," 424.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., Russell, "The Persistent Problem," 133.

see one step further than you previously had. This is a sensory connection. Rather than saying after looking in a specific direction, that is all there is (a flat earth), taking that forward step revealed one more step of ocular and physical information by way of cognition and connection to the world you are in. For the sake of argument, removing geographical obstacles such as oceans and mountains and continuing to take forward steps would eventually lead to circumnavigating the globe, thus establishing that there is something more beyond the horizon (what we see or what we know present perception). The intent here is to show that, given advances in CS and CSR, there are necessary conditions that instantiate warranted belief even in incomplete information or perception. A more detailed treatment of this position will entail in the last section. Russell's argument advances to incorporate STs position of a young earth.

#### Young Earthers/Biblical Creationists

Russell develops his argument from the position of refutation from CORNEA (reasons beyond our ken) to incorporate the arguments from whom he calls "Young Earthers."<sup>269</sup> The newly stated argument from this position against a young earth and crossover to EAE goes as such.

(1\*) If Young Earthism is true, then the earth was created recently.

(2\*) But the earth was not created recently.

(3\*) So Young Earthism is false.<sup>270</sup>

Russell asserts that YE (Young Earthers) insist that premise (2) cannot be judged accurately because no position warrants such a stipulation (akin to ST).<sup>271</sup> He continues to summarily

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., Russell, "The Problem of Evil and Replies," 111.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., Russell, 111.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 111.

describe all individuals who adhere to a young creation as envisioning what is an intentional deception by God. The intentionality lies in the apparent long history of the world where people only believe they have had issues rather than the actuality of having those issues (evil acts).<sup>272</sup> This position hardly represents the whole of young-earth creationists. Holding a young-earth position does not necessitate the belief of deception on the part of God. There are problems with this position. The entirety of this line of argumentation lies in the presence of evil, and God's allowance of it, that God intentionally deceives and places Him in the action of the evil, which is contrary to orthodox Christian belief.<sup>273</sup> The second is if the statement of this world being a deception were true, it would not be a reality that could be differentiated from virtual existence. In Russell's defense, he argues that the base refutation is the same in ST and YE, that being not in a place to say something is the way it is observed or believed to be per human cognitive limitations.

This thesis does not allow the scope of evidence comparison from empirical positions to support a YE or to dialectically engage various scientific positions based on experimentation and historical science, developing hypotheses from a base of Scripture versus evolution. It suggests that regardless of position, the evidence available to science is the same for all engaged in the pursuit of the ontology of all that is observed. The same data lead scientists in vastly different directions to understand the universe. Beyond the position that the world was created one hundred years ago or sooner (this does seem out of sorts), the position of a young creation (ten thousand years or so) is based on hypotheses stemming from the same data (biology, geology,

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid., Russell, "The Problem of Evil and Replies," 112.

<sup>273</sup> David Baggett, and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 149, accessed December 7, 2021, Logos.

etc.) available to mainline scientists, each with a variable starting point. Those points are physicalism and theism, both having direct bearing here.<sup>274</sup> Creation science is termed pseudo-science as it lacks epistemic rigor, as alleged.<sup>275</sup> An interesting aspect here is that scientists who uphold a young creation receive the same level of education and examine the same data but have different foundational starting points. But those who do not conform or prescribe to “standard science” are considered pseudo.<sup>276</sup> It is important to acknowledge that there is a difference between empirical and theoretical science and between scientific methodology and the philosophy of science. This is believed to be the tact taken by Russell, theoretical, which he continues using the G. E. Moore shift.

### **Moore Warrant**

Section III of Russell’s offering involves the critique of Plantinga, Moon, and Swinburne *viz a vis* the G. E. Moore shift. In simple form, the G. E. Moore shift lies in a reversal of a premise and the conclusion with a negation of the reversed positions. Essentially, by negating the first premise and the conclusion, Moore says that he does have (or whomever the interlocutor

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<sup>274</sup> Bruce Russell does not explicitly state his position as a physicalist but alludes to such in his argumentation on page 125. Here it is observed the battleground of belief and unbelief between physicalism and theism.

<sup>275</sup> Ralph M. Barnes, “The Nature of the Arguments for Creationism, Intelligent Design, and Evolution,” *Science & Education* 26.1-2 (March 2017), 28, accessed December 7, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11191-017-9875-5>.

<sup>276</sup> Standard science is referred to here as proponents of evolution and big bang cosmology. It is, of course, interesting that many Christian scientists are proponents of evolution and big bang cosmology. As it is not the scope here, further study must remain a separate study.

might be) reason to believe (God exists).<sup>277</sup> Russell seems to be challenging the reasons offered by the Moore shift as a lack of warrant as stipulated by Plantinga, Moon, and Swinburne.<sup>278</sup>

### Plantinga

Specifically, Plantinga argues for what he calls a “natural knowledge of God.”<sup>279</sup> This is akin to intuition, as has been argued in chapter one from the research and work of Barrett. But it goes a bit further as the natural knowledge is a combination of what is observed in nature and humanity bearing the image of God (Rom. 1:19-20; Gen. 1:26). Plantinga quotes John Calvin as man (humanity) has been “imbued with the conviction that there is a God.”<sup>280</sup> This position of self-seeking a deity is a debate for another venue, but it could be from being created in God’s image (Gen. 1:26). C. S. Lewis also alludes to this, calling it the “Natural Law.”<sup>281</sup> In juxtaposition to Calvin and Plantinga, where this inner conviction of God is further exemplified in refusal of His existence, is akin to an apophatic argument for God’s existence from the negation. Accordingly, argumentation that God does not exist is evidence that He does. Otherwise, why would there be a need to argue at all? Plantinga refers to this sense as the *sensus divinitatis*.<sup>282</sup> Russell engages this phrase with a curious comparison.

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<sup>277</sup> Marilyn M. Adams, and Robert M. Adams, *Oxford Readings in Philosophy: The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 32, accessed December 7, 2021, Logos.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, Russell, “The Problem of Evil and Replies,” 114.

<sup>279</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 31, December 7, 2021, Logos.

<sup>280</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997), I, iii,1, accessed December 8, 2021, Logos.

<sup>281</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 1980), 3, accessed December 8, 2021, Kindle.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 33.



Russell attempts to turn the *sensus divinitatis* on the notion of a leprechaun, noting it as *sensus leprechaunitis*.<sup>283</sup> Then seeing something traditionally linked to leprechauns, conclude that a leprechaun created this thing; therefore, leprechauns exist.<sup>284</sup> This is where the expanded CORNEA would come into play. Establishing a connection of the belief with an external factor (or more) and how the one holding the belief relates (interacts) to that environment would solidify the epistemic position giving additional warrant to the belief. Take God and leprechauns as the examples given. For argument's sake, a factor that could be examined would be a contrast between the numbers of people who believe in God against those who believe in leprechauns.

Not surprisingly, the numbers of leprechaun-believing people are not reflective of a global position. Surprisingly, there is a statistic based on a poll taken in Ireland of people who believe in leprechauns. This poll conducted by Cooley Distillery in 2011 showed that 33% of those contacted (people living in Ireland, specifically Louth County) believed in leprechauns.<sup>285</sup> The brief article does not give the count of the total number of people polled or other demographics that would prove beneficial, so this is not a scientific endeavor. But facts can be surmised as to the population of Louth Co Ireland, which, as of the 2011 census, was counted at 122,897.<sup>286</sup> The weight of this data is compromised. It was done in jest, but indeed there are a portion polled that believe in leprechauns. In contrast to Christianity, or better, those religions that hold monotheism (Christian, Islam, Judaism) have a more robust calculation based on census data. A Pew research analysis from 2015 demonstrated that of the world's 7.3 billion

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., Russell, "The Problem of Evil and Replies," 115.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., Russell, 115.

<sup>285</sup> Irish Central Staff, "One Third of Irish People Believe Leprechauns Exist," *Irish Central* (February 16, 2020), accessed December 8, 2021, [www.irishcentral.com](http://www.irishcentral.com).

<sup>286</sup> "Louth (Ireland)" *Population City*, accessed December 8, 2021, [www.citypopulation.de](http://www.citypopulation.de).

population (2015), 2.3 billion were professing Christians.<sup>287</sup> Add to that number the remaining monotheistic religions of Islam and Judaism, 1.8 and .01, respectively, bringing the total number of believers in God to 4.11 billion.<sup>288</sup> These numbers show that monotheistic religions make up approximately 56% of the global population.

The totality of monotheistic belief can be viewed in contrast to the *sensus leprechaunitis* as a vast difference. Additionally, the fact that there are no mechanisms in census calculations to account for those who believe in leprechauns as opposed to those who believe in God shows that one is inconsequential. At the same time, the other holds some form of merit and presence. Does the leprechaun comparison of Russell really hold when looking at the *sensus divinitatis* from the global population of those who believe in God? The sheer weight of the numbers of those who believe bolsters the cognitive mechanism of the *sensus divinitatis*, or as Baggett and Walls posit, non-discursive knowledge (intuitive), which wields properly basic belief.<sup>289</sup> This expanded CORNEA gives support to an *a priori* belief in the existence of God or non-discursive knowledge. It seems the same reasoning for the knowledge that I am not a brain in a vat, in a matrix, or created five minutes ago, holds to an extent, circular reasoning if explained away through discursive knowledge (moving from evidence to a conclusion). The simple way to understand these examples is through the proper basic belief that they are not true. The axiomatic presence of these beliefs is such that they do not need evidential or argumentative support.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Conrad Hackett, and David McClendon, "Christians remain world's largest religious group, but they are declining in Europe," *Pew Research* (April 2017), accessed December 8, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/05/christians-remain-worlds-largest-religious-group-but-they-are-declining-in-europe/>.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, Hackett, "Christians remain," no page.

<sup>289</sup> Baggett, David, and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 190, accessed December 8, 2021, Logos.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, Baggett, *God and Cosmos*, 190.

This is believed to be the position advocated by Plantinga viz a vis the *sensus divinitatis*. Russell then engages the position of Moon as an additional step in which to defeat the *sensus divinitatis*.

### Moon

As an *a priori* belief or properly basic belief, the *sensus divinitatis* is axiomatic. Russell offers a counterexample of this intuitive belief with Truenorth in opposition to Moon's position.<sup>291</sup> Truenorth is an individual who has the ability to point north in most any circumstance.<sup>292</sup> As the scenario goes, Truenorth is at a party and engages his ability to always point north in a contest with other party attendees, being blindfolded and spun in a circle then told to point north.<sup>293</sup> The indicated direction is, of course, correct, but Truenorth has no justification for this ability. Russell posits that it is counterintuitive that Truenorth believes in this ability because the source of the ability is unreliable.<sup>294</sup> In the example, Truenorth is always right. This is so with the results at the party and other statements within the scenario. Questioning the intuitiveness of having the ability is different than questioning the results or how the result came to be. As the belief goes, knowing a toaster makes toast does not preclude having to have a working knowledge of how the toaster does this; it just does. Truenorth always being able to point north does not eliminate the presence of this ability, nor does not having a reliable source of the ability negate the belief in the ability as the ability shows to be trustworthy. It does

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<sup>291</sup> Andrew Moon, "How to Use Cognitive Faculties You Never Knew You Had," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 99, S1 (April 2018), 251-275, accessed December 8, 2021, [www.onlinelibrary-wiley.com](http://www.onlinelibrary-wiley.com). Moon offered a position of a "no-defeater" regarding justified belief. The "no-defeater" clause is linked to "unfamiliar cognitive function." The relevance of this article lies in the use of unfamiliar cognitive functions such as those present in children, to form true beliefs. In other words, a connection between intuitive knowledge and the metaphysical subject demonstrates unexplainable justification of beliefs. It is an interesting article and worthy of a critique, but that goes beyond its use in this thesis.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, Russell, "The Problem of Evil and Replies," 117.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, Russell, 117.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

not follow then that the *sensus divinitatis* would be defeated based on not being able to explain the source outside of divine implanting. The last position taken by Russell is with Swinburne.

### Swinburne

Bayes theorem is the entrance point to this last section in Russell's paper. As such, he begins with the hypothesis of van Gogh and van Faux and who painted more in the van Gogh style than the other, probabilistically. This play on words essentially says that a given painting was more likely painted by van Faux based on probabilities than van Gogh.<sup>295</sup> It should be noted that the numbers shown in the example, although fictitious, are known. In contrast to the Bayes theorem given by Rowe, where the numbers were not derived from a known source, fictitious or otherwise, they were derived from what they believed could be. Also, lacking some of the background evidence in favor of God's existence makes it difficult to determine objectively what those numbers could actually be. Plantinga managed this aspect of the refutation convincingly. Therefore, no further treatment will occur with this portion of Russell's paper. Russell uses the Bayesian argument to springboard into a broad-spectrum argument against God. This could possibly be his better argument.

Russell draws attention to what is termed the "God Hypothesis."<sup>296</sup> In this, God created everything and sustains the universe. According to Russell, this explanation fails due to an unexplainable event: how does an unembodied entity interact with a physical cosmos?<sup>297</sup> According to Russell, this is a mark against the hypothesis, as giving a reason that is impossible

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid., Russell, "The Problem of Evil and Replies," 120-121.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., Russell, 123.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 123.

to comprehend does not suffice.<sup>298</sup> This is a good point, where special pleading does not yield truth in a paradigm belonging to a worldview but must be able to explain what it should.<sup>299</sup> This point will be developed in the last section, but for now, attention is needed to set this aspect aside as it is a key to Russell's argument at this point. The short answer to this is the incorporeality doctrine, which explains God's disembodied existence. But more is needed to engage this explanation meaningfully. Continuing, Russell requests more evidence, such as a voice, an inner voice, urging people to do what is right.<sup>300</sup>

It seems quite clear that this voice exists. It exists as conscience, that inner voice that speaks to us about a moral law, a way of living which necessitates right action towards people and the world, the moral law written on the hearts of humanity (Rom. 2:15). Atheists have submitted that morality is merely a social contract between people.<sup>301</sup> This contract or agreement brings two questions to mind one is mitigation for when the contract is violated, and the second is from where these moral inclinations come from? What is the locus of what is agreed upon? Is it that internal voice Russell is asking for which determines right and wrong across ethnic and cultural divides? Is it a voice heard in the language of one it is speaking to? It seems clear this voice exists and does so in the way Russell requests. In concluding, Russell turns the discourse back to pain and suffering as it pertains to animals and people. Foregoing additional criticisms (as they have been offered earlier in this chapter), one point of mention is the position that there

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid., Russell, "The Problem of Evil and Replies," 123.

<sup>299</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL; IVP Academic, 2011), 51, accessed December 8, 2021, Logos.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., Russell, 124-125.

<sup>301</sup> Veritas Forum, "Is God Necessary for Morality?," June 24, 2012, *YouTube*, 1:03:32, accessed December 8, 2021, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rm2wShHJ2iA&t=19s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rm2wShHJ2iA&t=19s).

is too much suffering to justify the virtues of compassion and sympathy, etc., which are required for development, and that a lesser amount would accomplish the same end result.<sup>302</sup> If this were the case (a lesser amount), we would have less suffering, at least from a human perspective. But as Russell posits, there is excessive, unnecessary evil, so an inference is that humanity has not benefitted from lesser amounts. However, it does not seem as though Russell views this position in the same way. Similarly, to a judge decreeing a sentence that is considered harsh, that sentence is based on more factors than the capriciousness of an individual. Comparing this to humanity, it is clear that moral change and maturation have not increased by lesser forms of pain and suffering. Free will dictates the actions of moral agents of an egregious nature continue to occur. What basis in life, at this moment, would suggest that lesser amounts of evil would bring about the change Russell would like to see? Additionally, how much compassion is shown when an individual is killed for a belief or other reason on the other side of the world, your country, state, city, or family? There is a gradation in which the closer an individual is to pain, the more compassion they develop. This would be of great good in the full maturation of compassion, sympathy, and empathy, a fullness not realized if observed from a distance. Russell then concludes his paper.

In his conclusion, Russell ruminates the lengthy journey of arguments for and against God's existence. He opines that he hopes his offering is more than a step on the road, leading to the conclusion that atheism is the better choice.<sup>303</sup> This ending statement exhibits the bias Russell holds that God does not exist. The confirmation bias exhibited by Russell is that of a held belief. It is not due to an overwhelming counterargument but from the refusal to allow the examination

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid., Russell, "The Problem of Evil and Replies," 127.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., Russell, 129.

of counterevidence to his belief. This is confirmation bias and engaging such is the focus of the last section.

### **Strategy: A Cumulative Argument**

As noted elsewhere in this thesis, the issue at hand is not necessarily the refutation of the EAE but the bias exhibited by those that argue from it. As it is here, the confirmation bias of Bruce Russell is evident in his arguments which seek to ignore credible data in lieu of the presupposition that God does not exist. The latest treatise of Russell has been critiqued; therefore, what is offered in this section is an expansion of sorts to broaden the categories Russell speaks to in his 2018 paper, which he uses to bolster his position of atheism on the face of evil. The tactic here is to take what has been offered in argumentation and add a defense of the reason for suffering, address God's intervention in the cosmos's affairs, and evaluate Russell's position in relation to coherence. This is a cumulative case effort incorporating certain Christian doctrines regarding the work of God, gathering an understanding of cognition and how this works intuitively with beliefs, the writings of Wittgenstein, Schaeffer, and Lewis, and concluding with a Groothian evaluation for coherence. The intent in this last section is to expose the confirmation bias so that it cannot be ignored, but to the end of which free will is exercised in the continued nonbelief or objective evaluation of data that leads to belief or the possibility of such.

### **Excessive Unnecessary Suffering: A Defense**

Over the years of toil on the part of atheism, the EAE has undergone many changes. As wording and premises are refuted, new arguments emerge with new language. Language not

intended to be a perversion of the Wittgenstein sort<sup>304</sup> but to limit what can be challenged by the theistic community. An example of this is the argument critiqued here. Moving from unknown reasons to accentuate the quantity of evil and stress, such as excessive and unnecessary, is presumably a tact to avoid ST and go after the quantity or amount of evil. Still, there is the implication of an unknown reason lurking in the premises, possibly background data as alluded to in the Bayesian form. This is so because of the repeated rehash of this notion throughout Russell's argument. A theodicy of sorts has been offered for the allowance of pain, suffering, and evil in the example of people coming to the aid of a victim ("Sue") in the investigative and prosecution portion of that case. A more refined reason or defense could also be time.

It does not follow that for something to be justified (evil), the reason must be known at the time of the event. This is the onus of ST, as there are circumstances where a reason for something is unknown at the time but not nonexistent. The counter premise from Wykstra, the parent-child analogy, is an example of this.<sup>305</sup> The noetic disparity between a parent and a one-month-old is clear but lessens as time goes forward and the infant matures into adulthood. This means that a parental reason for the allowance of something, whether for an infant, toddler, pre-teen, or teen, does not preclude that the reason is known at the time but understood later in life. This is also understood as hindsight. Looking back on something from the past and learning lessons is a major mode of learning and understanding what is in the present. Therefore, an unknown reason has the great potential to be known later in the future. It may even be known generationally in that what escapes the father may be understood by the granddaughter, also to be

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<sup>304</sup> The intention or understanding here is that the language used is not a user-based conception as is much suited to postmodern thinking. But apart from a subjective aspect (notwithstanding the subjective nature of the belief behind the language) the use of language is to shelter the argument from refutation based on connotative or denotative understanding and application.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., Howard-Snyder, *The Evidential Argument*, 130.



revealed in the next life (1 Cor. 13:12). This would make time the counterbalance of the unknown reason for the given evil (pain and suffering), and also, the expansion of CORNEA previously noted.

As stated, meaning (understanding) is established through representation and interaction with the world being represented.<sup>306</sup> The infant has lesser interaction with the world around her, thus reduced cognitive assimilation of reasons for a given event. This holds true through maturation, both physically and mentally, until such a time when the now older individual has a more solid cognition of worldly interaction from which representations are made. The locus, among other things, is time. The expansion of CORNEA to include time differentials bridges what would be known to not known yet. Thus, time is a defense against not knowing a specific reason for a given evil event. Russell also notes issues with God's intervention in the cosmos, specifically the world and evil occurrences.

### Doctrines of God

The insistence that God should intervene or intervene more in the world's affairs is a point made by Russell in his 1989 article,<sup>307</sup> an idea also touched on in the 2018 piece.<sup>308</sup> In the case of the former, God's intervention into the states of affairs of the world is questioned to include the amount that would be needed to balance the scales. This would be considered a miracle, which does occur but should be evaluated individually. These occurrences are typically ignored by atheists or "fall on deaf ears."<sup>309</sup> Russell's take on God's intervention (miracles)

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid., Pearce, "Intentionality," 422.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., Russell, "The Persistent Problem," 128.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., Russell, "Some Important Replies," 123.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., Baggett, *Good God*, 156.

could rest on the same foundation as his not seeing reasons for evils. By this, Russell does not see a reason and, in like manner, does not see a miracle, so it does not exist in either case. Also, as there seem to be far more evils in the world than, as Russell would have the reader believe, goods, Russell posits there is too much evil. He is ignoring the goods that are prevalent in the world. This is akin to Hume's argument against miracles, by adding generalities or uniform occurrence, negating the belief that miracles are possible by the testimony of a natural event.<sup>310</sup> Here Hume ignores those miracle claims by way of natural occurrence and not investigating the claimed miracle. Russell seemingly does the same by ignoring the goods in the world. These smacks of confirmation bias by denying the alternate data against his position, which could be special pleading in favor of his position. God does intervene in the world. This is made known through Scripture and testimony of individuals witnessing and directly involved in said miracles. It does not mean that every reported miracle is, in fact, a miracle; therefore, rather than dismissing the claims out of hand, attention should be given to weighing the data for a proper conclusion. As is with miracles or God's intervention in the world, Russell questions God's ability to even interact with the physical reality.

Working from the God Hypothesis, Russell questions God's ability to interact with the physical world as a non-embodied being.<sup>311</sup> He further equates this to be a mark against theism as the proposition of God as Spirit and interacting with the world is impossible to grasp.<sup>312</sup> Is this truly an impossible proposition? Or is it contrary to prior philosophical commitments to

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<sup>310</sup> R. Douglas Geivett, and Gary Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2018), 77, accessed December 9, 2021, Logos.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, Russell, "The Persistent Problem," 123.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, Russell, 123.

physicalism or naturalism? The doctrine in question is incorporeality; God is spirit (John 4:24). For a naturalist, it is understandable to struggle with this position. This issue has raged from ancient times (Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle) to contemporary settings and the cognitive revolution discussed in the preceding chapters. Specifically at stake is reductivism, or the reduction of the mind to a physical state rather than separate from the physical brain. This can be encapsulated in the mind/body dualism, which seems less favorable in contemporary discourse but is undergoing somewhat of a resurrection.<sup>313</sup> The difference lies between philosophical anthropology and theistic anthropology, and of course, if it is established that the mind is separate from the body, the incorporeality of God is defensible.<sup>314</sup> Substance dualism, naturalism, physicalism, and the various forms associated with each are vast topics that cannot fit in this restricted space. Suffice to say, Russell's difficulties do not lie in the incomprehensibility of the doctrine of incorporeality. Instead, it is directly contrary to his philosophical commitment to physicalism. Therefore, it is denied as an applicable proposition by way of confirmation bias, not the inability to grasp the subject matter. This bias acts as a roof or shield for the objective perusal of data for God's existence and thus the subject of the cumulative case.

### Theistic Belief, EAE, and Impossibility

Russell stated that believing in the incorporeal God of the Bible is impossible to grasp.<sup>315</sup> As such, his appeal to physicalism is more sensible. Is it? The universe's expansion discovered

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<sup>313</sup> Jonathan Loose, Angus J. L. Menuge, and James Porter Moreland, *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2018), 2, accessed December 10, 2021, [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com).

<sup>314</sup> J. P. Moreland, and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 2nd Edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 514, accessed December 10, 2021, Logos.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, Russell, "The Persistent Problem," 123.

by Edwin Hubble in the 1920s suggests the universe had a beginning.<sup>316</sup> The Kalam Cosmological argument birthed from medieval Islamic Scholasticism posits a transcendent cause outside of matter which brought the universe into existence, hence a beginning.<sup>317</sup> This beginning was solidified by the universe's expansion, as is noted in modern cosmology. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). Here, it can be observed that what was known in antiquity was known through special revelation of Scripture. Thus, Scripture was at one point considered the "queen of the sciences."<sup>318</sup> Scripture is a starting point from which understanding the world has a *terminus a quo*. Aquinas made such claims giving the term (Queen of the Sciences) to theology.<sup>319</sup> Theology, Scripture, was the proving board for what could be known (Eccl. 3:22, 25). Additionally, all knowledge begins with a fear of God (Prov. 9:10). Not a fear in the sense of fright but from reverent respect. The teleological argument (finetuning) is another theologically based endeavor.

Looking at the cosmos, our world, and the observed intricacy suggests a designer. As with the Hubble constant for speed estimation of the expansion of the cosmos, this too is factored into the design, otherwise scientists would not be able to use it for measurement. This is merely one example. Others would be the tilt and distance of the earth from the sun. More or less would

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<sup>316</sup> Davide Castelvecchi, "Daily Briefing: How Fast is the Universe Expanding? Cosmologists just got more confused.," *Nature* 571 (July 2019), 458, accessed December 10, 2021, <https://www-nature-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/articles/d41586-019-02198-z>. This brief article speaks more to the rate of expansion and subsequent confusion of varying results from different calculation models, but speaks to the expansion, nonetheless.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations*, 477.

<sup>318</sup> Erna Oliver, "Theology: Still a Queen of Science in the Post-Modern Era," *In Die Skriflig* 50, no. 1 (2016), 1, accessed December 10, 2021, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Ftheology-still-queen-science-post-modern-era%2Fdocview%2F1817993108%2Fse-2>.

<sup>319</sup> Thomas Aquinas, Saint and Dominicans, English Province, *Summa Theologica* (Westminster, Md: Forgotten Books, 2007), STh., Iq.1, accessed December 10, 2021, Logos.

result in the inability, impossibility, for life to exist. Scripture notes the creation in Genesis 1-2, Isaiah 45:18 teaches that the world was created to be inhabited. This is precisely what is found in the natural sciences. Given the precision present in the cosmos, it seems irrational to hold to a physicalist or naturalist position. Random acts, chance, and time do not seem to support what is observed in nature or advocated by Darwinism.<sup>320</sup> It is also understood that there are counterexamples to these positions. Needless to say, what is has a cause, and to avoid an infinite regress of causes, the first cause must be transcendent; the God of the Bible. As these are observations of the world, it is understood that such observations are begotten from cognition. Thus, they are manifested or verbalized through language and praxis.

#### Cognitive Science, Cognitive Science of Religion, and Intuition

The work of Barrett and Kahneman has discovered much about how beliefs form through cognition and intuition. The two-system paradigm focuses on fast and slow, and intuition and reasoning.<sup>321</sup> Intuition is especially being used in determining agent causality. Looking at the stars, planets, or a mountain range suggests agency, one where human action will not do.<sup>322</sup> The counter to this is that science has progressed to help us understand what we are looking at; therefore, there is no need to assign agent causality. Natural processes over eons of time have produced what is observed. This position, naturalism, is unconvincing as it does not tell why these things exist, their teleologic nature, or the meaning they have to those who gaze upon them or purpose beyond mere existence. In the shadow of this absence is the intuition of agency, which far surpasses what a human or humans can do. Religious belief has been found in all

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid., Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 270.

<sup>321</sup> See chapter one for elaboration on this topic.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology*, 101.

cultures from all parts of the globe throughout history.<sup>323</sup> An influence on religious beliefs, specifically Christian, is related to prior philosophical commitments such as dualism or physicalism/naturalism.<sup>324</sup> This prior commitment produces biases that affect evaluative measures when engaging complex topics or, as in the case of the EAE, evidence, and arguments that propose God or His inexistence.

One aspect alluded to is the mind/body issue and conscience. It seems that to speak of suffering requires reflection. Such reflection goes beyond a physicalist perspective of the mind in that cognitive faculty produced as a product of brain function would work primarily to ensure survival.<sup>325</sup> The reliability of such faculties seems counterintuitive. But an innate, intuitive belief in God (or a god that exists and is responsible for the cosmos) lies in the nature of humans.<sup>326</sup> This embedded inclination to believe in God is the *sensus divinitatis*. This sense of the divine is manifest in looking at all there is and intuitively knowing that something created it. The heavens declare the work of His hands (Ps. 19:1) is precisely what comes to mind when one looks at the stars. The innate, intuitive belief in a creator is triggered in connection with the purpose for that which is observed. This is reason and reflection of the world, which is observed, as with the NFT, not merely being in the world but also the connection through cognitive faculties which necessitate growth. This surpasses mere survival to progress toward a connection beyond the

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<sup>323</sup> Aiyana K. Willard, Lubomír Cingl, and Ara Norenzayan, "Cognitive Biases and Religious Belief: A Path Model Replication in the Czech Republic and Slovakia with a Focus on Anthropomorphism," *Social Psychological & Personality Science* 11, no. 1 (2020), 97, accessed December 11, 2021, [www.sagepub.com](http://www.sagepub.com).

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, Willard, "Cognitive Biases and Religious Belief," 97.

<sup>325</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 315, accessed December 12, 2021. Kindle.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, Plantinga, *Where the Conflict*, 60.

physical.<sup>327</sup> This, seated in mind, is the connection to our creator. Rather than look at nature and see it as a material substance, it has meaning beyond matter. Scripture states that God created everything and mandated that humanity have governance over the creation (Gen. 1:1-26). Therefore, the rational mind fits within the framework of a rational world; a rational being creates this world in a way that the mind can comprehend what is observed and go beyond the mere existence (NFT) to engage the one who created it.<sup>328</sup> This represents breaking free from societal, academic, or philosophical constraints of commitment to look beyond the physical nature of what is observed.

### Coherence

The argument thus far seeks to demonstrate the coherence of belief in God through cognition, intuition, and the innate draw present in humanity towards deity (specifically the God of the Bible), which suggests that the interest or religiosity is natural through human perception and cognition.<sup>329</sup> This seems counterintuitive for the naturalist, but when a further connection is sought, a coherence comes to bear, surpassing the physical to explain why and the relation to the why. In one way or another, the writings of Wittgenstein, Schaeffer, and Lewis attest to this coherence through what is naturally perceived, rooves constructed to shield differing conclusions and the innate notion that there is an omniscient God. They are efforts to engage those mechanisms which work to thwart the natural inclination through perception and cognition to

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid., Pearce, "Intentionality," 425.

<sup>328</sup> J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 46, accessed December 12, 2021, Logos.

<sup>329</sup> Justin L. Barrett, "Exploring the Natural Foundations of Religion," *Trends in Cognitive Science* 4, no 1, (January 2000), 29, accessed December 12, 2021, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1364661399014199>.

accept this coherence to reality. Groothuis interacts with worldview evaluations to determine coherence, testing the viability of a worldview. Rather than evaluate physicalism/naturalism, the intent here is to return to the EAE to assess it against what has been offered for coherence to what is observed perceptually, intuitively, and cognitively.

The Groothian system is designed to be used for worldview evaluation. The EAE is not a worldview as it only seeks to further one area of thought about humanity and the world. Therefore, it is better to hold the EAE as a paradigm, a smaller portion within a larger view. However, various aspects of the evaluative system can be waged against this paradigm to determine coherence. The following criteria will serve in this evaluation 1) consistency, 2) coherence of propositions, and 3) the establishment of factual claims.<sup>330</sup>

The first, consistency, is applied to Russell's second premise regarding excessive, unnecessary suffering. Arguments have been given here in two forms, the quasi theodicy (those coming to aid the victim and those affected by the criminal event) and a defense with expanded CORNEA (time). When observed through these counterarguments, the question of the consistency between excessive and unnecessary suffering speaks to inconsistency. This does not suggest there is no suffering; instead, the suffering born through the world is not superfluous and, therefore, not excessive, unnecessary from the standpoint of having a reason to allow the suffering. The "roof" analogous to Schaeffer's writings suggests a shield from counterevidence.<sup>331</sup> This shield is arguably the fact that combinatorial goods or goods, in general, are not allowed or reflected upon when considering the evils in the world. As it is presented, the reader feels that the only thing exists are evils. This, combined with the counterargument here,

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid., Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 52-58.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, 156.



shows inconsistency with Russell's argument's second premise and is related to the following criterion.

The second criterion is the coherence of proposition. This criterion wages the coherence of all three premises of Russell.

(1) If God exists, he would not allow excessive unnecessary suffering.

(2) But there is excessive unnecessary suffering.

(3) Therefore, God does not exist

The thrust of the later sections of this thesis alludes to God's existence through cognition, intuition, and the innate belief that there is a God. The focal point Lewis makes in much of his writing is what he terms the curiousness of the "Natural Law," that men intuitively know they are to act in certain ways.<sup>332</sup> This innate knowledge, the metaphysical subject (as it pertains here) of Wittgenstein, is such that it makes sense in conjunction that God exists. Looking at what is observed in nature may be explained mechanically, but metaphysics suggests a causal agent that surpasses humanity, the God of the Bible (Exod. 3:14). Refusing to allow this aspect within the argument only evaluates half of the situation. This speaks to the third criterion of establishing factual claims.

Establishing factual sufficiency is a marker of truthfulness. It has been argued here, and elsewhere, that what is posited by Russell and others does not incorporate all there is on the matter.<sup>333</sup> From Rowe to Russell, the intent to limit aspects behind the theistic position places a

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid., Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 3.

<sup>333</sup> This has been demonstrated through the work of Plantings, Jordan, Wykstra, and Martin to name a few. What is missing is the other side of the equation, the goods.

lopsidedness on the arguments,<sup>334</sup> thus tilting the argument from the first premise in favor of atheism. This is the manifestation of confirmation bias by eliminating the argument's potential counterevidence, thus upholding the individual belief against God's existence. It is in these criteria that Russell's argument fails.

### **Conclusion**

This has been a long chapter covering much ground. It does not instantiate the failure of the EAE or death knell but works to expose the confirmation bias which undergirds the premises. The progression of the arguments of the past half-century elucidates the unwillingness to fairly evaluate any evidence contrary to the atheistic position. Such positions as time with expanded CORNEA show the truth of understanding a reason for an evil well after the particular evil has faded into history. Continuing advances in CS and CSR work to understand religious belief and bolster the intuitive nature of belief in God. Being created in God's image (Gen. 1:26) is the connective link with the *sensus divinitatis*, which triggers *a priori* belief in God as it is akin to the metaphysical subject needing no justification, not in the sense of a brute fact, but in conjunction to a cumulative case for God. Given this parlance, the intent is not to thwart or render a death blow to the EAE but to show the coherence of belief in God with reality surpassing the physical mechanics to the way to share the truth of Christ.

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid., Howard-Snyder, 266 and Ibid., Russell, 106. It is the contention that both these men acknowledge the positive arguments from theists against EAE but disallow those positive inputs such as religious experience and the cogency of previous theistic arguments.

## Thesis Conclusion/Results

The problem of evil does seem to be a problem. But for whom? The atheist observes the suffering in the world as gratuitous or excessive, and unnecessary. This postulates that there is no God, or these sufferings would not be as they are. Despite the concession that some evils are necessary for virtue and ethical maturation, the mission to refute God's existence continues. It is an all-or-nothing proposition espousing all the evil in the world and its volume but not noting any of the good. Evidence for God's existence is beckoned for, and then when offered, such evidence is ignored or disallowed. It seems preposterous to require such expectations and then impose limits on what can be provided. This weighs on the EAE in understanding the reason for the evils in the world. This understanding compares finite, limited humanity in juxtaposition to an omniscient God. Orthodox Christianity holds that humans are made in and with the image of God. The image of God provides a means of intellect, rationality, and self-reflection. Additionally, the *sensus divinitatis* gives an innate notion that there is a God, a specific God who is the creator of everything and unlike anything else (Isa. 46:9).

It would be an easier pursuit to dismiss this innate connection to the Divine if it were isolated cases or a diminished account of this occurrence. But it is not. Taking a strand from Hume's position in miracles which he postulates need to be uniform, the presence of the *sensus divinitatis* is precisely that and is observed in cultures across time and distance. The flaw in the draw of this sense to the one true God is the brokenness of man (Isa. 53:6). This brokenness is the bedrock of the EAE, as has been argued throughout this paper.

The argument began with a discourse on CS and CSR. Specifically with the formation of religious belief. CS and CSR are young in the vast landscape of scientific exploration with its own challenges. One such challenge is the mind/body problem. The dualist perspective was

demonstrated in antiquity and contemporary times and is a growing issue with the rise of physicalism/naturalism. This study area has beckoned philosophers for answers for millennia and will likely continue to do so. The psychology of today was the philosophy of the past. Still seeking answers to the difficult questions of ontology, intuition, and innate knowledge, which surpasses survival instincts. It is a condition shared with no other creature setting humanity apart from everything else in life and death (1 Cor. 15:39; Eccl. 3:21). Being created in this manner fosters the intuitive knowledge that there is a God and then seeking Him out (Prov. 8:17). The interaction with cognitive studies and the history which brought it into modernity is the basis of understanding the EAE.

From the dawn of humanity, the POE has been traced to ancient Greece and Epicurus. The answer then is the same as it is now. Today's technology is vastly different, but the nature of humanity was no better then than now. Humans are the constant and thus hold a particular position in propagating evil in the world. But evil is not all there is, although atheists would have you believe such. With ancient roots, the work of Rowe laid the foundation for the modern parlance of the EAE, postulating the inexistence of God by way of the existence of evil in the world. The engagement of theodicies and defenses against the EAE have proven formidable in the battle for the soul of humanity. The latest offering from Russell seems to be an attempt to side-step the reason for evil, looking more at the quantity or amount present in the world. As demonstrated, this is a one-sided argument as it disallows the weight of the good in the world. But the unspoken question remains why?

In the case of "Sue," a quasi-theodicy was given forming in the criminal justice system, which fought for justice in the case. Additionally, the defense of time was offered. Time being the great equalizer sets things straight and allows for additional gained knowledge, which often

cannot be gathered or comprehended when a specific event occurs. This hindsight allows for an objective review of a situation and also being able to see from a perspective not available at the time. It is in this hindsight that more complete knowledge can be had. This is interesting as it pertains to the yearning for God to intervene in the evil states of affairs (more so than He already does through miracles) but looking back in time, it does not seem as though humans truly learn from past behavior. This, and understanding that God does intervene, would not seem to have the positive effect that Russell posits. This is due to the brokenness of humanity, the will to do the bad. It is known to be bad from the “Natural Law” innate to all people (with properly functioning cognition).

This “Natural Law” is an *a priori* notion of a way of existence. Akin to the metaphysical subject of Wittgenstein, it is without the need for justification. Not in the sense of a brute fact as this innateness is felt rather than observed (Rom. 2:15). Evaluating Russell’s argument using aspects of Groothuis’ worldview evaluation exposes a break from the coherence to reality. Not in as much from faulty logic but tainted processes due to confirmation bias. This bias is observed in Hume with uniformity and Rowe and Russell with the disallowance of goods levied in the EAE. This confirmation bias is in part created from prior philosophical commitments and through presuppositions against God’s existence. Bias is the portion of the mind and soul that works towards good and evil. Everyone has a bias; most have many, which guide their understanding of the world and how an individual connects to that world. Bias is the *terminus a quo* of a worldview that can be observed in scientists educated and accredited in the same bastions of higher education but coming to vastly different conclusions to the same evidence. This is a bulwark of bias. A presupposition, a philosophical commitment, which guides and inhibits the objective review of data. Looking at Russell’s latest paper, the bias is pronounced and refuted as

not coherent to the world, even with aspects counterintuitive to what is expected to be observed in cognition and the scientific method. The outcome of the success of this thesis is more than words or argumentation. Its loci depend on the truth of life and existence, tainted through bias. This thesis worked to specify the ontology of bias as a worldview engine pertaining to the POE/EAE and address this bias to determine the incoherence to reality to instantiate warranted belief in God's existence. I believe the tact employed here successfully identifies the confirmation bias exhibited by Russell and others and shows this position to be contrary in coherence to what is real in the cosmos. This is when a held belief should be released in favor of the coherent paradigm. Acquiescence to God's existence does not mean placing faith in Him for life and salvation, it is only the acceptance that He does exist. This is the complex portion as changing a belief is up to the individual. The ultimate goal of this research is yet to be realized in that individuals may draw nearer to God.

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