

Skeptical Theism and the Scope of our Moral Horizons

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Abstract: Reconciling the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent God with the evil that exists in our world is one of the most enduring problems for the Judeo-Christian tradition. *Skeptical theists* attempt to defend their theism against this *problem of evil* by appealing to the limits of human wisdom. On this view, our inability to understand goods, evils, and long-term consequences causes a failure in the inference from appearance of unjustified evil to reality of unjustified evil. One prominent objection to skeptical theism, the *moral skepticism objection*, argues that this view of human moral knowledge undermines our ordinary moral practices. In this paper, I will reject the most popular theistic reply to the moral skepticism objection – that we can depend on likely consequences, given the available evidence, for our moral practices. This *expected utility reply* causes skeptical theists to face a dilemma about how to delineate which consequences are relevant to us, given our epistemic limits. I will argue that neither horn of the dilemma can save the skeptical theist from moral skepticism.

Keywords: Philosophy of Religion, Normative Ethics, Skeptical Theism, Derek Parfit, Stephen Wykstra

Introduction

The evidential argument from evil, in its various forms, attempts to show that because of the frequency of evil in our world that appears to be unjustified, it is likely that some of it is actually unjustified. However, if there is a God (at least the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition), then there cannot be unjustified evil. Thus, it is likely that there is no such God.

Skeptical theism attempts to block the “noseeum inference”¹ from appearance of unjustified evil to reality of unjustified evil. Michael Bergmann² formulates the skeptical theist’s skeptical theses (ST) as follows:

Skeptical Theses

(ST1) We have no good reason for thinking that the possible goods we know of are representative of the possible goods that are.

¹ Wykstra (1996)

² (2001, 4)

(ST2) We have no good reason for thinking that the possible evils we know of are representative of the possible evils that are.

(ST3) We have no good reason for thinking that the entailment relations we know of between possible goods and the permission of possible evils are representative of the entailment relations there are between possible goods and permission of possible evils.

If these skeptical theses are cogent, then we are in no position to make a claim about the likelihood that our perceptions of unjustified evil are accurate. For all we know, God has some fantastic good in mind that can only be actualized if he allows some corresponding evil. Grasping the causal relationship between the fantastic good and the corresponding evil is simply beyond our cognitive abilities.

In this paper, I argue that ST1 - ST3 undermine our ordinary moral practices. In section 1, I outline and clarify the canonical version of the *moral skepticism objection* to skeptical theism. In section 2, I consider the *expected utility reply* - an attempt by skeptical theists to preserve both their skepticism and their ordinary moral practices by limiting the scope of relevant consequences. This move causes skeptical theists to face a dilemma about what to do when they can acquire access to end-of-time consequences. Sections 3 and 4 will correspond to the two horns of this dilemma, and I will argue that neither horn can save the skeptical theist from moral skepticism.

1. Moral Skepticism Objection

Most powerfully put forth by Michael Almeida and Graham Oppy in 2003, the moral skepticism objection claims that ST1 - ST3 undermine our ordinary moral deliberations. Skeptical theism, the view holds, entails a level of moral skepticism that makes otherwise uncontroversial moral practices unjustified.

Consider an event which would facilitate moral action. For instance, you pass by a swimming pool in which a child is drowning. Ordinary moral reasoning would maintain that you should jump in the pool and rescue the child. Almeida and Oppy argue that³:

[M]erely on the basis of our acceptance of ST1-ST3, we should insist that it is not unlikely that there is some good which, if we were smarter and better equipped, we could recognize as a reason for not intervening [...] [I]f we do not have good reason to assign low probability to the claim that there are goods which, if we were smarter and better equipped, we would recognize as reasons for us not to prevent [the evil], then how can we have good reason to interfere and to prevent it? [...] If we are not prepared to judge that it is unlikely that a particular instance of [evil] is not also a very great good—and that is just the kind of judgement which our acceptance of ST1-ST3 is supposed to preclude—then we do not have sufficient reason to interfere, and to prevent the [evil].

³ Almeida and Oppy (2003, 506)

This is an argument that ST1 - ST3 cause severe collateral damage to our moral reasoning. While the skeptical theses are intended to block the inference from the appearance of unjustified evil to the reality of unjustified evil, they also block the development of an all-things-considered reason to save the drowning child⁴.

This claim, however, is slightly too strong. Let us consider the way in which reasons for action apply to the case of the drowning child. There are certainly some *pro tanto* (i.e. to an extent) reasons in favor of intervening to save the child. In terms of duty, I may have a *prima facie* obligation to save people from harm when I can. In terms of consequences, preventing the child from drowning is likely to save the child's parents from a lifetime of grief. In terms of virtue, intervention would allow me to practice bravery and compassion.

At the same time, I may also have some *pro tanto* reasons for not intervening. If I cannot swim, then jumping in the pool may come at a significant risk to my own well being. Of more significance in our case, there is the rarely considered possibility⁵ that the child is "a nascent monster [whose continued life] would result in the suffering of millions upon millions of people"⁶. If I accept ST1 - ST3, then I cannot accurately assign probability to the risk that saving the child will have worse overall consequences than allowing him to drown.

As I see it, Almeida and Oppy's claim that the skeptical theist is left with insufficient reason to intervene in cases like that of the drowning child depends on a rather unconventional form of consequentialism. It implies that in the case at hand, ST1 - ST3 accomplish two functions. First, they cancel out any *pro tanto* reason to act on consequentialist grounds. Because we are in the dark about goods, evils, and entailment relations between the two, consequences cannot provide positive reasons to intervene. This claim seems quite plausible.

Second, however, Almeida and Oppy's claim implies that ST1 - ST3 cause the prospect of reasons to allow the child to drown⁷ to provide a *pro tanto* reason over and above consequences that is just as strong or stronger than the *pro tanto* reasons provided by duties and virtues. This seems wrong. In my view, concern that there is a justifying reason to allow the child to drown is sufficient to block the generation of an all-things-considered reason to save the child on consequences alone⁸. However, duty to intervene and the virtues involved in intervention provide *pro tanto* reasons in favor of saving the child that are not undermined by inability to perform utilitarian calculus on the rescue⁹. The duty and virtue remain, even if the child turns out to be a nascent monster.

⁴ *ibid*, 507

⁵ Rarely considered outside of philosophy departments, that is.

⁶ Bergmann and Rea (2005, 247)

⁷ Again, a prospect with unknown probability.

⁸ An all-consequences-considered reason, perhaps.

⁹ Bergmann and Rea (2005, 248-250) argue something similar to this. They believe that because there are consequence-independent reasons to prevent evils like drownings, we can have an all-things considered reason to

For proponents of ST1 - ST3, the prospect of a justifying reason to permit a particular evil is one factor in developing an all-things-considered reason for action. But Almeida and Oppy are mistaken in thinking that this factor is capable of preventing the development of an all-things-considered reason in the case at hand. Thus, contra Almeida and Oppy, the skeptical theist still has good reasons to intervene in some ordinary cases, like that of the drowning child.

Despite this clarification, there are at least two premises that stay intact from Almeida and Oppy's central argument. The first is that considering the prospect of a justifying reason to let the child drown is foreign to our process of moral deliberation. Even if this prospect is too weak to produce moral paralysis, it is still off-putting for the skeptical theist to include it in her moral thought process. The second premise that remains from the moral skepticism objection is that when consequences are of primary importance, the skeptical theist is left in moral paralysis. She was able to escape from moral paralysis in the case of the drowning child because consequence-independent reasons were salient. However, in cases which are deontically underdetermined¹⁰, ST1 - ST3 undermine any sort of utilitarian calculus. It is this second premise that I will defend in the remainder of this paper.

2. Expected Utility Reply and Optimal Moral Horizons

Even across differing normative ethical views, it is widely accepted that there are some situations in which consequences are the most important factor in making the right moral decision¹¹. The skeptical theist, then, must take up the task of reconciling our ordinary consequentialist decision-making with ST1 - ST3.

The expected utility reply attempts to show that our consequentialist decision-making does not necessitate that the goods, evils, and entailment relations we know of be representative of those that actually exist. Representativeness may *look* integral to the structural integrity of our moral reasoning, but it can actually be knocked out with a sledgehammer and our ordinary practices stay standing. With a bit of analysis, the reply goes, it becomes apparent that only those consequences which we can *expect to obtain* provide support for our ordinary consequentialist reasoning. Bergmann develops a standard form of the expected utility reply saying¹²:

prevent the drowning even if we have no grasp on the utility the act will produce. I agree. However, it is unclear what they think about cases in which there are no such consequence-independent reasons. These sorts of cases are the subject of this paper.

¹⁰ This phrasing is taken from Wykstra (2017, 127).

¹¹ Bergmann (2009, 10), a non-consequentialist, affirms this claim with respect to his expected utility reply. Consequentialists should be even more ready to endorse this framing of the argument than Bergmann is. I think that the antecedent of the conditional, "If consequences are most important, the skeptical theists are left in moral paralysis", is only true some of the time. Consequentialists will think that the antecedent is true all of the time, and so my argument (whether sound or unsound) applies in even more cases.

¹² (2009, 29)

[W]e aren't morally bound to do what *in fact* has the overall best consequences [...] What is relevant are the likely consequences we have some reason to be confident about after a reasonable amount of time and effort aimed at identifying the expected results of our behavior.

This reply says that a consequence is morally relevant *only if* we can reasonably expect that it will occur. If this view of consequentialism is correct, then ST1 - ST3 present no problem for our moral practices. Only those goods, evils, and entailment relations which are epistemically available to us are important. Thus, we can generate an all-things-considered reason solely in terms of consequences that we can expect. There are plenty more consequences of our actions about which we can't reasonably form beliefs, but those consequences are irrelevant.

Before presenting my own criticism of the expected utility reply, I will examine Stephen Wykstra's (2017) clarification of Bergmann's (2009) argument. Wykstra thinks that Bergmann has limited the scope of relevant consequences too narrowly. However, he also hopes to affirm Bergmann's position that we are not bound to do what will, in fact, have the best consequences to-the-end-of-time. To help parse out his middle-ground position, Wykstra appeals to the moral theory of Derek Parfit. Parfit proposes three distinct senses of 'wrong'¹³. The first is the fact-relative sense¹⁴:

Fact-relative Sense of 'Wrong'

[An act is] *wrong* in the *fact-relative* sense just when this act would be wrong in the ordinary sense if we knew all of the morally relevant facts

Wykstra correctly points out that Parfit sees rightness in this sense as the target for our moral action. "[W]hen I am trying to determine what I ought to do," Wykstra says, "my aim [...] is to try to get a fix on [the fact-relative sense]"¹⁵. Despite its objective, third person fundamentality, both Bergmann and Wykstra hope to discard this sense as irrelevant for our ordinary, first person moral practices. Due to our epistemic limits, we cannot be held to a fact-relative standard in our moral action. To speak of wrongness in the fact-relative sense for a given moral decision is to say that the far-distant, unknown moral facts are just as salient as the immediate, known moral facts.

Of additional importance for Wykstra and Bergmann, the implications of the fact-relative sense's centrality, combined with ST1 - ST3, result in moral skepticism. If we are bound to do what will, in fact, have the best overall consequences, and we are entirely in the dark about that those consequences are, then our consequentialist reasoning fails. Parfit's second sense of 'wrong' constricts the scope of morally relevant facts, and so it may be more satisfying to the skeptical theist. The belief-relative sense states that¹⁶:

¹³ Parfit (2011, 150-151)

¹⁴ *ibid*, 150

¹⁵ Wykstra (2017, 131)

¹⁶ Parfit (2011, 150-151)

Belief-relative Sense of ‘Wrong’

[An act is] *wrong* in the *belief-relative* sense just when this act would be wrong in the ordinary sense if our beliefs about these facts were true

This is the sense of ‘wrong’ used in Bergmann’s expected utility reply. Only those consequences about which we can reasonably form beliefs are morally relevant for us. Conversely, those consequences about which we cannot reasonably form beliefs are morally irrelevant for us.

Wykstra thinks this move is a mistake; the belief-relative sense, and thus Bergmann’s expected utility reply, limits the scope of morally relevant consequences too narrowly. To flesh out his misgivings with the view, he presents the case of Hiker Sally¹⁷:

Sally is a former U.S. Army Ranger who, while hiking in a remote area of northern Canada, finds a young boy manacled to a railroad track [...] Sally is left with three options. She can stay with the boy, hoping against hope that help will arrive. She can build a shelter around him and hike out for help—leaving him on the track for three days. Or she can use her battlefield medic skills to amputate his hands and feet, and carry him out.

The agony in Sally’s decision comes precisely from her lack of information regarding the train schedule. If the train runs every day, then amputation is likely the best choice and going to get help is the worst choice. On the contrary, if the train runs very infrequently, the inverse is likely the case.

If, however, the belief-relative sense is primary and Bergmann’s view of morally relevant facts is correct, then Sally’s agony makes little sense. Bergmann’s consequentialism stipulates that if, after a reasonable amount of time and effort, Sally cannot form beliefs about the probability of certain consequences, then those consequences are irrelevant to her. It seems prohibitively counterintuitive, though, to say that the train schedule *actually* is irrelevant to Sally. If Bergmann’s view of relevant consequences, says Wykstra, “entails that this agony of hiker Sally is silly, then it is [Bergmann’s view] that must go”¹⁸.

Wykstra has argued that Bergmann, working under the presumption of the belief-relative sense, has made the scope of relevant consequences too narrow. But Wykstra does not want to expand the scope of relevant consequences to the overall (or “end-of-time”) consequences at the risk of steering his skeptical theism into the jagged rocks of moral skepticism. The route to open water, Wykstra believes, can be found in Parfit’s third sense, the evidence-relative sense¹⁹:

¹⁷ Wykstra (2017, 124-125)

¹⁸ *ibid*, 125

¹⁹ Parfit (2011, 151)

Evidence-relative Sense of ‘Wrong’

[An act is] *wrong* in the *evidence-relative* sense just when this act would be wrong in the ordinary sense if we believed what the available evidence gives us decisive reasons to believe, and these beliefs were true

Twice, Wykstra claims that this sense is “most relevant” for the discussion at hand²⁰. According to the evidence-relative sense, there may be morally relevant facts that, at the time of a moral decision, are unknown to the moral agent. Contra Bergmann, the morally relevant facts for an agent are more expansive than those that are epistemically available to her at the time of her decision. Yet, the proper delineation of morally relevant facts for Parfit’s evidence-relative sense is left somewhat vague.

Wykstra attempts to achieve clarity by establishing an agent’s “optimal moral horizon” as the boundary of morally relevant consequences. The criteria he gives for the optimal moral horizon delineation are as follows²¹:

[We] need to ask what wider concept of ‘moral horizon,’ what elasticizing of the ‘available’ boundary, is needed. Here it helps to identify a few of the sorts of stumbling stones that, at times almost unavoidably, have tripped up our past moral decision making. Sometimes we stumble because [of moral insensitivity, lack of conscientiousness, social ineptitude, or time-constrained decisions]. These and other similar limiting factors can be called ‘horizon blockers.’ Horizon blockers, in a given situation, are factors that block from our view morally relevant facts that, had we known them, could significantly affect the moral judgement in a situation. We can now define a person’s optimal moral horizon in a given situation as including all those morally relevant facts that would be accessible were there no horizon blockers operative in the situation.

On first pass, limiting the scope of relevant consequences to those within one’s optimal moral horizon seems promising for skeptical theism. It explains Sally’s agony (since she likely *could* have known the train schedule). Plus, it does not depend on the claim that the goods, evils, and entailment relations that we see are representative of the ones that actually exist to-the-end-of-time.

Due to the addition of optimal moral horizons, Wykstra thinks that the primary sense of ‘wrong’, the evidence-relative sense, can now be revised to, “wrong [...] in the ordinary sense if the agent were to have known all the optimal morally relevant facts within his or her optimal moral horizon”²². He wants his optimal moral horizon theory to distance us from the specter of the fact-

²⁰ Wykstra (2017, 131, 134)

²¹ *ibid*, 134

²² Wykstra (2017, 135)

relative sense, while also giving good reasons to expand our moral epistemologies where doing so seems intuitive.

In my view, this exposition of the optimal moral horizon theory leaves a significant question unanswered:

Big Question

If we could acquire access to end-of-time consequences, would they be binding on our moral decisions?

From textual analysis, it is unclear what Wykstra's answer to this question would be. I see two plausible readings that will serve as two horns of a dilemma for Wykstra. On horn 1, Wykstra answers no; optimal moral horizons are formal limits on the relevant moral facts, and far-distant consequences are outside of those limits. On horn 2, Wykstra answers yes; our optimal moral horizons include end-of-time consequences, so long as we have epistemic access to them. In the next two sections, I will give good reasons for thinking that neither choice is capable of saving the skeptical theist's position from moral skepticism.

3. Horn 1 - Rejecting End-of-time Consequences

So far, Wykstra has utilized Parfit's evidence-relative sense of 'wrong' to develop his optimal moral horizon concept and thereby defend skeptical theism. The belief-relative sense, he argues, restricts the scope of relevant consequences too narrowly, and the fact-relative sense (mistakenly) fails to restrict at all. The delineation set up by optimal moral horizon theory serves as the golden mean between the belief-relative sense and the fact-relative sense.

It is true that on Parfit's normative ethics, our ordinary moral decisions cannot be thought of purely in terms of the fact-relative sense, since "I cannot try to do what *would in fact* save your life rather than doing what *I now believe* would save your life"²³. And yet, as I discussed at the beginning of section 2, there is a certain sense in which the fact-relative sense must be thought of as fundamental. The centrality of the fact-relative sense is illuminated in the following quote from Parfit²⁴:

Though we cannot try to do what is really right rather than what we now believe to be right, we ought to try to have true moral beliefs, since we shall then be less likely to act wrongly [...] We can [...] ask which acts would be wrong if we knew all of the morally relevant facts. These are questions about which acts would be wrong, in such cases, in what I have called the ordinary sense. But these are also questions about which acts would be wrong in the fact-relative sense.

²³ Parfit (2011, 161)

²⁴ *ibid*, 161-162

It is correspondence between our evaluations of ‘wrong’ in the limited senses and ‘wrong’ in the unlimited, fact-relative sense that gives us confidence that our moral beliefs are true and our evidence is good. Additionally, if we knew all the morally relevant information, then the fact-relative sense would become the only important one.

On Parfit’s framework, making moral decisions that are right in the fact-relative sense is our ultimate goal. We settle for the evidence-relative sense merely out of unfortunate necessity due to our epistemic limits. The fact-relative sense, then, serves as a regulative ideal for the limited senses of ‘wrong’. Thus, Parfit would answer the Big Question with a resounding “yes”. If we could acquire access to moral facts that would get us closer to a correct evaluation in the fact-relative sense, then those facts are relevant for our determinations in the evidence-relative sense.

Horn 1 denies this important aspect of the Parfitian moral landscape. It says that even if we had access to end-of-time consequences, they would be irrelevant because they lie outside of our optimal moral horizons. If Wykstra accepts this horn of the dilemma, then he endorses the view that we are bound by his formulation of the evidence-relative sense, not as an unfortunate necessity, but as a formal aspect of our definition of ‘wrong’.

It is not uncharitable to read Wykstra as accepting horn 1 in his 2017 paper. Optimal moral horizon theory attempts to show that our ordinary moral practices “need not rest on some implausible to-the-end-of-time view of morally relevant consequences”²⁵. Instead, when we hope for “representativeness” between the moral facts we know of and all those that are relevant to us, we hope that²⁶:

[O]ur judgement that action A is the right (or wrong) thing to do would remain intact and retain its integrity if horizon blockers were removed, and we remade the judgement based on the full set of morally relevant facts—that is, the full set of facts within our optimal moral horizon.

So then, once horizon blockers are removed, we have reached the moral epistemic summit; we are properly situated to see all morally relevant consequences. Without any horizon blockers, we have the best vantage point that we are going to get. Any consequences that remain unseen at the summit (i.e. after the removal of horizon blockers) are irrelevant to us.

It would be quite a liberal expansion of Wykstra’s list of horizon blockers to include inability to perceive of consequences in the distant future²⁷. A natural reading of Wykstra’s theory places far-distant consequences outside of the optimal moral horizon, even after all horizon blockers are removed. But, as horn 1 anticipates, if inability to perceive of consequences in the

²⁵ Wykstra (2017, 136)

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ An non-exhaustive list of horizon blockers is found on 135; I paraphrase this list toward the end of section 2.

distant future is *not* a horizon blocker, then end-of-time consequences are *always* irrelevant to us, even if they were to suddenly become epistemically available.

By jettisoning the fact-relative sense, this view runs afoul with that of Parfit. On Parfit's view, the centrality of the fact-relative sense gives us good reason to attempt to expand our moral knowledge not just to the edge of our optimal moral horizon or any other formal limit, but as far as possible.

When compared, Parfit's view seems far more plausible than the view expressed in horn 1. Restricting epistemically available moral facts due to some formal limit appears arbitrary. It is much more natural to think that all evidence to which we have epistemic access ought to be considered in our moral evaluations. Additionally, Wykstra's creation of a formal limit that excludes end-of-time consequences would appear dubiously ad hoc. The rationale for such a limit would seem to come from a desire to allow for some expansion of moral epistemology without admitting the problem I raise in the following section.

4. Horn 2 - Admitting End-of-time Consequences

How, then, does the expected utility reply fair if we read Wykstra as accepting Parfit's view of the scope of morally relevant consequences and his answer to the Big Question. Not well, I will argue. The first step to understanding why lies in the status of epistemically available, far-distant moral facts. On Parfit's view, when we are ignorant of far-distant consequences, they are irrelevant for us contingently, not necessarily. If we could acquire access to information about end-of-time consequences, we must work to do so *and* we must include this information in our moral decision making.

The second step to my argument that horn 2 cannot save skeptical theism lies in the premise that the theistic position entails certain beliefs about end-of-time consequences. Namely, theists are committed to the claim that all past evils have been ultimately justified in terms of end-of-time consequences. The skeptical theistic project endeavors to show that this claim is not unreasonable. Wykstra affirms that this is the stance of standard theism saying²⁸:

If theism is true, then if you could lift every horrific suffering in our world, you would find beneath each one some fabulous outweighing good for the sake of which it is allowed by God. [In other words,] if God exists, then each instance of actual suffering is related in a suitable way to some local or global good that provides a 'rationale' by which a being supreme in goodness, wisdom, and power can allow it.

Theists, then, *can* acquire access to information about end-of-time consequences. Given that they are committed to the premise that all past evils have ultimate justification, they have good reason

²⁸ Wykstra (2017, 126)

to believe that future evils that obtain will also have ultimate justification in terms of end-of-time consequences²⁹. On the Parfitian view of morally relevant consequences, theists must consider the ultimate justification of actualized future evil in their moral decisions. This consideration causes moral paralysis in consequentialist cases.

The expected utility reply readily admits that the key premise here—that for any choice between permitting an evil or preventing an evil, we should expect a probability of > 0 that permitting the evil will have the best overall consequences. The project of the expected utility reply is to prevent this probability from blocking the generation of an all-things-considered reason for action in consequentialist cases. Wykstra has attempted to show that Parfit's normative ethics allow us to reasonably make consequentialist moral decisions without this probability creeping in and undercutting the rationale for our common-sense choices.

But if Wykstra endorses Parfit's view with regard to the relationship between the fact-relative sense and the evidence-relative sense (i.e., he accepts horn 2), then his attempt clearly fails. Even if we limit the scope of relevant consequences to those that we can expect, theists should expect to be moral agents in cases where permitting a preventable evil is best. This expectation takes a wrecking ball to the skeptical theist's construction of an all-things-considered consequentialist reason to prevent the evil.

Conclusion

In this paper, I hope to have shown that in cases where consequences are most important, ST1 - ST3 block the development of an all-things-considered reason for action. Attempting to limit the scope of morally relevant consequences did not succeed in saving the skeptical theses. On Parfit's plausible view regarding the limit of moral facts we should consider, the theist's belief that future evils that obtain will be ultimately justified is salient. This belief is enough to undermine ordinary moral consequentialist practices.

If my arguments here are sound, skeptical theists can reply in any number of the following ways. First, they can concede theism. Second, they can concede the rationality of their ordinary consequentialist moral decision making. Third, they could change their moral practices, and stop predicting future consequences in order to make moral decisions. The second and third possibility would (I think, rightly) be rejected by most moral philosophers.

²⁹ I see two possible ways of plausibly framing this move from the belief in the ultimate justification of past evils that obtained to the belief in the ultimate justification of future evils that will obtain. The first is to appeal to the static character of God. There is no good reason for thinking that God's character and behavior would turn on the indexical "now" or "present". The second possibility is to combine these two beliefs and express them in a timeless way - the belief in ultimate justification of all evils that obtain.

Fourth, skeptical theists can find a novel way to defend their view from the moral skepticism objection. Perhaps there is good, independent reason to reject Parfit's normative ethical theory, and a new view would allow the expected utility reply to regain its strength. Alternatively, a skeptical theist could set the expected utility reply aside and devise a different way to overcome the moral skepticism objection.

So far, skeptical theists have not found a way to reconcile our ordinary moral practices with their skepticism about God's reasons for allowing evil to occur. Until a mechanism for harmonizing these two commitments is developed, skeptical theism remains an insufficient defense against the evidential argument from evil.

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