INTRODUCTION
THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The problem of evil is generally held to be the principal objection to the existence of God: the 'rock of atheism', as Hans Küng has called it.[1] Evil, in this context, refers to the fact of pain and suffering in the world, and is invariably further subdivided into two types: (1) *moral evil*, which proceeds from human action, i.e., killing, war, mental and physical torture, etc.; and (2) *non-moral evil*, which occurs through natural calamities, i.e., earthquakes, disease, etc. At root the problem is a very simple one: how can suffering, in whatever form, exist in a world created by a benign deity, whether that suffering arises through human agency (for example the Holocaust) or through natural disasters (for example, the Tsunami of 2004). Any theistic attempt to resolve this alleged incompatibility is, following Leibniz, called a *theodicy* (from the Greek, *theos* [God]+*dike* [justice]) and down the centuries many classic theodicies have been offered: by St Augustine,* St Thomas Aquinas, St Irenaeus,* Gottfried Leibniz* and, in our own day, by John Hick,* Alvin Plantinga* and Richard Swinburne. Critics of such attempts include David Hume,* Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill, and, more recently, Antony Flew, J.L. Mackie,* H.J. McCloskey and William Rowe.* Nor is discussion of the problem restricted to the philosophical literature: the Old Testament deals with it in the Book of Job, as do numerous works of fiction, two of which should be mentioned in particular: Camus' *The Plague* (1948) and Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880).

Modern commentators usually distinguish between two versions of the problem: (1) its *logical* form: that the existence of evil is *logically incompatible* with God's existence; and (2) its *evidential* form: that, while not logically incompatible with the existence of God, the sheer weight and variety of suffering in the world make religious belief untenable.

1. *The logical (or deductive) argument from evil*. This argument claims that there is a logical incompatibility between the existence of suffering and the existence of a being who, as we saw in Chapter 1, is defined in the Judaeo-Christian tradition as possessing certain attributes: namely, omnipotence and omni-benevolence. This objection may be expressed as a dilemma, most famously presented by David Hume but first formulated by Epicurus (342-270 BC): 'Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence evil?' Or more bluntly: (1) If God, who is a benevolent and omnipotent being, exists, there would be no evil; (2) Evil exists; (3) Therefore God does not exist. Various attempts have been made to resolve this dilemma. Two attempts are invariably discarded from the outset, since each of them resolves the dilemma by the simple expedient of denying one of its components: i.e., either that no evil exists or that no omnipotent God exists. The first alternative is found in the Hindu teaching of *maya* (illusion) and some aspects of Christian

1. *On Being a Christian*, trans. Edward Quinn, Garden City, New York, Doubleday, 1976, p. 432.

Science, the latter holding that disease is unreal and the product of ignorance; but these are generally rejected by most parties to the dispute as being not merely contrary to everyday experience but as providing no proper resolution of the logical difficulty. For if evil is the product of ignorance and illusion, then such ignorance and illusion remain the evils incompatible with God's omniscient goodness. The second alternative, admittedly, has more mileage. An early variant is the Manichaean heresy of ditheism: that evil is the product of a struggle between two non-omnipotent powers, the one good and the other evil, neither of which can overcome the other. While modern theologians have almost universally rejected the claims of a supernatural evil being (Satan) as the source of evil, more recent process theologians have resolved the dilemma on not entirely dissimilar lines, admittedly rejecting any personification of evil but also denying divine omnipotence (see David Griffin, 1991, and Charles Hartshorne, pp. I:30-35 above, and for a list of limited-finitist concepts of God, see Brightman, 1940). Two further theodicies deserve special mention. The first is the punishment theodicy, by which God allows or brings about evil as a punishment for wrongdoing. Closely allied to the biblical account of original sin, this argument, as an article of faith, provides no satisfactory explanation of the original motive to sin and has unacceptable moral implications by making its distribution of suffering disproportionate, visiting the sins of the guilty parents upon their innocent children and thereby undermining the notion of a just God. The second is the best of all possible worlds theodicy, associated with Leibniz.* This argues that the existence of evil does not impugn either God's goodness or his omnipotence since this world contains the least amount of evil possible. This argument is rejected by Hume,* who claims that improvements to our world could be made without a corresponding increase in suffering, and by Grim (1990) and Plantinga (1974), both of whom regard the concept of the best of all possible worlds as incoherent.

Without question, however, the two outstanding arguments deployed to resolve the logical dilemma remain (a) *the free-will theodicy*, according to which evil derives from the God-given ability of human beings to choose between good and evil acts; and (b) *the soul-making theodicy*, according to which God allows or brings about evil in order to enable individuals to become morally and spiritually mature. The first of these is more popularly known as the free-will defence. Classically stated by St Augustine, it has been developed and refined in our own day by Alvin Plantinga* and Richard Swinburne. In its usual formulation, the free-will defence purports to be an explanation of moral and not non-moral evil, although Plantinga attempts to extend it to cover the latter. The claim is that, despite the possibility of misuse, God gave humans the ability to make choices because a world with free choices is more desirable than one without them. This argument has been challenged by various philosophers, more particularly on the grounds that God could have created human beings with free will but who were yet incapable of doing wrong (Flew, Mackie*) or that God, despite human free will, is still indirectly responsible for the evil acts of his creatures since he could have intervened to offset their worst excesses (McCloskey, Lewis). The second defence – the theodicy of soul-making – can

be traced back to Bishop Irenaeus.* The value of suffering, it is claimed, lies in the improvement of character which follows from the demands placed on the individual seeking to overcome it, these leading to the development of such qualities as resilience, courage and self-sacrifice. The principal contemporary advocate of soul-making theodicy is John Hick.* The invariable criticism of this approach is that, however laudable the goal of moral improvement, the end is not justified by the excessive hardship often endured to achieve it.

   2. *The evidential (or inductive) argument from evil.* A major feature of recent literature is the shift away from the logical dilemma and towards its evidential counterpart, with the logical argument from evil now being variously described as bankrupt and redundant. The most frequent reason given for this is the widely held view that Plantinga's various versions of the free-will defence (pp. I:179-180 below) do provide a successful reply to the criticism earlier levelled by Mackie and Flew. The Evidential Argument accordingly proceeds on a different tack and presents an inductive or probabilistic argument from evil for the non-existence of God: that the existence of evil provides *prima facie* reasons for the probability, if not the possibility, that no God exists. This argument may be schematized as follows: (a) there exist amounts and varieties of intense suffering which an omnipotent and omniscient being could have prevented without at the same time either preventing some greater good or permitting some other evil to occur; (b) an omniscient and omnibenevolent being would prevent the occurrence of such intense suffering, unless it could not do so without preventing some greater good or permitting some other evil to occur; therefore c) there does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent being. Among sponsors of the evidential argument are Madden and Hare (1968), Michael Martin (1990) and Paul Draper (1989), but the most prominent advocate is William Rowe (see pp. I:198-205 below).

   Two important critics of the evidential argument are Alston (1996) and Wykstra (1984), who have developed what has come to be known as *sceptical theism*. Wyskstra rejects the evidentialist argument on the grounds that it fails to satisy CORNEA (i.e., the Condition of Reasonable Epistemic Access),[2] namely, that the limitations of our cognitive-epistemic situation do not entitle us to claim (with Rowe) that God could have no good reason for permitting the evils that occur. This position is endorsed by Alston, who provides a list of theodicies safeguarded by the inadequacy of the cognitive capacities of their critics. For support of this position see O'Connor (1998), and for criticisms Swinburne (1998).

   There are innumerable essay collections on the problem of evil, but note in particular Adams and Adams (1990), Howard-Snyder (1996), Larrimore (2000), Peterson (1998) and Rowe (2001). Whitney (1992) provides an annotated bibliography of articles on Theodicy.

---

2. Which reads: 'On the basis of a cognized situation s, human H is entitled to claim 'It appears that p' only if it is reasonable for H to believe that, given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, if p were not the case, s would likely be different than it is in some way discernible by her' (Wykstra, p. 152).

8. WILLIAM ROWE:
THE EVIDENTIAL PROBLEM OF EVIL

Philosophical Summary. William Rowe (b. 1931) Professor of Philosophy, Purdue University, Indiana (1962-2005). The attempt to show that evil is logically inconsistent with an omnipotent God (Mackie) has largely been superseded by the empirical argument from evil – sometimes also known as the evidential, probabilistic or inductive argument – of which Rowe is the principal exponent. The question now is not whether the existence of God and the existence of evil are logically irreconcilable but whether the evidence of evil renders the existence of God less likely. The Irenaean-Hick response is that a world free from pain would not be conducive to soul-making, and Rowe accepts that there may be cases of moral and spiritual development impossible without suffering; but there are equally instances of 'pointless' human and animal suffering which are difficult to construe as leading to any greater good, i.e., instances that are not consequences of human choice, are excessive and go beyond anything required for soul-making, and which a good and omnipotent being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater compensating good. Rowe concludes that the failure to find a morally justifiable reason for such gratuitous suffering is sufficient evidence that there is no reason, and that accordingly it is unlikely that God exists.

Bibliographical Summary. Primary Sources: Rowe has been a prolific advocate of the evidential argument, a summary of his argument being given in his *The Philosophy of Religion* (1978),* 'The Empirical Argument from Evil' (1986) and 'The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look' (1996). For a more detailed account, see Rowe's 'The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism' (1979) and 'Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis: A Response to Wykstra' (1984 – both articles reprinted in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Adams and Adams, 1979). **Secondary Sources:** Amongst the many responses to Rowe, see Howard-Snyder (ed.1996, 2001), Silver (2002), Trakakis (2007) and Wykstra (1984, 1996).

William Rowe
The Evidential Problem of Evil[19]

I turn now to the evidential form of the problem of evil: the form of the problem which holds that the variety and profusion of evil in our world, although perhaps not logically inconsistent with the existence of God provides, nevertheless, *rational support* for the belief that the theistic God does not exist. In developing this form of the problem of evil it will be useful to focus on some particular evil that our world contains in considerable abundance. Intense human and animal suffering, for example, occurs daily and in great plenitude in our world. Such intense suffering is a clear case of evil. Of course, if the intense

19. *The Philosophy of Religion*, Belmont, California, Wadsworth, 1978, pp. 86-94.

suffering leads to some greater good, a good we could not have obtained without undergoing the suffering in question, we might conclude that the suffering is *justified*, but it remains an evil nevertheless. For we must not confuse the intense suffering in and of itself with the good things to which it sometimes leads or of which it may be a necessary part. Intense human or animal suffering is *in itself* bad, an evil, even though it may sometimes be justified by virtue of being a part of, or leading to, some good which is unobtainable without it. What is evil in itself may sometimes be good as a *means* because it leads to something which is good in itself. In such a case, while remaining an evil in itself, the intense human or animal suffering is, nevertheless, an evil which someone might be morally justified in permitting.

Taking human and animal suffering as a clear instance of evil which occurs with great frequency in our world, the evidential form of the problem of evil can be stated in terms of the following argument for atheism.

1. There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby preventing the occurrence of any greater good.

2. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby preventing the occurrence of some greater good.

Therefore,

3. There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being. What are we to say about this argument for atheism, an argument based on the profusion of one sort of evil in our world? The argument is valid; therefore, if we have rational grounds for accepting its premises, to that extent we have rational grounds for accepting atheism. Do we, however, have rational grounds for accepting the premises of this argument?

The second premise of the argument expresses a belief about what a morally good being would do under certain circumstances. According to this belief, if a morally good being knew of some intense suffering that was about to occur and he was in a position to prevent its occurrence, he would prevent it unless he could not do so without thereby losing some greater good of which he was aware. This belief (or something very close to it), is, I think, held in common by theists and nontheists. Of course, there may be disagreement about whether something is good, and whether, if it is good, one would be morally justified in permitting some intense suffering to occur in order to obtain it. Someone might hold, for example, that no good is great enough to justify permitting an innocent child to suffer terribly. To hold such a view, however, is not to deny premise 2. 2 claims only that *if* an omniscient, wholly good being permits intense suffering *then* there must be some greater good (a good which outweighs the suffering in question) which the good being could not obtain without

permitting the intense suffering. So stated, 2 seems to express a belief that accords with our basic moral principles, principles shared by both theists and nontheists. If we are to fault this argument, therefore, we must find some fault with its first premise.

Suppose in some distant forest lightning strikes a dead tree, resulting in a forest fire. In the fire a fawn is trapped, horribly burned, and lies in terrible agony for several days before death relieves its suffering. So far as we can see, the fawn's intense suffering is pointless, leading to no greater good. Could an omnipotent, omniscient being have prevented the fawn's apparently pointless suffering? The answer is obvious, as even the theist will insist. An omnipotent, omniscient being could easily have prevented the fawn from being horribly burned, or, given the burning, could have spared the fawn the intense suffering by quickly ending its life, rather than allowing the fawn to lie in terrible agony for several days. Since no greater good, so far as we can see, would have been lost had the fawn's intense suffering been prevented, doesn't it appear that premise 1 of the argument is true, that there do exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby preventing the occurrence of any greater good?

It must be acknowledged that the case of the fawn's apparently pointless suffering does not prove that premise 1 is true. For even though we cannot see how the fawn's suffering leads to any greater good. it hardly follows that it does not do so. After all, we are often surprised by how things we thought to be unconnected turn out to be intimately connected, Perhaps, then, there is some familiar good outweighing the fawn's suffering to which that suffering is connected in a way we do not see. Furthermore, there may well be unfamiliar goods, goods we haven't dreamed of, to which the fawn's suffering is inextricably connected. Indeed, it would seem to require something like omniscience on our part before we could lay claim to *knowing* that there is no greater good to which the fawn's suffering leads which an omnipotent, omniscient being could not have achieved without permitting that suffering, So the case of the fawn's suffering does not enable us to establish the truth of premise 1.

The truth is that we are not in a position to prove that 1 is true, We cannot *know* with certainty that instances of suffering of the sort described in 1 do occur in our world. But it is one thing to know or prove that 1 is true and quite another thing to have *rational grounds* for believing 1 to be true. We are often in the position where in the light of our experience and knowledge it is rational to believe that a certain statement is true, even though we are not in a position to prove or to know with certainty that the statement is true. In the light of our past experience and knowledge it is, for example, very reasonable to believe that neither Goldwater nor McGovern will ever be elected president, but we are scarcely in the position of

knowing with certainty that neither will ever be elected president. So, too, with 1, although we cannot know with certainty that it is true, it perhaps can be rationally supported, shown to be a rational belief.

Consider again the case of the fawn's suffering. There are two distinct questions we need to raise: 'Does the fawn's suffering lead to some greater good?' and 'Is the greater good to which it might lead such that an omnipotent, omniscient being could not obtain it without permitting the fawn's suffering?' It may strike us as unlikely that the answer to the first question is yes. And it may strike us as quite a bit more unlikely that the answer to the second question is yes. But even if we should think it is reasonable to believe that the fawn's suffering leads to a greater good unobtainable without that suffering, we must then ask whether it is reasonable to believe that *all* the instances of profound, seemingly pointless human and animal suffering lead to greater goods. And, if they should somehow all lead to greater goods, is it reasonable to believe that an omnipotent, omniscient being *could not* have brought about *any* of those goods without permitting the instances of suffering which supposedly lead to them? When we consider these more general questions in the light of our experience and knowledge of the variety and profusion of human and animal suffering occurring daily in our world, it seems that the answer must be no. It seems quite unlikely that all the instances of intense human and animal suffering occurring daily in our world lead to greater goods, and even more unlikely that if they all do, an omnipotent, omniscient being could not have achieved at least some of those goods without permitting the instances of suffering that lead to them. In the light of our experience and knowledge of the variety and scale of human and animal suffering in our world, the idea that none of those instances of suffering could have been prevented by an omnipotent being without the loss of a greater good seems an extraordinary, absurd idea, quite beyond our belief. It seems then that although we cannot prove that premise 1 is true, it is, nevertheless, altogether reasonable to believe that 1 is true, that it is a *rational* belief.

Returning now to our argument for atheism, we've seen that the second premise expresses a basic belief common to theists and nontheists. We've also seen that our experience and knowledge of the variety and profusion of suffering in our world provides *rational support* for the first premise. Seeing that the conclusion, 'There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being' follows from these two premises, it does seem that we have *rational support* for atheism, that it is reasonable for us to believe that the theistic God does not exist.

Response to the Evidential Problem
Of the two forms of the problem of evil we've considered, the first (the *logical* form) was seen to be not much of a problem for theistic belief. The second

form (the *evidential* form), however, has been seen to be a severe problem for theistic belief, for its basic thesis – that the variety and profusion of evil in our world provides rational support for atheism – has been established. It is time now to see how the theist might best respond to the evidential form of the problem of evil. This response can best be explained as a response to the basic argument for atheism by means of which the thesis of the evidential form of the problem of evil was established.

Since the argument from 1 and 2 to 3 is valid, and since the theist, no less than the nontheist, is committed to 2, it's clear that the theist can reject this atheistic argument only by rejecting its first premise, the premise that states that there are instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby preventing the occurrence of any greater good. How, then, can the theist best respond to this premise and the considerations advanced in its support?

It is difficult to make any *direct* attack on 1. By a direct attack, I mean an attempt to reject 1 by pointing out goods to which suffering might lead, goods which an omnipotent, omniscient being could not achieve without permitting suffering. The theist may point out that some suffering leads to moral and spiritual development impossible without suffering. But it's reasonably clear that suffering often occurs in a degree far beyond what is required for character development. The theist may say that some suffering results from free choices of human beings and might be preventable only by preventing some measure of human freedom. But, again, it's clear that much intense suffering occurs not as a result of human free choices. The general difficulty with this direct attack on premise 1 is twofold. First, it cannot succeed, for the theist does not know what greater goods might be served by each instance of intense human or animal suffering. Second, the theist's own religious tradition usually maintains that in this life it is not given to us to know God's purpose in allowing particular instances of suffering. Hence, the direct attack against premise 1 cannot succeed and violates basic beliefs associated with theism.

The 'G.E. Moore Shift'

The best procedure for the theist to follow in rejecting premise 1 is an indirect procedure. This procedure I shall call 'the G.E. Moore shift', so called in honor of the twentieth century philosopher, G.E. Moore, who used it to great effect in dealing with the arguments of the skeptics. Skeptical philosophers such as David Hume have advanced ingenious arguments to prove that no one can know of the existence of any material object. The premises of their arguments employ plausible principles, principles which many philosophers have tried to reject directly, but only with questionable success. Moore's procedure was altogether different. Instead of arguing directly against the premises of the skeptic's arguments, he simply noted

that the premises implied, for example, that he (Moore) did not know of the existence of a pencil. Moore then proceeded indirectly against the skeptic's premises by arguing:

I do know that this pencil exists,

If the skeptic's principles are correct I cannot know of the existence of this pencil

Therefore,

The skeptic's principles (at least one) must be incorrect.

Moore then noted that his argument is just as valid as the skeptic's, that both of their arguments contain the premise 'If the skeptic's principles are correct Moore cannot know of the existence of this Pencil,' and concluded that the only way to choose between the two arguments (Moore's and the skeptic's) is by deciding which of the first premises it is more rational to believe – Moore's premise 'I do know that this pencil exists' or the skeptic's premise asserting that certain skeptical principles are correct. Moore concluded that his own first premise was the more rational of the two.

Before we see how the theist may apply the G.E. Moore shift to the basic argument for atheism, we should note the general strategy of the shift. We're given an argument: p, q, therefore, r. Instead of arguing *directly* against p, another argument is constructed – not-r, q, therefore, not-p – which begins with the denial of the conclusion of the first argument, keeps its second premise, and ends with the denial of the first premise as its conclusion. Let's compare these two:

$$\text{I. } p \qquad\qquad \text{II. not-r}$$
$$\underline{q} \qquad\qquad\qquad \underline{q}$$
$$r \qquad\qquad\qquad \text{not-p}$$

Now it is a truth of logic that if I is valid II must be valid as well. Since the arguments are the same so far as the second premise is concerned, any choice between them must concern their respective first premises. To argue against the first premise p by constructing the counter argument II is to employ the G.E. Moore shift

Applying the G.E. Moore shift against the first premise of the basic argument for atheism, the theist can argue as follows:

not-3. There exists an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.

2.   An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby preventing the occurrence of some greater good.

Therefore,

not-1. It is not the case that there exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby preventing the occurrence of any greater good.

We have now two arguments: the basic argument for atheism from 1 and

2 to 3, and the theist's best response, the argument from not-3 and 2 to not-1. What the theist then says about 1 is that he or she has rational grounds for believing in the existence of the theistic God not-3, accepts 2 as true, and sees that not-1 follows from not-3 and 2. The theist concludes, therefore, that he or she has rational grounds for rejecting 1. Having rational grounds for rejecting 1, the theist concludes that the basic argument for atheism is mistaken.

Argument and Response: An Assessment

It is now time to assess the relative merits of the basic argument for atheism as well as the theist's response to it. Suppose that someone is in the position of having no rational grounds for thinking that the theistic God exists. Either this person has not heard of the arguments for the existence of God or has considered them but finds them altogether unconvincing. Perhaps, too, he or she has not had any visions of God and is rationally convinced that the religious experiences of others fail to provide any good grounds for theistic belief. Contemplating the variety and scale of human and animal suffering in our world, however, this individual concludes that it is altogether reasonable to accept premise 1 as true. It must be admitted, I think, that such a person is rationally justified in accepting atheism. Suppose, however, that another person has had religious experiences which justify her or him in believing that the theistic God exists. Perhaps, too, this person has carefully examined the Ontological Argument and found it rationally coercive. It must be admitted, I think, that such a person has some rational grounds for accepting theism. But what if this individual is aware of the basic argument for atheism and the considerations advanced in support of its first premise? In that case she or he will have some rational grounds for believing that theism is true and some rational grounds for believing that 1 is true, and, therefore, that theism is false. This person must then weigh the relative strength of his or her grounds for theism against his or her grounds for 1 and atheism. If the grounds for theism seem rationally stronger than the grounds for 1 this individual may reasonably reject 1, since its denial is implied by theism and 2. Of course, assessing the relative merit of competing rational grounds is no easy matter, but it seems clear that someone may be rationally justified in accepting theism and concluding that 1 and the basic argument for atheism are mistaken.

In terms of our own response to the basic argument for atheism and the theist's counter argument against 1, each of us must judge in the light of personal experience and knowledge whether our grounds for believing 1 are stronger or weaker than our grounds for believing that the theistic God exists. What we have seen is that since our experience and knowledge may differ it is possible, indeed likely, that some of us may be justified in accepting 1 and atheism, while others of us may be rationally justified in accepting theism and rejecting 1.

The conclusion to which we have come is that the evidential form of the problem of evil is a serious but not insurmountable problem for theism. To the extent that she or he has stronger grounds for believing that the theistic God exists than for accepting 1, the theist, on balance, may have more reason to reject 1 than she or he has for accepting it. However, in the absence of good reasons for believing that the theistic God exists, our study of the evidential form of the problem of evil has led us to the view that we are rationally justified in accepting atheism.

We must not confuse the view that someone may be rationally justified in accepting theism while someone else is rationally justified in accepting atheism with the *incoherent* view that both theism and atheism may be true. Since theism (in the narrow sense) and atheism (in the narrow sense) express contradictory claims, one must be true and the other false. But since the evidence one possesses may justify one in believing a statement which, in the light of the total evidence, is a false statement, it is possible for different people to be rationally justified in believing statements which cannot both be true. Suppose, for example, a friend of yours takes a flight to Hawaii. Hours after takeoff you learn that the plane has gone down at sea. After a twenty-four hour search, no survivors have been found. Under these circumstances it is rational for you to believe that your friend has perished. But it is hardly rational for your friend to believe that while bobbing up and down in a life vest and wondering why the search planes have failed to spot her. Theism and atheism cannot both be true. But because of differing experience and knowledge, someone may be rationally justified in accepting theism while someone else is rationally justified in believing atheism.

Earlier we characterized a theist as someone who believes that the theistic God exists, and an atheist as someone who believes that the theistic God does not exist. In the light of our study of the problem of evil perhaps we should introduce further distinctions. A *friendly atheist* is an atheist who believes that someone may well be rationally justified in believing that the theistic God exists. An *unfriendly atheist* is an atheist who believes that no one is rationally justified in believing that the theistic God exists. Similar distinctions are to be made with respect to theism and agnosticism. An unfriendly agnostic, for example, is an agnostic who thinks that no one is rationally justified in believing that the theistic God exists and no one is rationally justified in believing that the theistic God does not exist. Again, we must note that the friendly atheist (theist) does not believe that the theist (atheist) has a *true* belief, only that he or she may well be rationally justified in holding that belief. Perhaps the final lesson to be drawn from our study of the problem of evil is that the *friendly* versions of theism, agnosticism, and atheism are each preferable to their respective unfriendly versions.