Editorial preface

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The first four essays in this issue deal with theodicy. The last two deal with revelation and reason respectively.

In the first essay, John Culp is looking to establish what he calls “a more comprehensive response to the existence of evil” than is found in either theoretical or practical responses alone. As Culp explains, theoretical responses to evil are too abstract adequately to deal with the actual sufferings of real human beings *in concreto*; and even though practical responses (e.g. confession, prayer, forgiveness) are practices that may lessen the destructive force of evil, these practices alone are insufficient without conceptual reflection. We need both. He calls this combination of approaches a comprehensive reciprocal interaction. To illustrate how this reciprocity works, he considers how such an approach would serve to modify our understanding of divine omnipotence and how this would help address real life cases of suffering.

Daniel Howard-Snyder, often cited as a defender of skeptical theism, undertakes to critique Trent Dougherty’s objection to the evidential argument from evil (classically formulated by Rowe), just as he had previously undertaken a critique Paul Draper’s objection to skeptical theism. In the first section of the essay, he questions the sense of holding that the universe is, or seems to be, indifferent to horrendous suffering. After all, indifference is a mental attitude and the universe is, well, not conscious. But the heart of his objection to Dougherty’s objection to skeptical theism is a logical problem with his argument. Indeed, Howard-Snyder claims that a central move in Dougherty’s argument is a *non-sequitur*. In the process of weighing evidence, Dougherty says that it is *unknown* whether there is anything

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to put on the side of the scale in favor of theism, and hence it is *known (or at least probably true)* that there is nothing to put on this theistic side of the scale.

In our next article, Stephen Law considers what has come to be called the Pandora's Box objection to skeptical theism. This objection alerts us to untoward consequences that seem to follow from skeptical theism. As the objection goes, if we suppose that human beings lack the cognitive capacity to know what God might be up to in permitting what appears to our limited eyes as horrendous evil, how can our limited cognitive capacities ensure us that what appears to common sense as obvious, for example, that there is an external world, is not also an illusion God has perpetuated (for some unknown reason)? Skeptical theists have not been happy with this objection and have rushed to quell its force. Law considers two such responses offered by Beaudoin and Bergmann and finds that they do not succeed.

A standard appeal of skeptical theism is to the parent–child relation. Clearly, parents often and for the good of their children, do things for reasons that lie beyond their children's capacity to understand. Skeptical theists invite us to think that this is how the heavenly father treats his children. Erik J. Wielenberg argues, however, that this analogy is limited and fails to support skeptical theism. In a discussion of various stands from the literature of skeptical theism, he draws the following conclusion regarding the parent–child analogy: it is impossible to imagine a justifying reason that loving parents might have in permitting their children to experience prolonged intense and apparently gratuitous suffering, just as it is impossible to imagine a justifying reason parents might have to permit their children to experience a sense of utter abandonment. This inability to grasp such justifying reasons cannot be a matter of our limited cognitive abilities without opening the skeptical door to all of our common sense. Unless we are willing to open this door, the arguments for skeptical theism do not meet the challenge that the existence of gratuitous evil presents.

Even though our last two articles change the theme at bit, they are still concerned with finding a path to theism. The first essay by Thomas Park considers the path of revelation and the last article by John Shook considers the rational path.

Thomas Park undertakes a critique of John D. Caputo's view that the path to theistic faith does not require revelation. As Caputo puts it, the kingdom of God arrives when human beings respond positively to a divine call for justice and compassion. But as Park points out, it is impossible to make sense of this as a response to God's call unless we have some way of hearing that call. This means that we cannot get away from the idea that knowing and doing God's will requires that it be disclosed to us. Hence faith cannot dispense with revelation.

Finally, John Shook considers the moves often made by theists that are designed to counter the claim made by rationalist atheology that rational arguments for theism fail to offer an acceptable path to theistic belief. Theists often seek to blunt the acknowledged rational failures of these arguments for theism by embracing extra-rational concepts such as mystery and even contradiction in order to side step these failures. Shook argues that such appeals cannot succeed. To show this, he formulates 7 rules that are correlated with the principle of sufficient reason and shows how theistic appeals to the extra-rational in five standard theistic arguments violate one or more of these rules. He thinks that this will bring new life to the otherwise unfocused and disorganized claims of rationalist atheology.