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LOOKING THROUGH PASCAL'S WINDOW

John T. Mullen

This paper is an attempt to draw a time-honored insight from Blaise Pascal, generalize it for contemporary use, and apply it to two topics of general concern to contemporary philosophers of religion. The two topics are the status of evolutionary biology as evidence for Philosophical Naturalism, and biological versions of the problem of evil (I focus specifically on the problem of long ages of animal suffering). The "Pascalian" insight is that God wants human beings to be in a state of epistemic ambiguity when we consider important, life-altering claims. I call this state of epistemic ambiguity "Pascal's Window," and argue that God's desire to place human beings into Pascal's Window with respect to important, life-altering claims generates the important constraint on His creative activity that He must create gradually. This constraint is then employed to argue that evolutionary biology supplies very little evidential support for Philosophical Naturalism, and that appeals to "divine hiddenness" can become effective responses to the problem of "biological evil."

Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) is most widely known for his famed "wager argument." But there is another aspect of his legacy that is (in my view) even more significant for contemporary philosophy of religion. This is his now time-honored insight that (to paraphrase) God has intentionally placed human beings in a state of epistemic ambiguity with respect to His own existence and some of His attributes and actions.¹ God's reasons for wanting us to be in this condition of ambiguity (which I shall call "Pascal's Window") are further claimed by Pascal to be related to our moral condition, and perhaps also to the preservation of our freedom. However, Pascal makes these claims in a characteristically vague and imprecise way. We must first seek to clarify his claims and to uncover his implicit assumptions before we can usefully apply his insight, while simultaneously recognizing that the subject matter is such that a certain amount of vagueness and imprecision is unavoidable. However, once it

¹Others, most notably William James and John Hick, have advanced and made use of similar insights. This is why we may regard Pascal's insight as "time-honored." But Pascal can be regarded plausibly as the historical source for apologetic appeals to "divine hiddenness," so the designation of this epistemic condition as "*Pascal's Window*" is historically appropriate. Also, Pascal's subsequent appeal to "reasons of the heart," as distinct from publically accessible, widely agreed-upon reasons, is especially amenable to the particular application of this paper (i.e., a constraint on God's creative activity arising from the need to keep Philosophical Naturalism viable in a scientifically sophisticated age).



has been suitably clarified, Pascal's insight can shed light on two questions of considerable contemporary interest: the status of evolutionary biology as evidence for Philosophical Naturalism, and potential theistic responses to biological versions of the problem of evil.

What Is "Pascal's Window"?

Let us begin with Pascal's own remarks in the most explicit communication of this point that may be found in his writings:

God's will has been to redeem men and open the way to salvation to those who seek it, but men have shown themselves so unworthy that it is right for God to refuse to some, for their hardness of heart, what he grants to others by a mercy they have not earned.

If He had wished to overcome the obstinacy of the most hardened, He could have done so by revealing Himself so plainly that they could not doubt the truth of His essence, as He will appear on the last day with such thunder and lightning and such convulsions of nature that the dead will rise up and the blindest will see Him.

This is not the way He wished to appear when He came in mildness. . . . It was therefore not right that He should appear in a manner manifestly divine and absolutely capable of convincing all men, but neither was it right that His coming should be so hidden that He could not be recognized by those who sincerely sought Him. He wished to make Himself perfectly recognizable to them.

Wishing to appear openly only to those who seek Him with all their heart, and to remain hidden from those who shun Him with all their heart, God has moderated the way He might be known by giving signs, which can be seen by those who seek Him and not by those who do not. There is enough light for those whose only desire is to see, and enough darkness for those of a contrary disposition.²

Pascal then goes on to cite Old Testament prophecies of a coming Messiah as those very "signs" by which God simultaneously reveals Himself and remains hidden. It should be noted that the above passage is embedded within an attempt on Pascal's part to argue that the Old Testament must be interpreted figuratively if it is to be rationally believed at all. Thus those who desire to embrace the Messiah who (according to the orthodox Christian theology that Pascal obviously endorses) did in fact enter human history will interpret the prophecies correctly (i.e., figuratively) and thereby arrive at a reasonable faith. On the other hand, those of a "contrary disposition" will interpret the prophecies incorrectly (i.e., literally) and thereby reject them, but their rejection of the prophecies is a perfectly reasonable conclusion given their prior "decision" to interpret literally. Thus Pascal, in the above passage, is thinking entirely in terms of an apologetic for the specifically Christian doctrine of the Incarnation.

²Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, #149, according to the numbering employed in *Oeuvres Completes*, ed. L. Lafuma (Paris: Seuil, 1963). The cited translation appears in David Wetsel, "Pascal and Holy Writ," chap. 9 of *The Cambridge Companion to Pascal*, ed. Nicholas Hammond (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 166–167.

He is concerned with the rationality of believing that God Himself “came in mildness.”

We will be concerned with a wider range of religious beliefs that human beings might form, and so we will want to generalize Pascal’s remarks as much as possible and apply the generalized principles to additional religious contexts that are of interest to us. But to do that, we must first identify which features of his “argument” are thus generalizable. I would like to suggest that there are three, each of which carries with it certain auxiliary assumptions that must be made explicit. Let us examine them in order.

First, Pascal believes that God wants human beings to believe the doctrine of the Incarnation from a position of epistemic ambiguity. The total evidence available to us must be such that it compels neither belief nor disbelief, but instead allows both states (and also the third state of withholding belief) to be rationally permissible. In this way, the outcome (either belief or non-belief, where non-belief is the disjunction of disbelief and withholding) will be indicative of one’s desires and moral dispositions, and not merely of the proper functioning of one’s rational faculties. Thus Pascal seems to be thinking of an epistemic “window” that is defined at its lower boundary by the threshold at which the epistemic strength of our total evidence renders belief rationally permissible, and at its upper boundary by the threshold at which the epistemic strength of our total evidence rationally requires, or compels, belief. We will not be able to specify these thresholds precisely. But the notion of an epistemic condition that fits the above description should be both intelligible and familiar to anyone who has lived as a human being long enough to reflect on his/her evidence and beliefs. Let us call this condition “Pascal’s Window.” Those who have difficulty hearing Pascal’s name without simultaneously thinking of the wager argument are hereby provided with an alternative and further exhorted to lay the wager aside.³

Now it is clear that Pascal’s Window is easily generalizable to all subjects and all beliefs. We may give it the following more formal explication:

(PW) A subject s is in Pascal’s Window (PW) with respect to proposition p iff the total evidence e of which s is aware is such that it is rational for s to believe p on the basis of e , and s is not rationally required to believe p on the basis of e .⁴

³This may not be easy, because the wager and the window are clearly related to each other. For example, the wager argument presupposes a condition of epistemic parity between the evidence in favor of God’s existence and the evidence against it. In other words, the wager assumes that we are in the window with respect to the existence of God. This relationship is worth exploring further. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this paper, I must repeat and reemphasize my exhortation to simply forget about the wager and to focus instead on the window.

⁴I am assuming that the threshold for the rational permissibility of believing a proposition p is higher than the threshold at which it becomes irrational to disbelieve p . Thus if e is strong enough to make it rational for s to believe p , it follows that e is also strong enough to make it irrational to disbelieve p . However, if this assumption is incorrect then PW can be

We must forego any attempt to analyze the concept of rationality here. It is a multifarious concept in any case, and so it may be that we can be in PW with respect to a given proposition according to one notion of rationality, but not be in PW with respect to the same proposition according to a different notion of rationality. This need not deter us. Let us proceed according to a vague concept of "overall rationality" (perhaps a conjunction of the several competing concepts). If difficulties arise because of this vagueness, they must be considered on a case-by-case basis. The same applies to the thorny problem of what should count as evidence. However, I will assume that Pascal is referring to publicly available evidence of the sort that is typically presented to the human rational faculties and about which there is widespread agreement. These are the faculties that are frequently grouped together under the heading of "reason" (i.e., sense perception, memory, rational intuition, introspection, deduction, induction, etc.). Pascal does *not* intend to include what he elsewhere refers to as the "reasons of the heart," but that exclusion is in no way intended to diminish the significance of those extra-rational "reasons." On the contrary, Pascal hopes to *highlight* their importance by specifying the condition under which they can become operative, i.e., the epistemic "window" as described above. It is only when reason does *not* force our hand that we can act on the "reasons of the heart." Finally, PW as defined above also excludes controversial faculties that are not acknowledged by nearly all human beings. For example, some philosophers contend that we have a special faculty for believing that God exists under certain conditions. But even if we do have such a faculty, its deliverances are not ubiquitous enough to make it suitable for membership in *e*. One might imagine additional conditions of epistemic ambiguity that are analogous to PW but which employ broader concepts of evidence (and then call them, say, PW2, PW3, etc.), and it will follow once again that a subject might be in PW with respect to a proposition *p* but not be in PW2 with respect to *p* (though the converse is not true). So PW is neutral with respect to the various concepts of rationality, and it employs a concept of evidence that is restricted to widely agreed-upon faculties.⁵

easily modified to include, on the right side of the bi-conditional, the condition that it is not rational to disbelieve *p* on the basis of *e*.

⁵If it is possible for a subject to be in PW, then what is often called the *Uniqueness Thesis* (UT) is false. The UT says that epistemic rationality requires *exactly* one doxastic attitude (i.e., either belief, disbelief, or withholding) for each subject with a given body of evidence. Thus if the UT is true then it is impossible for both of two subjects with the same body of evidence to be rational if they hold differing doxastic attitudes with respect to some proposition *p*. The UT has been recently defended by Roger White (see his "Epistemic Permissiveness," *Philosophical Perspectives* 19 [2005], 445–459) and Richard Feldman (see his "Reasonable Religious Disagreement" in *Philosophers Without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, ed. Louise Antony [New York: Oxford University Press, 2007]). The incompatibility of PW with the UT was pointed out to me by Alex Arnold. Now the UT is very controversial among epistemologists, but it may have some plausibility if we allow the body of evidence, *e*, to include the deliverances of all possible sources of belief (though it seems dubious to me even in that case). But in PW we have restricted *e* to the deliverances of

The second generalizable feature of Pascal's "argument" is this: Pascal clearly believes there is some sort of *value* attached to forming beliefs from within PW. But precisely what sort of value he has in mind is difficult to discern. His language suggests a moral value (for example, he says it is "right" for God to place us in this ambiguous condition), but even that is far from obvious. Furthermore, even if he is thinking generally of moral rectitude, it is not at all clear whether he is thinking of God as being morally praiseworthy for placing us in PW, or of human beings as being morally praiseworthy when we form beliefs from within PW, or perhaps both. The situation is further complicated when we consider that it is very much an open question whether the formation of a belief should be regarded as an *action* that can be the proper subject of moral evaluation. If Pascal thinks it should be, then it makes sense to understand him as claiming that God wants us in PW because it is only from within PW that our beliefs can be both rational and the products of an exercise of a power of free will. Any condition outside of PW is a condition in which our state of belief is rationally required of us, and is therefore not "free."⁶ But if Pascal does not think that belief formation itself is a proper subject of moral evaluation, then it is better to read him as someone who thinks that God is praiseworthy for placing us in PW, simply because beliefs formed from within PW become reliable indicators of a prior condition of "the heart." If we are outside of PW, then our beliefs reveal only our rationality (or lack thereof). But when we are in PW, they are the causally determined products of our desires and true motives, which are thereby placed on display for all to see. Thus God is to be morally praised for placing us in PW and thereby revealing our inner desires to both ourselves and each other, even though we cannot be praised or blamed for the beliefs themselves.⁷

A final resolution to the problem of Pascal's own view will elude us, but it should be noted that Pascal himself may not have held a libertarian notion of free will. He was known to be a Jansenist in his theology. Jansenists may be very loosely described as Calvinists who remain within the Catholic tradition, and this association would incline Pascal toward theological determinism and toward compatibilism regarding freedom and determinism (though he does not explicitly commit himself on these issues). This might indicate to us that Pascal thought that the value of being in PW is that it reveals our inner motives and desires, because compatibilists tend to

widely agreed-upon faculties and left out others, and when we do that it is very difficult to defend the UT. The best evidence that the UT is false when ϵ is thus restricted is the simple fact that there seem to be many cases of disagreement among rational subjects who have the same body of "public" evidence.

⁶It is clear that some people believe things in opposition to what is rationally required of them, apparently because they are "free" to do so. But these are always cases of negative evaluation. The freedom that is necessary for positive evaluation does seem to require that the subject be in PW. See footnotes 9 and 10 below for more discussion of this rather puzzling phenomenon.

⁷We may, however, yet be praised or blamed for the prior conditions that cause our beliefs.

think that free will is less valuable than incompatibilists think it is.⁸ But at this point we must return to our concern with generalizing Pascal's claims for use in other contexts. Pascal's own views are of only marginal help here. Theological determinism has proved extremely difficult to defend, as it seems to leave its proponents with no plausible response to the problem of evil. If we are to make further use of Pascal's insights on this topic, we would be better advised to do so in a way that is more in keeping with the first possibility considered in the preceding paragraph, and to try to locate the value of being in PW in its apparent enabling of our power of free will to produce beliefs, even if Pascal himself did not have that possibility in mind. Accordingly, I suggest that our future use of PW be governed by the following controversial (but not unreasonable) assumptions regarding the value associated with being in PW. They are presented here in what seems to me to be the order of increasing questionability:

1. God wants to place human beings in PW because there is a particular value associated with being in PW.
2. The value associated with being in PW is such that it is not *logically* possible to realize it in any epistemic condition other than PW.⁹
3. The value associated with being in PW is closely associated with moral value in that being in PW is a necessary condition for belief formation to be a proper subject of *positive* moral evaluation.¹⁰

⁸This tendency must not be taken to imply that compatibilists cannot place enough value on our power of free will to endorse the conclusions and general dialectical strategy of this paper. Indeed, I take it that one of the strengths of this strategy is that it is open to both compatibilists and incompatibilists alike. For this point I am indebted to several helpful comments from Kenneth Boyce.

⁹This is a necessary assumption because it will provide an effective response to the charge that God could have placed us in a better epistemic condition with respect to His existence without sacrificing the value associated with being in PW. Some may correctly note that it is logically possible that there be subjects who are capable of forming their beliefs freely even in the case of rationally compelling evidence, i.e., even when they are outside of PW. But in such cases these subjects would be potentially subject to moral blame only, but not to moral praise. This is why the third assumption specifies the value of being in PW as the value associated with the possibility of a *positive* moral evaluation. See footnote 10 below for further amplification.

¹⁰Being in PW is not a necessary condition for *all* moral evaluation of belief, because we might freely believe something when we are below the threshold of rational permissibility, and in that case we might be blameworthy. The same applies if we freely withhold or disbelieve propositions that are above the threshold of rational compulsion. But I do take it that a judgment of moral praise (i.e., a positive evaluation) for freely believing a proposition can be proper only if the subject was within PW when he formed the belief, and that is all that is needed for the purposes of this paper. For this point I am once again indebted to Alex Arnold. Furthermore, I am assuming nothing about how often we human beings freely form beliefs, except that it occasionally occurs from within PW. It may be that we never freely form beliefs when we are outside of PW, and that we only very rarely do so from within PW. Thus a minimal thesis of doxastic voluntarism is assumed here, but it is so restricted that those who wish to deny it must show that we *never* freely form *any* beliefs. Nevertheless, those who are still troubled by this very weak form of doxastic voluntarism may wish to consider a modified version of this paper where the notion of "acceptance" (or any other lesser doxastic condition) is substituted for "belief." The distinction between belief and

4. Because freedom of will is a necessary condition for moral responsibility and human beings (generally) have freedom of will, the value associated with being in PW is that it enables some instances of human belief formation to be the morally significant product of an exercise of the human power of freedom of will.¹¹
5. The value associated with being in PW is so great that it outweighs (and therefore justifies) whatever negative consequences being in PW actually has.¹²

Assumptions 3 and 4 suggest that the value associated with being in PW is *not* itself a moral value. Rather, it is merely a necessary condition for a certain type of human activity (i.e., belief formation) to be a proper subject of positive moral evaluation. Thus it derives its value from whatever positive moral value one may assign to some instances of belief formation. This close association with moral value makes it easy to mistakenly assign a moral value to PW itself. But one might still wonder *which* moral values might be properly assigned to belief formation. One might canvass the moral values with which we are most familiar (such as honesty, or courage, or compassion, etc.), and then ask which of these values is appropriate to belief formation. Perhaps such an inquiry would bear some fruit. But it seems to me that we should not insist that the value appropriate to belief formation be equated with a particular familiar moral value. The value appropriate to belief formation might be moral rectitude in a form that is intuitively recognizable as such, but which lacks a common name. We must remain open to this possibility. In what follows, we will proceed on the (at least reasonable) assumption that there is a positive moral value associated with some instances of belief formation, but we will not attempt to give a more specific account of that value. This has the advantage of allowing us to make subsequent applications of PW that are compatible with a variety of possible accounts of the value in question. But one might yet object that assumption 5 above creates the need for such

acceptance has been made by several philosophers, but see especially L. Jonathan Cohen, *An Essay on Belief and Acceptance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). I am persuaded that the overall argument in this paper is more persuasive and intuitively plausible when it is cast in terms of belief, and the belief/acceptance distinction is itself questionable. Thus I will continue to speak of belief and not of acceptance. But a parallel argument, cast in terms of acceptance, may be a suitable "fallback" position for many readers.

¹¹Again, the assumption is stated in such a way that both compatibilists and incompatibilists can agree with it.

¹²It is difficult to argue positively for this assumption (though it is equally difficult to argue for denials of it), but theists who believe that God has intentionally placed us in PW with respect to some important propositions are likely to regard assumption 5 as a simple consequence of that fact. However, there can be some odd permutations of value here. In a given case, it may be that the value associated with being in PW is not sufficient to outweigh the negative consequences that being in that state has, but God has placed the subject in PW anyway because it was a necessary by-product of some *other* good state-of-affairs that God wanted to obtain. But such cases will not be the norm, and the assumption seems highly plausible generally. For this point I am again indebted to comments from Kenneth Boyce.

an account, because we will be unable to compare the value associated with being in PW with its negative consequences unless we have a more specific account of the positive value appropriate to belief formation (from which PW derives its value). If one wishes to apply PW in such a way as to counterbalance some significant evils (as I will indeed suggest below), then one should show that the value associated with being in PW is great enough to do that, and that will in turn require a specific account of the moral value appropriate to belief formation. I am sympathetic to the spirit of this objection, but I will nevertheless continue to refrain from offering a more specific account. The reason is that the value of being in PW can be amplified in another way, namely, by being causally related to the subsequent direction and quality of a person's life. This will be discussed further below, but the point here is that this causal relation to the quality of a person's life is sufficient to render it plausible that the value associated with being in PW is great enough to counterbalance some very significant evils, even in the absence of a specific account of the moral value appropriate to belief formation.

The third way of generalizing Pascal's "argument" is to identify the additional religiously significant contexts to which PW might be relevant. PW has already been presented as an epistemic condition that might apply to any person and any proposition whatsoever (and thus it extends far beyond the important but limited context of belief in the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation with which Pascal was concerned), but we must now specify which beliefs are plausible candidates for the beliefs that God would want us to choose freely. I would like to suggest that the most plausible candidates for propositions that God would want us to believe (or not) from within PW are propositions that, when they are believed, cause a significant change in the direction and quality of one's life (for better or for worse). These are propositions that seem to have a "way of life" attached to them, which way of life follows in a causal way from believing the proposition. Those who form beliefs in such propositions during adulthood (or even in pre-adolescence or later) are likely to see that event as a significant crossroad in their lives, a point at which they reached a "fork in the road" and *chose* one way of life over another. They are also likely to view the choice as an exercise of freedom of will, and report an experience of having been given a moment of "wholly free choice." There is no better description of this sort of experience than the one provided by C. S. Lewis regarding his own conversion to Christianity. It is worth quoting in full:

The odd thing was that before God closed in on me, I was in fact offered what now appears a moment of wholly free choice. In a sense, I was going up Headington Hill on the top of a bus. Without words and (I think) almost without images, a fact about myself was somehow presented to me. I became aware that I was holding something at bay, or shutting something out. Or, if you like, that I was wearing some stiff clothing, like corsets, or even a suit of armor, as if I were a lobster. I felt myself being there and then,

given a free choice. I could open the door or keep it shut; I could unbuckle the armor or keep it on. Neither choice was presented as a duty; no threat or promise was attached to either, though I knew that to open the door or to take off the corset meant the incalculable. The choice appeared to be momentous but it was also strangely unemotional. I was moved by no desires or fears. In a sense I was not moved by anything. I chose to open, to unbuckle, to loosen the rein. I say "I chose," yet it did not really seem possible to do the opposite. On the other hand, I was aware of no motives. You could argue that I was not a free agent, but I am more inclined to think that this came nearer to being a perfectly free act than most that I have ever done. Necessity may not be the opposite of freedom, and perhaps a man is most free when, instead of producing motives, he could only say, "I am what I do." Then came the repercussion on the imaginative level. I felt as if I were a [snowman] at long last beginning to melt. The melting was starting in my back—drip-drip and presently trickle-trickle. I rather disliked the feeling.¹³

This, then, is arguably the sort of choice that God would want us to make from within PW because being in PW somehow confers value on the choice (see assumptions 3 and 4 above). It seems to me that this sort of choice is rare, that a given individual will have only a few such experiences in the course of his or her lifetime, and some may have none at all (this judgment is based on the simple observation that reports of such experiences seem to be relatively rare). However, some may think that such choices are more frequent, and some may think that they can consist in an accumulation of a number of less clearly significant choices.¹⁴ But regardless of their frequency or constitution, there is a very wide range of possible objects for this sort of choice. For Lewis the object of the choice was the Christian faith (and thus the proposition in view is the conjunction of whatever propositions Lewis took at the time to be essential to the Christian faith),¹⁵ but others will have vastly different backgrounds and experiences that will present them with very different objects. It seems unproblematic to say that any choice of commitment to any religious tradition will be a choice of this sort. But religious choices, numerous and disparate as they are, do not exhaust the category. A philosophical system or tradition can also have a "way of life" attached to it. Accordingly, philosophical traditions can be objects of the sort of choice described by Lewis, and it seems reasonable that God would want human beings in PW when we make commitments to philosophical systems as well.¹⁶ And

¹³C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (London: Fontana Books, 1977), 174–175. Lewis's "dislike" of the "feeling" was not taken by him to be a reason to think he had made the wrong choice.

¹⁴For this point I am indebted to the comments of an anonymous referee.

¹⁵Lewis may not be referring to propositions at all in this passage, but for our purposes we need to supply one. I take it that the conjunction of the propositions that the subject himself takes to be essential to the faith tradition he is embracing is the best candidate. However, another reasonable candidate is the conjunction of the propositions that are naturally believed as a result of one's experience. In Lewis's case, the experience is the "melting" he describes.

¹⁶Some would simply count philosophical commitments as types of religious commitment, but I am retaining the distinction because I find it useful in other, unrelated, contexts.

even beyond what one could describe as a clearly-defined and self-coherent philosophical system, or as a philosophical tradition with a respectable historical pedigree, one might choose to make commitments to sets of loosely connected general principles that nevertheless unite to make a significant difference in the character and quality of one's subsequent life. These choices likewise seem to fall into our category of interest. It is clear that we are now dealing with a very broad category. It might be desirable to specify a precise line of demarcation that sets apart those choices that are valuable when made from within PW from those that are not, but I strongly suspect that this line of demarcation must remain somewhat vague. Again, such vagueness should not prevent us from making intelligible and meaningful use of the category, and in what follows I hope to do just that.

First though, a few remarks about "Reformed Epistemology" (hereafter RE) are in order. It is not an exaggeration to say that RE has recently (i.e., within the past forty years or so) attained the status of a philosophical tradition.¹⁷ One of the central features of RE is the claim that many of our beliefs (including some very important religious beliefs such as belief in God's existence) are supplied to us involuntarily when our cognitive faculties are functioning properly, and that such beliefs are epistemically justified. Some of them may even meet the conditions sufficient for knowledge (whatever they might be). RE seeks to honor the experience of many religious believers who report that they did not *choose* their religious beliefs at all, but simply found themselves holding them after having acquiring them in a wholly passive manner. Some religious believers do not remember any time of acquisition of their religious beliefs, but instead have held them for as long as they can remember. Some religious believers further claim that they are unable to voluntarily divest themselves of their religious beliefs, just as we human beings in general are unable to voluntarily divest ourselves of perceptual beliefs or memory beliefs. Defenders of RE will insist that such beliefs are no less respectable intellectually for being thus passively acquired and incorrigible. Now I will admit to being highly sympathetic to RE, and therefore I would be very distressed if anything I have already said about the value of being in PW were to come into serious conflict with RE. But it is easy to see how it might appear that there is such a conflict. I have been speaking of religious beliefs as, at least on some occasions, the products of an exercise of an *active* power of freedom of will, i.e., as something we *do* choose. I have also claimed, following Pascal, that God wants these important choices to be made from a condition of epistemic ambiguity that I have called PW, all of which seems inconsistent with the passive and involuntary belief formation that

¹⁷See for example William Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993). See also *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983). There is also an historical pedigree to RE that goes back much further, at least to Thomas Reid, and which plausibly includes G. E. Moore.

is characteristic of RE. Must we then choose between RE and the value of making choices from within PW?

The appearance of conflict here is deceiving. There is no actual conflict. In fact, there are *two* important and distinct considerations that are independently sufficient to dissolve the appearance of conflict. The first is that there is nothing that *requires* that religious beliefs be chosen from within PW. They *might* be so chosen, and when they are they have that value that can be had only when formed from within PW. And perhaps God *often* places human beings in PW precisely because He wants their religious beliefs to have that value. But there is no reason to think that God is obligated to place all human beings in PW whenever we form religious beliefs, or that He is always concerned to secure that value for every religious belief of every human being. It is enough, one might reasonably think, that the world be structured in such a way as to secure that value for religious beliefs in a wide variety of cases (but not even necessarily a majority of all cases). And thus it is perfectly acceptable that many human beings should form their religious beliefs passively, with epistemic justification (just as RE claims), but without the value that attaches to being in PW. Are such people being cheated? No, because they can be put into PW with respect to a wide variety of other beliefs that God wants them to form (recall that such beliefs constitute a very broad category), and so gain the value of PW in that way. (Also, it is not clear that everyone should be put into PW at some point in one's lifetime. The value of some people believing some things from within PW is retained even if there are some who are never put into PW at all.) The appearance of conflict was created by importing a false assumption into the dialectic, namely, the assumption that God is limited to choices of religious beliefs (such as belief in His existence, or belief in important doctrines like the Incarnation) when He wishes to give us moments of life-changing choice. But He is not so limited. He can place human beings in PW with respect to many non-religious beliefs (or even quasi-religious beliefs, such as the belief that Philosophical Naturalism is false . . . more on this later) that have great significance for us, and those so placed might be the same individuals who honestly and correctly report that they did not choose their religious beliefs and cannot voluntarily discard them (just as RE claims). And so there is no conflict between the general claims of RE and the claim that there is a special value associated with being in PW.

The second conflict-dissolving consideration is the very simple observation that acquiring a belief is distinct from sustaining a belief. Let us imagine someone, call her Mary, who believes in a basic way that God exists, and who holds many more specific religious beliefs on the basis of the testimonial authority of her religious community. Let us further assume that Mary cannot voluntarily discard any of these beliefs. According to RE, Mary's beliefs are perfectly respectable, and justified from an epistemic point of view (provided that she has not been presented with any decisive "defeaters"). But her beliefs did not form from within PW,

so they do not have the value associated with being in PW. Let us now assume for the sake of argument that RE is correct about the epistemic status of Mary's beliefs. But as is usually the case, Mary's life does not end at this point.¹⁸ Instead she continues to learn, and think, and reflect on the beliefs she has that she considers important. Along the way her religious beliefs come under pressure. She is presented with many potential "defeaters" for her religious beliefs (i.e., propositions that, if believed, would rationally require Mary to abandon her religious beliefs, either because they entail that her religious beliefs are false or because they cast doubt on the reliability of the source of her religious beliefs), and these defeaters seem reasonable to her. However, the defeaters are not overwhelming, so her religious beliefs still seem reasonable to her as well. She investigates, but is not able to settle the matter from a purely rational standpoint. She is now in PW with respect to her religious beliefs and she can now discard them voluntarily, even though she did not acquire them in that condition. If her religious beliefs are sustained, they will be sustained from within PW and *might* have the value associated with being in PW. Let us assume that they do have that value. Now let us follow Mary's life just a little further, to the point where she acquires additional evidence for her religious beliefs (which might include experiential evidence available only to her) and she once again becomes incapable of discarding them voluntarily. She is no longer in PW with respect to them, and as time goes by she retains only vague memories of having freely chosen her religious beliefs during that relatively brief period when she was in PW. When asked about her reasons for believing as she does, she will say things that make it difficult to distinguish her present condition from her earlier ecto-PW condition, but there is indeed a significant difference. Her religious beliefs now retain the value associated with being in PW, because they were sustained from within PW. But they did not have that value in her earlier condition. Consideration of Mary's highly plausible (and perhaps even typical) case gives us a second, independent way of seeing that there is no conflict between the general claims of RE and the claim that there is a special value associated with being in PW. It also shows that the value of forming a belief from within PW is retained even after the individual's epistemic situation with respect to the belief changes dramatically.

We are now ready to apply Pascal's Window to topics of considerable interest to contemporary philosophers of religion. I do not mean to suggest that what follows are the only significant ways to make practical use of Pascal's Window, but only that they are two among many and that explorations of additional applications of Pascal's Window have the potential to bear much philosophical fruit.

¹⁸But even if her life were to end at this point, her life might exhibit a special value of some other sort. In general, the modest claim that there is a special value associated with being in PW is defensible even if there are some people who never form or sustain any beliefs from within PW.

Applying Pascal's Window: Is God Required to Create Gradually?

Contemporary evolutionary biology is often taken to be evidence in favor of Philosophical Naturalism (hereafter PN) over classical Theism. PN is the thesis that nothing exists except those things posited by a mature science of physics, and combinations of those things.¹⁹ The claim that PN is supported by evolutionary biology has been made most forcefully by several recent energetic and popular defenders of PN, such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and some others. However, the clearest and simplest (in my view) articulation of an argument that supports this claim is presented not by any of the popular defenders of PN but by a theist, Greg Ganssle, who puts it this way:

Theism does not *rule out* a long process of biological development, but theists are not restricted to such theories by their theistic commitments.

An atheistic universe, in contrast, lacks the resources for instantaneous creation of all life forms. It would be completely baffling if complex life emerges instantly in a universe without God. Complex life would require some kind of long developmental process. This process would not need to be through genetic variation and natural selection, but it would need to be gradual. It would need to be, it turns out, something like the way we find it.

Since the theistic universe is compatible with a variety of mechanisms for the development of complex biological life, the fact of gradual development through natural selection does not provide specific evidence for them. Since the naturalistic universe *seems to require* some kind of long-term biological process for complex biological life, the fact of natural selection does support the claim that the universe is naturalistic. This aspect of the universe we find, then, supports the claim that there is no God. Natural selection provides evidence for atheism even though it is not incompatible with theism.²⁰

I shall argue that Pascal's Window provides theists with an effective and almost novel way of challenging this claim. The only auxiliary assumption required for this challenge to be effective is the apparently plausible claim that God would often want human beings to be in PW with respect to PN. We have already seen that philosophical traditions with broad appeal are natural candidates for being the type of proposition that God would want us to believe or disbelieve from within PW. This seems especially clear in the case of PN. To see this, consider the following well-worn but always apt description of the *prima facie* consequences of PN from the pen of one of its most noteworthy defenders, Bertrand Russell:

¹⁹This definition is certainly intended to exclude God and immaterial souls, and usually abstract objects as well. This is a common notion of PN and I do not expect that those who call themselves philosophical naturalists will have any serious objections to it, whatever particularities or caveats they may wish to add to it. For an extended explication and defense of PN, see David Papineau, *Philosophical Naturalism* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993).

²⁰Gregory E. Ganssle, "Dawkins's Best Argument Against God's Existence," in *Contending With Christianity's Critics: Answering New Atheists and Other Objectors*, ed. Paul Copan and William Lane Craig (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic Publishing Group, 2009), 79.

That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; . . . that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.²¹

Now it is beyond doubt that Russell's rhetoric is excessive in this passage. Not only are these things *not* certain, but a plausible case has been made that PN does not fare as well as its philosophical competitors (which include Theism) from a strictly rational standpoint.²² But there is no need to make that case again here. At this point we need only to place PN *within* PW, and so we may disregard Russell's rather intemperate attempt to place PN outside of PW on the side of rational compulsion. Even if PN is not the *most* reasonable option for us, it is still plausible to regard it as at least a "live option" for us (as William James would have put it),²³ and thus to be above the threshold of rational permissibility.

We must also, of course, be convinced that God would frequently want us to reject PN from within PW. This is fairly easy if Russell has correctly described the negative consequences of PN, but some may doubt that he has. Several existentialist philosophers, for example, claim that these *prima facie* negative consequences of PN will dissolve on closer inspection (Nietzsche and Sartre come readily to mind). Though we must reject the possibility of life beyond the grave, they say, we need not approach that prospect with "unyielding despair." Rather, we may learn, after an admittedly arduous and painful psychological training process, to enjoy our freedom during the few years we spend here on earth. I regard such claims as highly dubious, but this is another debate that need not be engaged here.

²¹Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," in his *Why I Am Not a Christian* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 107.

²²See for example Michael Rea, *World Without Design: The Ontological Consequences of Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). We must also bypass Russell's nonstandard use of the word "soul," which for him must mean nothing more than a conjunction of neurons and their properties.

²³William James, "The Will to Believe," in *The New World: A Quarterly Review of Religion, Ethics and Theology* (Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin, 1896), 327–347. James famously spoke of "live options" as any proposed beliefs that have any serious and honest psychological appeal to us. A live option, according to James, must have some *emotive* appeal to the chooser. This is an internal and subjective appeal, not necessarily a rational or forced appeal. By this, James seems to mean simply that live options may fall below the threshold of rational compulsion. He does *not* add that they must also be above the threshold of rational permissibility, but it is difficult to see how any belief that falls below that threshold could retain any genuine psychological appeal. Whatever purely emotive appeal it may retain would be swamped, one would think, by the weight of the total evidence that is, by hypothesis, overwhelmingly against it.

For what follows, we will need only the more modest premise that *if* God exists, then He would want some of us (and perhaps even many or most of us) to reject PN from within PW. This seems likely, given that PN is clearly one of those propositions that have significant life-altering consequences when believed or disbelieved. God, *if* He exists, would want us to reject it because it would constitute a significant obstacle to our knowledge of the world and to our being properly related to Himself. It makes no difference that disbelieving PN is not sufficient for being properly related to God (as it clearly is not). At this point we need insist only that disbelieving PN is necessary for being properly related to God (as it clearly is). We must also add that God, *if* He exists, would occasionally (and perhaps even generally) want human choices to reject PN to have the value associated with being in PW. But again this seems likely, given the considerations adduced in the first section of this paper. A rationally compelled rejection of PN would lack that value.²⁴

We are now ready to connect the foregoing remarks with evolutionary biology and its status as evidence for PN. To do so we must make an additional qualification. We must restrict our attention to those human beings who both a) live at a time when the empirical investigation of natural history has resulted in a sophisticated body of scientific knowledge that yields a clear consensus regarding the time span of creation, and b) are aware of that consensus. Let us call such individuals “scientifically knowledgeable human beings.” The assumption from the preceding paragraph is then modified as follows: God, *if* He exists, would want some (and perhaps even many or most) scientifically knowledgeable human beings to reject PN from within PW. This seems to be a reasonable assumption. But God, in order to place some scientifically knowledgeable human beings into PW with respect to PN, must ensure that those among them who may wish to embrace PN are not epistemically overwhelmed by evidence contrary to PN. And all this in turn *requires* Him to create gradually.²⁵ Any

²⁴It might occur to some that I am talking quite freely about what God wants, and perhaps too freely. My initial response is that we must begin with whatever it is we think God wants, and then make adjustments as more information comes in. Discussion proceeds on the basis of how much agreement there is about what God wants, and I don’t think I have said anything seriously troublesome about that. But a deeper concern is that God surely has multiple desires, many of which conflict, and therefore we must be very careful inferring that God would act on any given desire. This point was brought to my attention by an anonymous referee, and it is clearly correct. The lesson to draw, however, is not that we shouldn’t expect God to act on His desires, but that we need to be alert to potentially conflicting desires that might cause God to act contrary to what we would otherwise expect. That is to say, we must be sensitive to counter-evidence and counter-arguments. This is a point about general philosophical method. It is analogous to requiring that someone present us with a “defeater” before we abandon a belief. In the present case, we are justified in thinking that God would act on a desire that we know He has, unless someone can show that some other desire of His would lead Him to act differently. More specifically, we are justified in thinking that God would act in such a way as to regularly place people in PW with respect to PN, unless someone can show that He has other desires that would lead Him to act otherwise.

²⁵This is now a logical requirement, given that God desires both to place some scientifically knowledgeable human beings into PW with respect to PN, and to ensure that the

non-gradual creative activity, once it is detected through a sufficiently sophisticated body of scientific knowledge, would tend to have just such an overwhelming epistemic effect (this is precisely Ganssle's point). Or to put it more crudely, if God does not create gradually, it will become too obvious that we do not live in a naturalistic world. Therefore, theists in a scientific age should *expect* that empirical investigation of natural history will reveal a gradual creative process.²⁶ We have now arrived at a "Pascalian" constraint on God's creative activity that makes a gradual creation an *expected consequence* of Theism. A gradual creation is indeed an instrumental good, as it is a necessary condition for the possibility of the intrinsic good of scientifically knowledgeable human beings being in PW with respect to PN.

If a gradual creation is an expected consequence of both Theism and PN, then its alleged evidential support for PN is effectively neutralized.²⁷ We should expect to find the world as we do in fact find it (at least as far as the investigation of natural history is concerned), regardless of whether we are theists or philosophical naturalists. The reason it appeared at first glance that a gradual development of life supports PN over Theism is that it does seem at first glance that Theism is neutral with respect to the wide variety of creative methods and processes that God might employ. It takes a considerable amount of reflection and intellectual effort (and perhaps spiritual insight) to see that this appearance of neutrality is misleading. But once one does see that it is misleading, one will no longer regard evolutionary biology as lending any significant epistemic support for PN.²⁸ And this is presumably desirable from a theistic perspective.

overwhelming evidence produced by an empirical investigation of natural history is not deceptive. Thus there should be no worries about compromising the classical attribute of omniscience.

²⁶This does leave room for a few interesting cases where it is difficult to see what the gradual process might have been. Such cases are indeed troublesome for philosophical naturalists, but as long as they remain isolated and quasi-mysterious, they may be dismissed as puzzles whose solution can be deferred to the indefinite future. They will not be sufficient to toss PN out of PW on the side of rational impermissibility.

²⁷The neutralization in view here need not be complete, but only nearly so. Cast in terms of Bayesian confirmation theory, the probability of a gradual creation given PN is 1. So unless the probability of a gradual creation given Theism is also 1, there will remain some confirming effect in favor of PN. But if we can say that the probability of a gradual creation given Theism is very nearly 1 (because of God's desire to place scientifically knowledgeable human beings within PW with respect to PN), then the confirming effect in favor of PN is very slight, and on the basis of that we may also conclude that the evidential support for PN has been effectively neutralized.

²⁸It might occur to some that this result is generalizable. If evolutionary biology can be effectively neutralized as epistemic support for PN in this way, then what is to prevent *any* purported evidence for PN from being effectively neutralized in precisely the same way? Evidence that is *decisively* in favor of PN will of course settle the issue. But regarding evidence that falls short of being decisive, the answer is . . . nothing. Pascal's Window does seem to imply that any purported evidence for PN *that falls short of being decisive* may be regarded by theists as a necessary condition for the intrinsic good of being in PW with respect to PN, and thereby be effectively neutralized as evidence in favor of PN. In fact, we may even be able to generalize beyond PN. It may be that *any* belief *p* that, like PN, is con-

Finally, we may also employ the foregoing result as a response to various biological versions of the problem of evil. I shall select one of these, the problem of long ages of animal suffering, to illustrate the point. But similar applications might be fruitfully explored with regard to other features of the biological world that might appear to some to be contrary to what God, if He exists, would ever allow (systems that seem grossly inefficient from a strict engineering standpoint are other important examples). A long-term process of creation that is continuously characterized (and indeed driven) by the frequent and often painful deaths of sentient animals can reasonably be regarded as an evil that God would never allow to besmirch His creation unless it is also some sort of instrumental good, i.e., a necessary condition for some intrinsic good that God clearly would want to actualize. If the intrinsic good “outweighs” the evil that must be present to actualize it, then one might reasonably conclude that God is morally justified in allowing the evil. This is a standard strategy for responding to many versions of the problem of evil (it is often called a “greater good” defense), and my suggestion that God wants to place us in PW with respect to PN can be taken as an attempt to identify an intrinsic good that might justify the long ages of animal suffering that have in fact occurred. But this is not the place to attempt to weigh this particular good against this particular evil and come to a firm conclusion regarding the justification of the evil. This is of course an important question, but arguing for such conclusions is notorious for being both exceedingly difficult and prone to standoffs resulting from conflicting intuitive judgments. Instead, I will content myself here with responding to two objections that have been raised against recent attempts to identify a very similar intrinsic good. If these objections can be de-motivated, we will at least have an open path toward using PW as a response to biological versions of the problem of evil.

The most extensive recent treatment of the problem of animal suffering from a theistic perspective is undoubtedly Michael Murray's *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw: Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering*.²⁹ In this very thorough work, Murray considers a variety of possible responses to the problem of animal suffering, one of which he calls the response from “Divine Hiddenness.” This response identifies the “hiddenness” of God as the intrinsic good that justifies the evil of animal suffering, and Murray cites Kenneth Miller and Michael Corey as its recent defenders.³⁰ Now it

nected to a way of life and entails atheism is such that any purported evidence for p that falls short of being decisive may be regarded by theists as a necessary condition for the intrinsic good of being in PW with respect to p . It would thereby be effectively neutralized as evidence in favor of p . These generalizations will be highly contentious, and there are numerous objections to them that cannot be addressed here. However, this is a possibility that is, in my view, worthy of further exploration.

²⁹Michael Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw: Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³⁰See Kenneth Miller, *Finding Darwin's God* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999); and Michael Corey, *Evolution and the Problem of Natural Evil* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000).

should be clear that PW is itself a state of epistemic hiddenness, for anyone in PW with respect to a proposition p will regard the truth of p to be to some extent hidden from him. If theists find themselves in PW with respect to God's existence, then it is reasonable for them to suppose that God has intentionally placed them in that condition (for He could surely make His existence more obvious than it is), and therefore that He has intentionally hidden Himself from us to some significant extent.³¹ It is therefore not surprising that Miller and Corey both appeal to the creation and preservation of a certain "epistemic distance" (as Corey puts it) between God and his creatures as God's *reason* for remaining hidden to us, and that this epistemic distance is in turn justified by an interest in preserving our freedom to embrace or reject Him. Their response is therefore almost identical to the above appeal to the value of being in PW as God's reason for placing us in PW with respect to PN. The only difference is that we have focused our attention on PN, where Miller and Corey speak directly of belief in the existence of God. But this difference will prove to be important when it comes to responding to Murray's second objection to the "divine hiddenness" response.

Murray rejects the "divine hiddenness" response for two reasons. The first is a flat assertion that things would be better (or at least as good) if God had simply deceived us into thinking that He created gradually. He writes:

[I]t might seem doubtful that God wouldn't be sufficiently hidden if he were to create a fully formed and recent creation with all the signs of apparent old age built into it. Above we considered the possibility that God could create the world in this way but introduce deceptive evidence which leads us to infer that it is in fact much older, and developing complexity through nominally regular means. As we saw, one might argue that this would be objectionable because it would constitute a violation of God's obligation not to deceive. Yet in that earlier discussion we also noted that it seems hard to defend these sorts of principles when failing to deceive comes at such a high cost. Is the suffering of animals through evolutionary history worth it, simply to prevent some geologists from being misled about the age of fossils? It is hard to believe that it is.³²

Thus Murray is thinking of God, in creating the world, as having to choose between two options: (1) Deceiving us into thinking that the world was created gradually when it was in fact created non-gradually (and with little or no animal suffering), and (2) Creating gradually by means of long ages of animal suffering (and enabling us to discover this by means of a proper application of our generally reliable rational faculties). In both

³¹Jews and Christians should not be surprised at this. Isaiah 45:15 flatly declares that God hides Himself, much to the consternation of those who desire to know Him better. For an excellent anthology of essays regarding divine hiddenness, its relation to the problem of evil, and its alleged status as being itself an evil that requires a special sort of defense, see *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³²Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 179.

options God remains appropriately hidden to us because his existence is not too obvious. In fact, our epistemic situation with respect to God is identical in both options. But according to Murray, 1 is preferable to 2, because the animal suffering involved in 2 is a worse evil than the deception involved in 1. Therefore God would choose 1 over 2, and remain sufficiently hidden in doing so. So the hiddenness response fails because it incorrectly assumes that God's need to remain hidden requires Him to create gradually. I shall argue that an analogous objection might be leveled against any "greater good" defense to any version of the problem of evil, and that fact alone shows that it is an unacceptable objection (the problem of animal suffering being a clear instance of the problem of evil, and the hiddenness response being a clear instance of a "greater good" defense to that problem).

First though, one might respond by noting that Murray's assertion that 1 is preferable to 2 is another appeal to raw intuition, and then simply counter-assert that it is not at all difficult to believe that 2 is preferable to 1. The degree of deception suggested here is truly staggering. I doubt that moral concerns about God engaging in deception on such an enormous scale can be so easily dismissed. I also doubt, however, that such counter-assertions will advance the discussion much. Raw intuition does seem to play an ineliminable role in Philosophy. At this point some may, quite understandably, wish to explore the question of dis-value further, especially regarding the opposing "weights" that should be assigned to animal suffering and divine deception. I will not do that here, partly because of space considerations, but partly because I am skeptical of the prospects of getting beyond one's raw intuitions of dis-value in this matter. So I will rest content with what I take to be a modest claim, namely, that it is at least reasonable to think that preserving God's trustworthiness in endowing us with generally reliable rational faculties (the same faculties we employ when we engage in scientific inquiry) might be valuable enough to justify long ages of animal suffering. It is not, after all, a matter of deceiving only a few academic geologists, because those geologists represent the rest of humanity when they put human rationality to work in the pursuit of truth. But as I mentioned above, I believe there is a more serious problem with Murray's first objection that renders it impotent.

The fact is that we are unable to distinguish between Murray's two options. The world looks the same to us in either case. For if God wants to deceive us into thinking that the universe is old when it is in fact young, He will succeed. He will leave us with *no way to distinguish* deceptive evidence from reliable evidence. He would, in fact, be acting just like Descartes' evil genius, and what Murray is offering us in option 1 is another skeptical hypothesis. Those who agree with him that the deceptive state of affairs he describes is indeed preferable to a non-deceptive one are free to embrace this skeptical hypothesis as the sober truth. Indeed, that is what one so convinced *should* think! God *could* actualize a world that is *both* free of actual animal suffering *and* filled with creatures who mistakenly think that He

has created gradually (and who thus reap all the moral benefits of that mistaken belief). Why then should we not think that He has done just that? We have no *other* evidence either way. But of course we simply *cannot* respond to skeptical hypotheses in that way. Skeptical hypotheses are not “live options” for us, we are not in PW with respect to them (for they fall below the threshold of rational permissibility), and we cannot simply will ourselves to believe things that, all *other* things considered, would indeed seem to be the best option available to God. Indeed, if this objection is allowed to stand, then we should similarly dismiss *any* attempt to run a “greater-good” defense to *any* version of the problem of evil. For one can always complain that God should have merely deceived us into thinking the evil is actual when it is in fact an illusion, thereby securing whatever character development follows from our *thinking* that we are confronted with evil, but without having to put up with any actual evil (except for the false beliefs themselves). No, we cannot take seriously any suggestion that we are being deceived on so massive a scale, but Murray’s option 1 requires us to take such a suggestion seriously. So it cannot stand as an objection to the “divine hiddenness” response, unless one is prepared to let it stand against *any* “greater good” response to *any* version of the problem of evil. We have no choice but to follow the deliverances of reason that tell us that God has indeed created gradually, and then ask why He might have *in fact* done that. *Whatever* answer we give will be subject to the alleged objection that it would be preferable if we merely *thought* (mistakenly) that He did that. But that is simply a reason not to take such objections seriously.

Murray’s second objection is more nuanced. He puts it this way:

[T]his position invites one to consider just how much divine hiddenness is required in order to secure an environment suitable for morally significant freedom. Would the presence of a creator who evidently creates a fully formed universe within the last ten thousand years improperly overwhelm creaturely freedom? It is hard to make this argument plausible when we take note of the fact that vast numbers of people over the last two millennia have believed in just such arguments. That is, prior to 1859, many if not most in the West fully accepted that the data—theological, philosophical, and empirical—resoundingly implied the existence of just such a being. As a result, for this claim to be plausible we would have to believe that the free and effective choice of all of those who accepted such arguments during this period was disabled. Needless to say, this is unbelievable.³³

Here the argument is as follows: Prior to Darwin most human beings in the West believed that God’s existence is rationally compelling (i.e., they “accepted that the data . . . resoundingly implied” it), and their free and effective choice was not thereby disabled. Therefore, free and effective choice regarding God’s existence is not disabled when human beings are rationally compelled to believe in God’s existence (and are thus out of PW with respect to God’s existence). Therefore, it is not the case that for all

³³*Ibid.*, 179–180.

propositions p , free and effective choice regarding p is disabled when human beings are rationally compelled to believe p . But the hiddenness response assumes that indeed, for all propositions p , free and effective choice regarding p is disabled whenever human beings are rationally compelled to believe p . Therefore, the hiddenness response is false. (Murray then infers, quite properly given his argument, that even compelling evidence for young-earth creationism would not disable free and effective choice. But this sounds very dubious, creating a strong suspicion that something must be wrong here.) I shall argue that Murray's argument moves subtly (and illegitimately) from the claim that many people prior to Darwin *thought* that God's existence is compelling (which is true), to the claim that they were in fact rationally compelled to believe that God exists (which is false). As an addendum, I shall also argue that the hiddenness response works much better when PN, and not God's existence, is the proposition with respect to which God wants us to remain in PW.

First, Murray's remarks about those who accepted the theistic arguments prior to Darwin are somewhat overstated, and require qualification. It must be admitted that there were also many rational people who were not persuaded by the theistic arguments, even in ages when there was strong social pressure to endorse them. It is this social pressure that tends to obscure the historical situation for us, because it makes it much more difficult to discern what people really thought. This suggests that human beings generally were in PW, even with respect to God's existence, and that those who were so firmly persuaded that the theistic arguments are compelling had overestimated their strength (to the point of calling them "proofs," though even most theists today would withhold that title), perhaps because they were convinced from other, extra-rational evidences that God exists. The force of these extra-rational evidences (Pascal's "reasons of the heart") could easily lead someone to believe that they are rationally compelled, when in fact a sober assessment of one's epistemic situation with respect to the publically available empirical evidence would yield the conclusion that one is in PW. It should be noted that the defender of the hiddenness response must agree with Murray that it is unbelievable that free and effective choice was disabled for so many for so long. The hiddenness response defender contends that God generally wants people in PW with respect to His existence, and it follows from that that the free choice of the pre-Darwinites was not disabled. But the reason it was not disabled was because they were in PW, not because their freedom would remain in the face of rational compulsion.

Finally, Murray's claim that compelling evidence for a young earth would not overwhelm creaturely freedom leads us to another important distinction. Recall that Murray is responding to Miller and Corey, who had framed the hiddenness response in terms of remaining at an "epistemic distance" with respect to the *existence of God*. In this paper I have taken pains to point out that God, though He surely does want us in PW with respect to His existence, would also often want us in PW with respect to PN. And

it is that latter desire that more effectively grounds a “divine hiddenness” response. The presence of a creator who evidently creates a fully-formed universe within the last ten thousand years *would indeed* improperly overwhelm creaturely freedom with respect to PN, even though it would *not* improperly overwhelm creaturely freedom with respect to God’s existence. That is because we would still be left with questions regarding the attributes of the creator, and one could still reject the existence of *God* in favor of a creator with lesser attributes.³⁴ We would also be left with polytheism, pantheism and (today) panentheism as live options. But in such a world we would all be compelled to reject PN, including those who would otherwise want to embrace PN. And that is precisely what God does *not* want (or so I say). Though one might wonder whether being in PW with respect to PN is as important as being in PW with respect to God’s existence, we need not think that it is in order to continue to press the hiddenness response. We need only think that being in PW with respect to PN might be important enough to justify long ages of animal suffering, and once again it is at least reasonable to think that it might be.

Its importance becomes magnified when we recognize that in many cases rejecting PN from within PW is propaedeutic to embracing God’s existence from within PW. And for those who have no access to special revelation, or who have not had the time or resources necessary to form a clear idea of God, rejecting PN might be the closest they could come to embracing God’s existence. Or, perhaps rejecting PN can serve as a stand-in for a full belief in God’s existence in such cases. At the very least, it might serve as an indicator of what such an individual would believe in more favorable epistemic conditions. Or, perhaps God is anticipating an age when PN and full Theism are the only reasonable options left for most human beings, in which case rejecting PN for Pascal’s “reasons of the heart” rationally requires a corresponding embrace of God’s existence for those same “reasons of the heart.” If any of these speculations are correct, it is easier to see why God would take a special interest in ensuring that many, and perhaps most, human beings are in PW with respect to PN.

An objection not considered by Murray, but nevertheless worthy of attention, is that God managed to ensure that human beings generally remained in PW with respect to PN prior to the appearance of evolutionary biology and compelling evidence of a gradual creation. How did that happen, one might wonder, if He must create gradually just to ensure that we remain in PW with respect to PN? Here we must remember that general ignorance about natural history tends to place us *into* states of

³⁴This may be precisely what the apostle Paul is referring to in *Romans* 1:18–20, though he goes on to say that those who do this are “without excuse.” This passage might be taken to be teaching that no one is ever in PW with respect to God’s existence, but the context is a condemnation of idolatry. Hence it is better to regard Paul as addressing those who have rejected PN (perhaps from within PW), but then subsequently ignored forceful evidence that God, *if* He exists, is unified, eternal, omnipotent, etc. Thus the issue is no longer whether there was a creation, but what kind of god has created. It is unclear whether the language of the text implies that the evidence for the classical attributes of God is compelling.

epistemic ambiguity (like PW). This was the general condition of human beings prior to the development of a reliable science of biology. The *requirement* to create gradually applies only when there are human beings who live in an age that has developed such a science to a certain level of sophistication. But it is surely reasonable to think that God, in planning the world He would create, would anticipate (and indeed desire) that there would come a time when most human beings would live in such an age. And in order to place most of *those* human beings (which of course includes us) into PW with respect to PN, He must create gradually from the very beginning. The requirement to create gradually is a consequence of God's preparations for a world that would contain a reliable and sophisticated science of biology. In worlds without such a science, there is no such requirement because general ignorance of natural history is sufficient to place most human beings into PW with respect to PN. And if there is a suspicion that PN was not taken seriously prior to Darwin, it should be laid to rest immediately. Defenders of PN go back at least as far as Democritus, and have on occasion constituted enduring schools of philosophy (e.g., the Epicureans). Even the biblical book of *Ecclesiastes* temporarily adopts a naturalistic ("under the sun") perspective under the apparent assumptions that it is at least reasonable to hold that view, and that many people will be attracted to it, though indeed the author's ultimate purpose is to convince his readers to reject that perspective on the basis of the existential despair that inevitably results from it (see the above quotation from Russell).

We may conclude that the divine hiddenness response, understood as a desire on God's part to place human beings generally into an epistemic condition that we have called Pascal's Window, is still viable as a response to the problem of animal suffering. It is also worth exploring as a response to other biological versions of the problem of evil, and perhaps even to all versions of the problem of evil. But for this purpose it works best when we think of the rejection of PN as the "action" that God wants us to "perform" from within that state of epistemic ambiguity (as opposed to believing that He exists, though He also wants that). As a by-product, we have also gleaned a consequence of Theism that effectively neutralizes evolutionary biology (or any empirical evidence for a gradual creation) as evidence for PN, and may similarly neutralize any non-decisive evidence for PN. All these things are clearly desirable from a theistic perspective, and theists should not fail to avail themselves of them without very good reasons for doing so.³⁵

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