

GOD, ANIMALS AND ZOMBIES

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Resumen

Argumentos neo-cartesianos recientes intentan reducir los animales a zombis filosóficos, seres sin estados de conciencia fenoménica. Si tales argumentos fuesen correctos, los animales verdaderamente no sufrirían, y, por tanto, no existiría el problema de Dios y el sufrimiento animal. En mi opinión, la afirmación de que los animales son zombis no es suficientemente plausible para proporcionar una teodicea adecuada acerca del problema de Dios y el dolor animal.

Palabras clave: Dios, animales, conciencia, teodicea, problema del mal, derechos animales, dolor animal, sufrimiento animal, zombis.

Abstract

Recent Neo-Cartesian arguments attempt to reduce animals to philosophical zombies, beings without phenomenally conscious states. If these arguments are right, animals do not genuinely suffer, and so there can be no problem of God and animal suffering. I try that the claim that animals are zombies is insufficiently plausible to provide an adequate theodicy with respect to the problem of God and animal pain.

Keywords: God, animals, consciousness, theodicy, problem of evil, animal rights, animal pain, animal suffering, zombies.

Several years ago I wrote a couple of articles about God and animal pain.¹ I was struck by the fact it was the problem of animal suffering

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¹ Lynch, Joseph J., “Harrison and Hick on God and Animal Pain”, *Sophia*, 33 (3), 1994, 63-73; “Theodicy and Animal Pain”, *Between the Species*, 13 (2), 2002, <http://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/bts/vol13/iss2/4>.

that helped erode the faith of Charles Darwin. Why would a good and powerful God permit so much suffering for so long? It is of course a particularly challenging form of the standard problem of evil. On the Classical Theist picture, God is omnipotent, and thus is able to eliminate suffering, God is perfectly good and thus would want to eliminate suffering. But suffering exists. This challenge to Classical Theism has many familiar responses, and most of the more compelling ones involve, in some way, an appeal to human free will. Typically, the theist wants to maintain that while it's difficult for us to see, all the evils of suffering are necessary in order for God to bring about a greater good. But there are instances of intense suffering that seem, on the face of it anyway, to be gratuitous or *pointless*. A pointless evil is an evil that an omnipotent God could have eliminated without thereby losing a greater good or having to permit an evil equally bad or worse. William Rowe gave the compelling example of the suffering fawn:

Here we develop the argument by focusing on animal suffering: a fawn's being badly burned in a fire cause by lightning, and suffering terribly before death ends its life. Unlike humans, fawns are not credited with free will, and so the fawn's suffering cannot be attributed to misuse of free will. Why then would God permit it to happen when, if he exists, he could have so easily prevented it? It is generally admitted that we are simply unable to imagine any greater good whose realization can reasonably be thought to require God to permit that fawn's terrible suffering. And it hardly seems reasonable to suppose there is some greater evil God would have been unable to prevent had he not permitted that fawn's five days of suffering.²

The problem of animal suffering seems to be intractable. Millions of creatures have suffered throughout what Darwin called "almost endless time." The Christian writer C.S. Lewis observed that animals can "neither deserve pain, nor be improved by it."³ The power of Rowe's suffering fawn example is precisely that in that particular case, no good seems to come from this instance of pain and suffering. Of course animal pain generally might lead to some greater good. But it's worth noting even there that what is required to show that logically the greater good could not have been achieved without the relevant suffering. This is a difficult challenge for those who believe in an omnipotent God. Without omnipotence, you have, of course, a very different story. For human beings, many greater goods cannot be realized without bearing some evils. For example during

² Rowe, William, *Philosophy of Religion* Belmont: Wadsworth, 2007, p. 120.

³ Lewis, C. S., *The Problem of Pain*, New York: MacMillan, 1962, p. 129.

the Civil War, many soldiers had to have limbs amputated in order to save their lives. The greater good of a continued life could not be realized otherwise. But an omnipotent God, surely, could save the life, without sacrificing the limb. So, the case of animal suffering is particularly tough, because while perhaps not all animal suffering seems pointless, it's not clear that the goods that result from it could not have been realized without the suffering, *and* there so many cases, like Rowe's suffering fawn, where the suffering appears to be gratuitous or pointless.

In my earlier articles I focused on a few attempts to solve the problem of animal pain, such as those by John Hick,⁴ Peter Geach,⁵ and a few others to show that their attempts fail to reconcile God's unlimited power and goodness with animal pain. The number of theists writing on theodicy and animal pain was and is a pretty short list. While it must be acknowledged that these thinkers at least recognized that the problem of animal pain is indeed a problem, I wanted to show that none of these theodicies could really take animal pain seriously. In fact, the very attempt to explain animal suffering *away* from a Classical Theist point of view amounted to minimizing the importance of the experience of the animals themselves. But, there is a line of thought within philosophical theology that minimizes the suffering of animals much more than these approaches. This line of reasoning has a lineage that traces back to René Descartes.

1. Revenge of the Cartesians

Well, in doing this work I only mentioned in passing the notorious view of Descartes and its impact on Neo-Cartesianism. Descartes argued that because animals were allegedly incapable of talk, they were incapable of thought. And he is usually taken to be denying consciousness to animals on this basis. His Port Royal followers certainly did, as seen in this widely quoted eyewitness account:

They administered beatings to dogs with perfect indifference, and made fun of those who pitied the creatures as if they felt pain. They said the animals were clocks; that the cries they emitted when struck were only the noise of a little spring that had been touched, but that the whole body was without feeling. They nailed

⁴ Hick, John, *Evil and the God of Love*, New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

⁵ Geach, Peter, *Providence and Evil*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

the poor animals up on boards by their four paws to vivisect them and see the circulation of the blood which was a great subject of conversation.⁶

In any case, if Descartes were right, there is no real problem of animal suffering, because animals are not conscious beings. Animals are mere machines. That has struck nearly everyone as not only deeply counter-intuitive but also counter to our experience with animals. And for the most it went away. Several years ago Neo-Cartesianism reared its head again in the context of theodicy in the work of Peter Harrison.

The principle strategy in Harrison's work was to deny that animals (or infants) have sufficient continuity of consciousness for their experiences to count as genuinely conscious, and then to counter the standard arguments in favor of animal consciousness, physiological similarity between humans and other animals, and our shared evolutionary history. In other words, Harrison and other Neo-Cartesians, maintain that animal behavior can be accounted for entirely without animal consciousness. Since there is no logical inference from animal behaviors to animal consciousness, we are not compelled to attribute consciousness to animals. Animals may be more than machines, but without consciousness, it's hard to see that they are really much more. And without consciousness, it's not clear that they have any moral standing at all. If they don't really feel pain, they can't suffer. And if they can't suffer, there can be no pointless evil of animal suffering. The problem of God and animal pain simply disappears.

2. Animal Zombies

While for nearly everyone the claim that nonhuman animals lack any real consciousness at all seems so widely counter-intuitive, that we don't generally take such views seriously at all. I wrote a little bit about Harrison's argument a few years ago, and I must admit that I didn't take his neo-Cartesianism seriously either. My counter amounted to little more than an appeal to our deeply held intuitions that animals *must* be conscious. And indeed it is this fact that provides the basis for their moral standing. This is still my intuition now, but some recent discussion in contemporary philosophy of mind seems to provide ammunition for the Neo-Cartesian position.

⁶ Quoted in Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, New York: Avon Books, 1975.

One famous thought experiment is this. Imagine a world just like this one where all the same physical laws obtain, including those that give rise to the process of natural selection. But in this world, there are no conscious beings. Our human counterparts *seem* to be conscious but in reality they are not. They are in fact *zombies*. Not the sort of brain eating zombies, we see in movies, but beings just like us, except there is nothing that it is like to be one of those beings. They have no conscious states at all. Sure, if they stub a toe, they say “ouch” and may comment on the tastiness of vegan cuisine. They might even attend conferences and give papers on consciousness. But they experience nothing. Is Zombie world a possible world? It seems to many that it is. Of course *our* world is not Zombie world. But animals themselves may well in fact be zombies!

To say that animals could be zombies is not to say that they lack a mental life altogether. There are many types of mental states and processes one could rightly attribute to animals, but these are not properly conscious mental states. More precisely, if Ned Block is right, there is even a form of consciousness that animal zombies can have.⁷ Block has usefully defended the distinction between Access Consciousness and Phenomenal Consciousness. Access consciousness simply means that the mental representations are available for an individual to use in rational action or speech. Phenomenal consciousness is the subjective feel, having to do with qualitative experiences. When Thomas Nagel wrote, “What it’s Like to Be a Bat?” he assumed that there is *something* that it’s like to be a bat.⁸ That is to say, bats and other animals are *sentient* beings. They presumably have Phenomenal Consciousness as well. So, Neo-Cartesians can maintain that while many animals may have Access Consciousness, they do not necessarily have Phenomenal Consciousness. And it’s only Phenomenal Consciousness that counts from a moral point of view and with respect to the problem of God and animal pain. The Neo-Cartesian can appeal to all sorts of mental states and even conscious mental states (so long as they are not phenomenally conscious states) in explaining animal behavior. Animals would not have the sort of conscious mentality that matters morally or that makes the problem of animal pain a genuine problem.

⁷ Block, Ned J., “On a Confusion About the Function of Consciousness,” in Block, Ned J.; Flanagan, Owen J. and Güzeldere, Güven (eds.), *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 375-415.

⁸ Nagel’s essay is widely published, e.g. Nagel, Thomas, “What it’s Like to Be a Bat?,” in Block; Flanagan, and Güzeldere (eds.) *op. cit.*, 519-527.

One proponent of what I am calling the Animals As Zombies view is Michael Murray. Murray takes on the problem of animal suffering in a direct and comprehensive way, so it's worth describing his general strategy before addressing his defense of Neo-Cartesianism. The critic of theism argues that [1] If God exists there would be no gratuitous evil (e.g., animal suffering), [2] There is gratuitous suffering, [3] Therefore God does not exist. Murray acknowledges that a mere defense of Theism is insufficient. A defense would only show that the critic has failed to establish that Theism is unlikely due to the fact of animal suffering. That is the Theist could endorse [1] and deny [3] from which it follows that [2] is false. While such a defense may be successful, it provides no positive reasons to reconcile animal suffering with the existence of God. I'll come back to that position later on. On the other hand, according to Murray, a full theodicy, which would explain every instance of animal suffering, goes too far, because it seems unlikely that humans could possibly know every divine purpose. Murray argues for a kind of middle path, which he calls a *Causa Dei* (CD), a term he borrowed from Leibniz. A successful CD would show that we are not justified in believing animal suffering to be gratuitous and thus counting the suffering as evidence against God's existence – in the light of our justified acceptances. That is, the successful CD would undermine [2]. Murray then systematically analyzes several CDs, contending that at least some are successful, including the Neo-Cartesian approach.

In the first chapter of the book Murray provides three moral conditions that must be met for God to permit evil.

- A. The Necessity Condition: the good secured by the permission of the evil, E, could not have been secured without permitting either E or some evils morally equivalent to or worse than E.
- B. The Outweighing Condition: the good secured by the permission of the evil is sufficiently outweighing.
- C. The Rights Condition: it is within the rights of the one permitting the evil to permit it.

What sort of CDs could do this? Murray rejects a suggestion by David Lewis that the theist needs an explanation that is somewhat plausible to Christians and other theists. This sets the standard too high; the theist only need to invoke hypotheses, that are true as far as he or she knows, that is the hypotheses are as plausible as not. Murray thinks that Van Inwagen's standard is also too high. He claims that the theist needs "a story such that both God and the suffering contained in the actual world exist, and which it is such that...there is no reason to think it is false, a

story that is not surprising on the hypothesis that God exists.”⁹ Murray correctly observes that we regularly engage in reasoning which would fail to meet this standard; we do in fact have some reason to believe a claim is false, but we can still accept the claim in the light of the totality of other beliefs we have. Instead, he proposes that the theist needs to construct hypotheses that show that the evil in question meet conditions A through C, and that the theist “is not justified or warranted in rejecting in the light of what she justifiably accepts.”¹⁰

Ideally, the justifiable acceptances in the CDs would be held in common to theists and nontheists alike. Murray contends that many of the CDs contain explanations that “do not stand in tension with claims that would be accepted by those reasonably well-educated in contemporary philosophy and science.” Still, there may vast differences between what theists and nontheists justifiably accept, so the objectives of CDs can differ. The point of some is to show that the theist can defend the rationality of her belief in the face of evil; the point of others is to show that the non-theist is not justified in rejecting theism on the basis of evil. Still others, Murray claims, will do both. The CDs that purportedly can undermine the evidential argument from evil by showing that the non-theist is not justified in rejecting theism on the basis of animal suffering are of particular interest. If it turns out that all a CD can do is offer epistemic comfort for the theist; i.e., theism is defensible only because the theist can maintain rationality given what she but not the non-theist accepts, it’s hard to see how the CD could be called a success at all. Indeed it would be hard to distinguish a CD from a mere defense. But again, Murray contends some of the CDs have enough force to demonstrate that atheism cannot be defended on the grounds of appealing to gratuitous evil.

The overall strategy that Murphy employs seems compelling, and to his credit he examines in rich detail many possible approaches to the problem of animal suffering and theism. However he contends that the Neo-Cartesian approach is in fact successful alone (indeed if it is, the other CD would clearly be superfluous). He rightly recognizes that most will not be convinced of this and therefore defends some other more plausible approaches as well. I am among those who are completely unconvinced by the Neo-Cartesian approach. In general the contention

⁹ Murray, Michael J., *Nature: Red In Tooth & Claw*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 38.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

seems to be that given our acceptances, we are not justified in rejecting the claim that animals lack phenomenal consciousness. And without phenomenal consciousness, there can be no awareness of pain. Clearly without awareness of pain, there just is no problem of animal suffering. There is no *reason* given for the permission of animal suffering; instead, the Neo-Cartesian approach is simply to deny this is a genuine problem at all. It could be claimed that the neo-Cartesian approach would just give rise to a new problem – why does it *seem* to almost everyone that animals are conscious and can feel pain, if in fact they cannot? To his credit, Murray observes that there are evolutionary explanations for the disposition to believe in the consciousness of other beings whether they are in fact conscious or not. Anthropomorphisms have a survival value to be sure, but it does not explain why an omnipotent omnibenevolent God would instantiate a world that *appears* to contain gratuitous evil. The problem of apparent evil is still a problem. Still, if the Neo-Cartesian argument is successful, the initial problem of animal pain ceases to be a genuine problem.

3. Why Animals Are Allegedly Zombies But Human Animals Aren't

The task of a Neo-Cartesian, like Descartes himself, is to show that it is plausible to say that animals are zombies, but not plausible to say this of human beings. After all, one only has direct access to one's own conscious states. Perhaps I should conclude that everyone is a zombie but me. Descartes famously argued that only the use of language was sufficient to prove the presence of thought. While there are some defenders of a view that links thought to language alone, few follow Descartes in denying consciousness to animals on this basis.¹¹ A Neo-Cartesian, like Murray, needs to clarify precisely what it is that makes humans and humans alone have subjective mental states.

Recall that the standard for success is fairly low. Neo-Cartesianism need only be shown to be as plausible as not, given what we know. The Cartesian picture can be supported by drawing the distinction between Access consciousness and Phenomenal consciousness, as we have seen.

¹¹ For example Davidson, Donald, "Thought and Talk", in Guttenplan, Samuel (ed.), *Mind and Language: Wolfson College Lectures 1974* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1975, 7-23. Davidson makes clear he does not intend to deny conscious mental states to animals, however.

A robot could access its various cognitive states; avoid noxious stimuli, etc. while having no phenomenally conscious states at all. There need be nothing that it is like to be that robot. What then would make a mental state phenomenally conscious? Murray, like many others,¹² is sympathetic to what is called the HOT theory, which he describes as follows:

For a mental state to be a conscious state (phenomenally) requires an accompanying higher-order mental state (a HOT) that has that state as its intentional object. The HOT must be thought that one is, oneself, in that first-order state. Only humans have the cognitive faculties required to form the conception of themselves being in a first-order state that one must have in order to have a HOT.¹³

Thus, one can maintain that animals have a rich mental life, including having pain states, and recognize that these states can be accessed in the cognitive economy of individuals, playing a causal role in their behaviors, while at the same time holding that animals do not have the higher order mental states that would make them aware of the other mental states. So, they could actually be in pain, but since they don't have the mental capacity to represent themselves as being in pain, their pain is phenomenally nonconscious.

Of course HOT is not the only theory in town. There are those who argue for Higher Order Perception Theories (HOP).¹⁴ There is no consensus on which of these approaches is more plausible.¹⁵ Generally, HOP theories are more amenable to animal consciousness, but Murray holds that it is not reasonable to expect that nonhuman animals could have higher order states of any sort. There are, however, theories that restrict consciousness to first order states and other theories that identify consciousness with inner perceptual states. This is not the place to argue the theories out, but all other things being equal, inasmuch as a given theory requires me

¹² See especially Carruthers, Peter, *Phenomenal Consciousness: A Naturalistic Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Carruthers details this account with respect to animals in Carruthers, Peter, "Brute Experience," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 86 (5), 1989, 437-453. Other proponents of HOT theory include Dennett, Daniel, *Consciousness Explained*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1991, and Rosenthal, David, "Two Concepts of Consciousness", *Philosophical Studies*, 49 (3), 329-359.

¹³ Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

¹⁴ E.g., Armstrong, David, *A Materialist Theory of the Mind*, New York: Humanities Press, 1968, Churchland, Paul, "Reduction, Qualia, and the Direct Introspection of Brain States," *Journal of Philosophy*, 82 (1), 1985, 8-28, and Lycan, William, *Consciousness*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987.

¹⁵ See the discussion by Güzeldere, Güven, "Is Consciousness the Perception of What Passes in One's Own Mind?", in Block; Flanagan and Güzeldere (eds.), *op. cit.*, 789-806.

to abandon a deeply entrenched intuition about reality, I may have to give up my intuition, but I may also abandon the deeply counter-intuitive theory, due to its implausible implications. This is especially so, given that there are defensible theoretical alternatives.¹⁶

It's not obvious that HOT or similar theories really explain phenomenal consciousness. That is they don't seem to explain what David Chalmers calls the "Hard Problem" of consciousness.¹⁷ HOT and HOP are getting at a kind of introspective consciousness to be sure, but it's not clear exactly how a higher mental state brings about a state with a subjective feel. After all, one could have an artificially designed system with higher order states directed toward lower order states, as a sort of monitoring process of all the states of that system. While this system would be sophisticated indeed, it's not obvious that there would be anything that it is like to be that system. If this is right, HOT theories do not explain the nature of consciousness at all.

Still, if a version of HOT theory is the only theory available, one can choose between a reading of HOT that allows attribution of conscious states to animal (why *not* attribute higher states to them?) or one could start with what is obviously true – many nonhuman animals have conscious states. If HOT implies they don't, then I'll reject HOT, even though I don't yet have a suitable alternative. But why take it as obvious that animals are conscious? First there's the behavioral evidence. The pain behaviors of many animals are similar to our own. In most cases, the pain behavior warrants the attribution of a conscious pain state in the human case, and should do so for animals as well. Secondly, at least for some animals, there are physiological similarities--anatomical similarities between humans and other animals, the fact that many animals have endogenous pain control systems, and the observation that analgesics and anesthetics work on many animals in just the way they work on human beings, all suggest that many animals actually feel their pains. It seems likely that the experience of conscious pain arose in our evolutionary history and conferred a distinctive advantage. Of course, none of this amounts to proof, as Murray or any Epiphenomenalist would quickly point out. It's possible to have the physiological similarities, for evolution to work without Phenomenal Consciousness. But it does show that Neo-Cartesian

¹⁶ For a concise overview of arguments for and against animal consciousness, see Allen, Colin and Bekoff, Marc, "Animal Consciousness", in Velmans, Max and Schenedier, Susan (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, 58-71.

¹⁷ Chalmers, David, *The Conscious Mind*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

argument must be very strong indeed. Murray only needed to show that the Neo-Cartesian position is as plausible as not, given our acceptances. And in spite of his detailed account of recent work in cognitive ethology, and his attempts to deflect objections to the strategy, he has not done this.

If we accept the neo-Cartesian view of phenomenal consciousness, we must also accept that infants and severely mentally handicapped human beings do not feel pain, for they would not have the capacity to have the requisite higher order mental states to be phenomenally conscious. Perhaps, as Murray suggests, harming animals is morally objectionable on other grounds, but torturing animals, infants, or severely mentally defective human beings is not even possible. If infants can feel pain, HOT or similar theories are false.

The skeptical argument of Neo-Cartesianism seems to run something like this; because it's *possible* that certain creaturely actions can be accounted for without appealing to consciousness, it's *reasonable* to conclude they didn't (because of HOT, etc.) That type of reasoning doesn't work generally, and it won't work here. It may be possible that I don't sweeten my coffee, but whether or not it's reasonable to claim I don't will depend on examining the actual evidence. Naturally, the evidence in the case of animal consciousness is difficult to come by. But given that no one has yet discovered a consciousness lobe or structure in the brain, we can also account for human behavior with Access Consciousness alone. That's why it's so easy to think of androids, robots, or zombies behaving just like us without any phenomenal states at all. Neo-Cartesian arguments that make animals into zombies can do the same for us. The problem of animal consciousness is a special case of the problem of other minds. It may seem possible to doubt the conscious states of other beings, but possibility does not entail "as plausible as not, given our justified acceptances."

4. Do Zombies Have Moral Standing?

Before concluding the chapter on neo-Cartesianism, Murray attempts to account for the obvious ethical worries associated with seriously holding that animals are not phenomenally conscious of their pain states. Why not "torture" animals if they are not really feeling pain? Animals seem to lie outside the sphere of moral consideration, if the neo-Cartesian view is true. Murray discusses two approaches that would generate human obligations to animals. One is the Kantian approach. Kant argued that cruelty to animals is wrong because it is likely to lead to cruelty to human beings.

So, the obligation to be kind to animals is not really an obligation to them, but to other human beings. The only wrongness in tormenting an animal is that it is likely that I may do the same to a human being. What seems to be missing is a theory that shows that animals have inherent worth in themselves. But it's hard, given the neo-Cartesian view, to see how they can have such moral worth, given that their cognitive modesty prevents them from being either proper moral agents or even subjects. So, Murray suggests a second distinctively Christian approach.

The moral significance of animals may be, Murray asserts, that they are a part of the natural world, which has intrinsic worth because it is a divine creation. So, on this view it *might* be wrong to harm some animals in the way that it might be wrong to destroy a forest. The details about what actually is wrong would have to be worked out in an adequate theory. The difficulty here is that it's easy to imagine the marginal cases of human beings in similar ways. If the neo-Cartesian view is correct, then severely retarded human beings cannot suffer. They can however still be within the sphere of moral consideration if we follow a Kantian suggestion that harming them might lead to harming non-retarded human beings, or if we say the wrongness of tormenting a severely retarded human is because they, like a tree, have intrinsic worth as a part of God's creation. The problem in these cases, as with animals, is that we have good reason to think that the real reason it's wrong to cause harm to animals or severely retarded humans is precisely that they do suffer. We do not discourage the torture of marginal human beings on the grounds that such torture may lead to the torture of nonmarginal human beings. Nor would we condemn this practice because marginal human beings, while nonsentient, have value by being a part of the created world.

Imagine similar arguments being put forward against the abuse of slaves in the American South in the mid nineteenth century. One could have argued that while the abused slaves do not actually *feel* their blows, it is nevertheless wrong to beat them so badly, for such behavior could lead to the abuse of fully conscious white slave owners and others. Furthermore, slaves are, after all, part of God's creation, and marring God's creation is just wrong. While this gets to the desired conclusion, i.e., it's wrong to abuse slaves, it is still a bad argument to a good conclusion. The wrongness of the abuse and indeed the enslavement of these individual consists in the harm suffered directly by them. Similarly, Murray's argument, which in effect says, "Don't worry, denying consciousness to animals need have disastrous moral effects with respect to our treatment of animals," provides moral considerability for animals but for the wrong reasons.

Indeed, the intuition that makes the moral result of Neo-Cartesianism seem disastrous in the first place is the very intuition that Neo-Cartesianism seeks to overcome – that many nonhuman animals do in fact suffer and that causing such suffering without a compelling reason is wrong.

5. Animals and Skepticism

There are other CDs or theodicies to bring to bear on the problem of God and animal pain. And Murray's work on many them is both extensive and admirable. Here I just wanted to focus on the Neo-Cartesian approach that reduces animals to zombies. That approach, like that of Descartes, fails. Perhaps other approaches discussed by Murray or by Van Inwagen will shed light on the problem.¹⁸ But I doubt it. Ultimately, it seemed to me when I first wrote on animals and theodicy, and still does now, that the best theistic response, inasmuch as the theist wishes to maintain both the omnipotence and perfect goodness of God is to insist that there must in fact be a good reason why God permits the suffering of the fawn and other animals, even though human beings don't know what that reason is. This can be called Skeptical Theism. It just doesn't follow from the fact that we can't see what greater good results from the suffering of the fawn that there is no greater good. The theist is confident, however, that there *is*. Naturally, the critic of theism will remain unconvinced. Even so, the skeptics who appeal to animal suffering will not undermine the defensibility of the classical theist's position. And there's the added advantage that because the theist isn't getting into the whole business of explaining animal pain, she won't risk minimizing the impact of the suffering of animals. Of course as I said earlier, the theist could also revise her or his account of God. If God is not omnipotent, the problem of evil takes on a rather different character. But given the assumption of divine omnipotence, and given the recognition of evil of suffering for the animals themselves, I can conclude that the best responses are versions of Skepticism. If one has some reason to believe in God, given the problem of animal pain, Skeptical Theism appears to be a defensible position. If one does not have reasons for theistic belief, the problem of animal pain justifies Skepticism about theism.

¹⁸ van Inwagen, Peter, *The Problem of Evil*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.