# The Limits of Skeptical Theism

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Skeptical theists contend that human cognitive limitations undermine atheistic arguments from evil. One recent challenge to skeptical theism has been posed by Climenhaga (2025), who argues that if we should—as some skeptical theists argue—be agnostic about the probability of the total collection of evils we observe given theism, $Pr(E|T)$, we should also be agnostic about the probability of theism given these evils, $Pr(T|E)$, and therefore be agnostic with respect to God's existence. If one is persuaded, as I am, that Climenhaga's argument is correct, the most promising skeptical theist response available seems to be one of mitigation: concede that $Pr(E|T)$ is *not* inscrutable—and thereby concede skeptical theism cannot undermine arguments from the total collection of observable evils to the nonexistence of God— but maintain that skeptical theism is still able to undermine *other* Bayesian problems of evil; namely, those which argue from some individual instance of observable evil to the nonexistence of God. However, as I will argue, this mitigation strategy is not viable: if $Pr(E_i|T)$ is inscrutable, where $Pr(E_i|T)$ is the probability of any individual instance of observable evil occurring given theism, so too is $Pr(E|T)$ correspondingly inscrutable. Therefore, absent demonstrating Climenhaga to be incorrect, skeptical theism cannot undermine *any* Bayesian arguments from evil.

Intuitively, the existence of evil is evidence against the existence of God. For just as a paradisal world "of pleasures with no pain, of goods with no evil" would seemingly be evidence for the existence of God, the presence of evil in our world seemingly is evidence against the existence of God (Benton, Hawthorne, & Isaacs 2016: 4).[1] By evil being evidence against the existence of God, I mean the Bayesian argument that some evidence *EV* is less likely given theism than naturalism and therefore lowers the probability of theism with respect to *EV*.[2] Isolating evidence in this way to assess its individual evidential impact on a

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hypothesis is ubiquitous practice in Bayesian reasoning and thus should be unproblematic for current purposes.

Skeptical theism is a family of responses to the problem(s) of evil which, as the name suggests, appeal to skeptical considerations to undermine these problems. As it relates to Bayesian arguments from evil specifically, several proponents of skeptical theism have argued that we are "in the dark about" Pr(E|T): the probability ("Pr") of evil ("E") given theism ("T") (Bergmann 2009; Van Inwagen 1991). That is, we are "not in a position to assign any epistemic probability to S on theism" where "S" is "a proposition that describes in some detail the amount, kinds, and distribution of suffering—the suffering not only of human beings, but of all the sentient terrestrial creatures that there are or ever have been" (Van Inwagen 1991: 141, 137). Following this understanding then, it seems that what is meant by Pr(E|T) is something like "the probability of the total collection of evils we observe in the actual world given theism." This understanding of Pr(E|T) will carry through the remainder of this essay. If we are "in the dark about" Pr(E|T)—that is, Pr(E|T) is inscrutable; we have no idea what it is—this has significant consequences for a Bayesian argument against the existence of God based upon "E," the total collection of observable evils. For if one cannot assign *any* value to Pr(E|T), one cannot conclude that the total collection of evils we observe lowers the probability of theism and therefore cannot conclude that the collection of evils we observe is evidence against the existence of God.

As Climenhaga (2025) has demonstrated, affirming that Pr(E|T) is inscrutable has significant consequences for the proponent of this sort of skeptical theism. For clearly if we cannot assign any value to Pr(E|T), then Pr(T|E)— the probability of theism given the collection of evils we observe—will also be inscrutable to us:

$$Pr(T|E) = \frac{Pr(T)Pr(E|T)}{Pr(T)Pr(E|T) + Pr(\sim T)Pr(E|\sim T)}$$

Even if Pr(E|T) is inscrutable, it necessarily falls within the range of 0 and 1 since all probabilities necessarily do so. Holding fixed the other probabilities, Pr(T|E) will correlatively increase alongside increases in Pr(E|T) from 0 to 1. But if Pr(E|T) inscrutably falls between 0 and 1, then Pr(T|E) also inscrutably falls between 0 and 1.[3] Were this inscrutability response offered by skeptical

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3. At least given the lowest value Pr(T) can be is 0 and the highest is 1. A referee wondered how much the force of this line of reasoning depends upon taking the interval of uncertainty for Pr(E|T) to be [0, 1]. Were the interval of uncertainty instead [ε, 1-ε] where ε is non-zero but *very* small, then there would no longer be a guaranteed symmetry between the intervals of uncertainty for Pr(E|T) and Pr(T|E). And in defense of this position, one might argue—following

theists correct, this would mean once we observe any evil and thereby obtain evidence that there is some total collection of observable evils "E,"[4] "we cannot tell whether theism is probable" (Climenhaga 2025: 201) *even when* the total evidence for theism is considered. This is because any Bayesian calculation as to the probability of theism given the total evidence which includes "E" will still necessitate a value assignment for Pr(E|T).[5]

If Climenhaga's argument is correct—it is difficult to see how it is not—then clearly skeptical theists, if they are to remain theists and not become agnostics, should reject inscrutability with respect to Pr(E|T). That is, skeptical theists should reject:

> PE-SKEPTICISM: The most we can tell about Pr(E|T) is that it is somewhere between 0 and 1 (Climenhaga 2025: 196).

In rejecting PE-SKEPTICISM, however, skeptical theists thereby concede that E may, after all, be evidence against the existence of God.

Doubtless this is an unsavory concession for skeptical theists but, so the skeptical theist might argue, there may yet be ways to make this concession more palatable. After all, conceding that E may be evidence against the existence of God by conceding that Pr(E|T) is not inscrutable does not entail that E *is* evidence against the existence of God, just that skeptical theism cannot be employed to prevent a value being assigned to Pr(E|T). And, so the skeptical theist might argue, this is consistent with thinking skeptical theism can still be employed to block *other* Bayesian arguments from evil from succeeding; namely, those which argue from some individual instance of observable evil to the nonexistence of God, e.g., Rowe-style cases. Therefore, while skeptical

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Climenhaga's suggestion (2025, fn 13)—that Plantinga (1974) *has* shown that E is not inconsistent with theism and therefore the lower bound of Pr(E|T) cannot be zero. Per Climenhaga (2025: fn 13), the problem with this sort of response is that while designating the lower bound of Pr(E|T) as non-zero would rule out Pr(T|E) being zero, it would not rule out Pr(T|E) being arbitrarily close to 0, *regardless of* the rest of one's evidence. Therefore, so long as the skeptical theist maintains that Pr(E|T) is almost completely inscrutable—Pr(E|T) is not 0, but otherwise inscrutable—problems remain for their theistic commitments.

4. This understanding of "E" will carry through the remainder of this paper.

5. Letting "S" represent the total remaining evidence, Climenhaga's conclusion can be seen as follows:

$$Pr(T|E \& S) = \frac{Pr(T)Pr(E|T)Pr(S|T \& E)}{Pr(T)Pr(E|T)Pr(S|T \& E) + Pr(\sim T)Pr(E|\sim T)Pr(S|\sim T \& E)}$$

If the lower bound for Pr(E|T) is 0 then the lower bound for Pr(T|E&S) will remain 0, regardless of additional evidence, since both any number multiplied by 0 and 0 divided by any number is 0. Therefore, any additional evidence cannot increase Pr(T|E&S) as the lower bound for Pr(T|E) and Pr(T|E&S) are equally 0.

theism may not be able to stymie *all* Bayesian arguments from evil, skeptical theism can still stymie *many*.[6]

As I will demonstrate, this is incorrect. Skeptical theists *cannot* reject PE-SKEPTICISM absent also rejecting the related skeptical thesis which otherwise stymies any Bayesian argument from an individual instance of evil to the nonexistence of God from succeeding:

> PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM: The most we can tell about $\Pr(E_i|T)$, where $E_i$ is any individual instance of evil, is that it is somewhere between 0 and 1.

Therefore, skeptical theists, in addition to rejecting PE-SKEPTICISM, are committed to rejecting PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM if they are to remain theists. The problem, however, is that skeptical theists seem committed to *endorsing* PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM, regardless of their commitments to PE-SKEPTICISM. And while rejecting PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM allows the skeptical theist to avoid agnosticism, it comes at the rather significant theoretical cost of having to concede that, absent demonstrating Climenhaga's argument to be incorrect, skeptical theism is unworkable for undermining *any* Bayesian arguments from evil.

My argument will proceed as follows. First, I will seek to establish why an *endorsement* of PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM plausibly follows from core skeptical theist commitments. Then, I will demonstrate why an endorsement of PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM rationally commits one to an endorsement of PE-SKEPTICISM. Therefore, one cannot deny PE-SKEPTICISM if one endorses PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM. Thus, given the aforementioned consequences of Climenhaga's argument, the only rational option for the skeptical theist is to deny both PE-SKEPTICISM *and* PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM. I will conclude by noting the implications of this denial.

## 1. Skeptical Theism and PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM

What reasons are there for thinking that skeptical theists would endorse PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM? Here I will incorporate skeptical theist responses to Rowe's evidential problem of evil to sketch one route by which the skeptical theist would arrive at an endorsement of PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM with the caveat that this is but one of several possible skeptical theist routes to arrive at such an endorsement.[7] In order

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6. Some skeptical theists seemingly concede this already. For instance, Perrine and Wykstra (2017: 86–87) note that what is essential to skeptical theism is that skeptical theism "takes the steam out of *many* evidential arguments from evil against theism on offer" (emphasis mine). However, in agreement with Oliveira (2020: 322 fn 6), Perrine and Wykstra's "moderate" skeptical theism (2014: 159) seems to be a minority position amongst skeptical theists.

7. For instance, if one thinks God's ethical constraints are, contra Rowe, not consequentialist in nature but instead deontological, and therefore the question of what value to assign $\Pr(E_i|T)$ is

to accomplish this, I will begin by examining the skeptical underpinnings of skeptical theism and then explicate how they are typically brought to bear to undermine Rowe's evidential problem of evil.

Hendricks (2020) has recently offered an argument for the truth of the skepticism which undergirds the skeptical theist position, which he calls "The Preclusion Argument" (PA):

1. For any event we know of, we have no good reason for thinking that there are not inscrutable states of affairs connected to the event.
2. Therefore, for any event we know of, we have no good reason to think that the states of affairs we know are connected to the event are representative in respect to value of the actual states of affairs connected to the event.
3. Therefore, skepticism (We have no good reason to think that the goods and evils that we know are connected to some individual instance of evil, $E_i$, are representative, in respect to value, of the actual goods and evils that are connected to the $E_i$ in question).[8]

I will assume, as Hendricks does, that skeptical theists should endorse PA. As to how PA undermines Rowe's problem of evil, consider Rowe's (1979) paradigm instance of purportedly gratuitous evil: a fawn being burned alive in a forest fire. Within the dialectic of Rowe's argument, an evil is considered gratuitous if it is not connected to, and necessary for, some set of states of affairs that outweighs it. God—a morally perfect being—would, per the argument, only be morally justified in allowing an individual instance of evil, $E_i$, *iff* the *total* value of the set of states of affairs that are produced by the $E_i$ is greater than the total value of the set of states of affairs that would have obtained had the $E_i$ not occurred; that is, if the $E_i$ is not gratuitous (Hendricks 2020: 265). If *any* $E_i$ is gratuitous—as Rowe thinks the fawn's being burned alive is—then God would not be morally justified in allowing its occurrence and therefore would not be morally perfect and therefore would not exist.

The difficulty for Rowe's argument, however, is that in order to determine whether *any* $E_i$ is gratuitous and thereby determine whether God would be morally justified in allowing any $E_i$'s occurrence, one would need to determine the *total* value of the set of states of affairs produced by the $E_i$ in question. But per

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not a question of our knowledge of the consequences of a given action but is instead a question of our knowledge of how God would weigh the various possible justifying and requiring reasons for permitting a given action, it still seems that skeptical theist responses to the latter of these questions would lead to an endorsement of PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM. See Hendricks (2023a) for a defense of deontological skeptical theism.

8. I have slightly modified Hendricks' premises (272) to fit the presentation of the argument offered here.

PA, we cannot do this: the total value of the set of states of affairs produced by any $E_i$ is inscrutable to us. And if the total value of the set of states of affairs produced by any $E_i$ is inscrutable, one cannot infer whether any $E_i$ is gratuitous and therefore cannot infer the nonexistence of God from the occurrence of any $E_i$. I take this to be a standard skeptical theist understanding of how skeptical theism undermines Rowe's evidential problem of evil.

As to how this conclusion supports an endorsement of PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM, consider the following (what will prove to be problematic) line of thought. Not knowing the set of states of affairs which obtains as a result of any $E_i$'s occurrence, one cannot determine whether any $E_i$ is gratuitous and therefore cannot determine whether any $E_i$ is such that God would be morally justified in allowing its occurrence. But if one cannot determine whether any $E_i$ is such that God would be morally justified in allowing its occurrence, one cannot determine how likely it is that any $E_i$ would occur given theism, as the likelihood of any $E_i$ occurring given theism very much depends upon whether the $E_i$ in question is such that God would be morally justified in allowing its occurrence. If it is the case—as is supposed within Rowe's argument—that God would only be morally justified in allowing an $E_i$ if the $E_i$ in question is *not* gratuitous, then $\Pr(E_i|T)$ where $E_i$ is a gratuitous evil is 0.[9] But if, as follows from PA, it is ultimately inscrutable as to whether or not any evil $E_i$ is gratuitous, then $\Pr(E_i|T)$ for *every* individual instance of evil $E_i$ is correspondingly inscrutable: we do not know how likely the evil in question is given theism because we do not know whether the evil in question is gratuitous or not.

One might resist this latter inference by arguing that while it may be inscrutable as to whether any $E_i$ is gratuitous, the probability that any $E_i$ is gratuitous—and, correspondingly, $\Pr(E_i|T)$ for the evil in question—need not be. Whatever one might think of such a line of argument, it does *not* seem to be one the skeptical theist is liable to endorse.[10] For, following Oliveira (2020: 327), if a) one can assign a likelihood to evils being gratuitous, and b) there are evils which seem more-likely-than-not gratuitous, then the size of a large collection of likely-gratuitous evils itself provides sufficient evidence for thinking that the collection contains at least one gratuitous evil.[11] Assuming, as seems plausible, that given

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9. Though the belief that the existence of God is incompatible with the existence of gratuitous evil is so widespread that Jordan (2003: 236) dubs it the "Standard Claim," a growing minority of philosophers reject it (see Hasker 1992; Van Inwagen 2006; Almeida 2012; Mooney 2019, amongst others).

10. This is an understatement. As skeptical theists *explicitly* deny the inference from "not knowing whether God is justified in allowing an instance of evil" to "probably God is not justified in allowing the instance of evil," and the latter is—within the context of Rowe's argument—synonymous with "probably the evil in question is gratuitous," it seems skeptical theists are committed to the probability of any $E_i$ being gratuitous being inscrutable. See Hendricks (2020: 265).

11. Strictly speaking, Oliveira's argument is with regard to a collection of "apparently pointless" evils. However, as gratuitous evils are pointless evils, I take it that "apparently pointless" evils can be represented probabilistically as more-likely-than-not gratuitous.

(a) and (b), the size of the collection of likely-gratuitous evils *would* be very large, then the consequence of conceding that the probability of any $E_i$ being gratuitous is *not* inscrutable is that skeptical theism could be true and yet *not* undermine the very problem it has developed in response to—Rowe's evidential problem of evil. However, seeing as skeptical theists *do* think, contra Oliveira, skeptical theism undermines Rowe's evidential problem of evil, I take it that skeptical theists would endorse the inference from the inscrutability of any $E_i$ being gratuitous to the conclusion that $\Pr(E_i|T)$ for any $E_i$ is inscrutable; that is, PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to guard against misunderstanding by making explicit what PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM does and does not commit one to. PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM amounts to the claim that for any arbitrarily chosen instance of evil, the likelihood of that instance of evil occurring given theism is inscrutable in virtue of one's lack of knowledge over whether God has a morally justifying reason for allowing the evil's occurrence. PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM does not commit one to taking a stance on whether every instance of evil is independent conditional on theism, nor does it commit one to taking a stance on whether God would be required to have independent justification for his allowance of each individual instance of evil. Therefore, if Seachris and Zagzebski (2007) are correct[12] in thinking that if God had a morally justifying reason for allowing some specific instance of evil, that justification could also apply to relevantly similar instances of evil, that would have no bearing on PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM. PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM follows from a skepticism as to one's knowledge of whether God would be justified in allowing any specific instance of evil; regardless of whether that justification is for God's allowance of one individual instance of evil or for God's allowance of all relevantly similar instances of evil.

## 2. From PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM to PE-SKEPTICISM

While it seems skeptical theists would endorse PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM, clearly they would want to avoid an endorsement of PE-SKEPTICISM given the agnostic consequences which, per Climenhaga, follow from such an endorsement. The problem, however, is that if skeptical theists endorse PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM, they are implicitly committed to endorsing PE-SKEPTICISM. If, for any individual evil within the total collection of observable evils, the probability of that evil occurring given theism is inscrutable, the probability of the total collection of observable evils occurring given theism cannot but be inscrutable.

To begin, consider the collection of observable evils E which consists of the specific individual evils, $E_1$ and $E_2$ and … $E_n$. It seems that there is an intimate

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12. See also Otte (2013).

relationship between the probability of, and the knowability of the probability of, a collection of evils, and the individual evils within that collection, such that the probability of individual contents within a collection impacts the probability of the totality of the collection, given theism. For example, consider a possible world with copious amounts of evil and in which *all* of the evils within it exclusively are brutally violent acts against children. Intuitively, were such a world actual, one would say Pr(E|T) is very low. But one would seemingly make this judgment of Pr(E|T) being low because Pr($E_i$|T) where the individual instance of evil $E_i$ is a brutally violent act against a child is intuitively low. In other words, knowledge of the likelihood of individual cases of evil occurring given theism informs our knowledge of the likelihood of collections of such cases occurring given theism: we can intuitively know that a world which contained copious amounts of evil and in which *all* of the evils within it exclusively are brutally violent acts against children is unlikely given theism *because* brutally violent acts against children, considered on an individual level, do not at all seem to be the sort of thing an omni-God would seek to include in their world actualization given how bad these evils are. The likelihood of these evils occurring given theism is a function of their, for lack of a better word, badness: the worse an evil seems, the more unlikely its occurrence seems given theism. This is the basic intuition which gives force to Rowe's evidential problem of evil. Hence why Rowe famously focuses on a fawn being burned alive in a forest fire instead of a toe-stubbing. *And* hence why skeptical theists deny a judgment as to the net badness of this evil.

Therefore, it seems to be the case that however one assigns a value to Pr(E|T), one will need to do so in such a way as to account for the specific contents which make up the collection, E. Assuming, as seems plausible, that any individual evil within the collection of observable evils is not independent conditional on theism,[13] one plausible way of assigning a value for Pr(E|T) is as follows:

$$\Pr(E|T) = \Pr(E_1|T)\,\Pr(E_2|E_1 \,\&\, T)\dots\ \Pr(E_n | E_1 \,\&\, E_2 \,\&\dots E_n \,\&\, T)$$

Quite clearly, if this understanding of Pr(E|T) is correct, then if the skeptical theist endorses PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM, they are correspondingly committed to the probability of *any* collection of evils given theism being inscrutable. In which case, an endorsement of PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM commits one to an endorsement of PE-SKEPTICISM. Therefore, per Climenhaga, those who endorse PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM should not be theists but agnostics.

Whether or not this particular construal of Pr(E|T) is correct does not seem to matter so much as what this construal correctly captures; namely, that in order

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13. To be clear, the argument is unaffected if every $E_i$ is independent conditional on theism, for if they are, then: $\Pr(E|T) = \Pr(E_1|T)\,\Pr(E_2|T)\dots\Pr(E_n|T)$ and Pr(E|T) is still inscrutable if one endorses PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM.

to assign a value to Pr(E|T), one seemingly needs to do so in such a way as to account for *at least some* of the specific contents which make up the collection, E.

In order for the skeptical theist to avoid this agnostic consequence, the intimate relationship between the probability of a collection and the probability of the individual contents within the collection needs to be severed, such that one can make a probabilistic judgment as to the likelihood of a collection of evils occurring given theism, despite their not having a clue as to the likelihood of *any* individual instances of evil within the collection occurring given theism. To continue the above example, one could know that in a world in which all of the evils within it exclusively were brutally violent acts against children, Pr(E|T) is low given how bad the collection of evils is. This, despite one's total ignorance—given the inscrutability of Pr($E_i$|T) for each of the instances of evil within the collection—as to whether any instance of evil within the collection is the sort of thing an omni-God would seek to include in their world actualization. Quite simply, if such an understanding of Pr(E|T) exists, it remains to be seen what it is.

In the absence of such an understanding of Pr(E|T), in endorsing PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM, skeptical theists are rationally committed to endorsing PE-SKEPTICISM and therefore, per Climenhaga, should not be theists, but agnostics. To address a likely objection, skeptical theists cannot avoid this conclusion by appeal to the Paradox of the Preface (PP) (see Makinson 1965). PP is the paradox one encounters in reading a preface of a book in which, after acknowledging how the work benefitted from the insight and feedback of others, the author says something along the lines of, "all remaining mistakes are solely attributable to the author"; this despite the fact that the author, we can presume, believes every claim they made within the book is correct. In other words, the author simultaneously believes that every individual claim they made within the book is correct and also that the collection of claims within the book contains at least one error.

The objection then, would go something like this: PP seems to be a concrete example whereby one is rationally able to make a probabilistic prediction about a whole collection—namely, the collection of claims within the book either definitely or very likely does contain at least one error—which seems to be independent of any probabilistic predictions of individual instances within the collection being errors. So, despite the author's belief that each individual claim within the book is correct, the author can rationally make a probabilistic prediction about the collection of claims which constitute the book containing an error because they have independent (of the contents of the collection) reason to think the collection contains an error: they know from past corrections of their work that the likelihood their book contains an unforeseen error is, if not certain, extremely high. Given this, why cannot the skeptical theist likewise consistently make a

probabilistic prediction about a collection—$Pr(E|T)$—which is independent of any probabilistic predictions of individual instances within the collection?[14]

For the sake of argument, let us grant that within PP the probabilistic prediction about the collection containing an error is *not* a function of the probabilistic predictions of individual instances within the collection being accurate since, absent such a concession, the objection is easy to dismiss.[15] Even granting such a concession, there is a salient disanalogy between PP and the position skeptical theists find themselves in; at least as things stand. Within PP, what allows the author to consistently make a probabilistic prediction about a collection which—we are presuming—is independent of any probabilistic predictions about individual instances within the collection is the author having independent (of the contents of the collection) reason to think the collection contains an error: they know from past corrections of their work that the likelihood of error in their new book is extremely high.

Therefore, in order for the analogy with PP to hold, skeptical theists would need to provide independent (of the likelihood of individual instances of evil occurring given theism) reason for thinking $Pr(E|T)$ is whatever value they assign to it. In other words, skeptical theists would need to engage in the task of theodicy: explaining what reasons God may or may not have for creating a world with the potential to have a collection of evils like ours does such that $Pr(E|T)$ can be given a knowable value assignment. If the skeptical theist were to supplement their skeptical claims with theodical claims, they conceivably could consistently maintain $Pr(E|T)$ being knowable, despite $Pr(E_i|T)$ for every individual instance of evil being inscrutable. This is because their theodical claims could provide reason to think $Pr(E|T)$ is whatever value they assign to it which is independent of any probabilistic predictions of individual instances within the collection, E.[16] *However*, the difficulty with this approach is that if skeptical

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14. One could alternatively appeal to instances of Brownian motion to motivate this objection. When particles are subjected to Brownian motion, they move randomly; thus making probabilistic predictions as to their individual movements inscrutable. Notwithstanding, for any total collection of particles subjected to Brownian motion, one *can* make probabilistic predictions as to the movement of the whole collection. I have not considered Brownian motion as an objection as it does not succeed as a counterexample to my argument for the same reason that PP does not succeed as a counterexample to my argument: in both examples, additional information which is independent of the information provided by the individual contents of the collection makes possible probabilistic predictions about the whole collection.

15. If the probabilistic prediction about the collection containing an error is merely the conjunction of all of the probabilistically *independent* claims within the collection being accurate, then clearly if the probability that a given claim is accurate is inscrutable for *all* of the probabilistically independent claims within the collection, then so too would any probabilistic prediction about the collection containing an error be inscrutable. In which case, PP would not be a counterexample to my argument. See the formula in fn 13 above.

16. Though one might wonder what reason would remain for thinking $Pr(E_i|T)$ is inscrutable once theodical considerations are brought into play. For given the relationship between $Pr(E|T)$

theists's skepticism also applies to their knowledge of how God would weigh the various possible reasons for permitting the collection of evils, E—as Hendricks (2023a) notably argues it *should*—then it would seem that *even if* skeptical theists could consistently employ theodical claims alongside their skeptical claims, they would be significantly restricted in both the theodical claims they could supplement their skeptical theism with, as well as the justification they could provide for them (Hendricks 2023b: ch. 8). In which case, even if such claims were rationally consistent, it is fair to wonder as to their plausibility. And given that what is in question is how skeptical theism could be employed to undermine Bayesian arguments from evil, the plausibility of the theodical claims employed by the skeptical theist to supplement their skeptical claims will be relevant.

## 3. On Rejecting PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM

Absent of pursuing theodicy, then, it would seem that in order to avoid agnosticism, skeptical theists must reject PE-SKEPTICISM and thereby must reject PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM as well. One way to reject PE$_i$-SKEPTICISM is by drawing a distinction between the likelihood of a specific evil occurring given theism and the likelihood that the instance of evil in question results in a set of states of affairs which are axiologically greater than the set of state of affairs that would have obtained had the evil in question not occurred. More concisely, the likelihood of a specific evil occurring given theism should be distinguished from the likelihood that that specific evil in question is gratuitous. While certain evidential problems of evil may lead to a conflation of these likelihoods, they clearly are not necessarily synonymous. One need not know the set of states of affairs that obtains as a result of some heinous evil occurring to think that—at least absent reason to think the contrary—the likelihood of that heinous evil occurring given theism is low. *Or*, in some instances, that the likelihood of some instance of heinous evil occurring given theism is remarkably high. After all, according to one theistic tradition, $Pr(E_i|T)$ is not inscrutable, but 1, where $E_i$ is the individual evil that was the crucifixion of a certain religious teacher at the hands of an angry mob.

Of course, once it is acknowledged that there are at least *some* individual instances of evils $E_i$ which have a knowable probabilistic likelihood given theism, this paves the way for the success of Bayesian arguments from individual instances of evil to the nonexistence of God; arguments which skeptical theism cannot undermine. And by "cannot undermine" I simply mean that skeptical theism cannot be employed to prevent one from determining whether an

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and $Pr(E_i|T)$ noted above, if one has a plausible explanation for assigning a knowable probabilistic judgement to $Pr(E|T)$, that explanation would presumably allow one to make probabilistic predictions as to the likelihood of specific evils *within* that collection, namely, $Pr(E_i|T)$.

individual evil, $E_i$, is evidence for or against the existence of God by preventing one from assigning a value to $\Pr(E_i|T)$. As to how problematic such a possibility is for skeptical theism, however, the jury is still out. For while skeptical theism may not be able to undermine such arguments from evil, skeptical theism may perhaps yet be employed to render such arguments less problematic for the theist than they otherwise would be.[17] Whether skeptical theism can ultimately do so will depend upon the strength of the specific Bayesian argument from evil in question. My purpose here is not to offer such an argument. But it is to note that the prospects for Bayesian arguments from evil to the nonexistence of God—be they arguments from the total collection of observable evils, arguments from some collection of observable evils, or arguments from particular instances of evil—look much more worrisome for skeptical theists than previously thought; at least if skeptical theists wish to remain theists.

## Acknowledgments

## References

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17.  In agreement with both Climenhaga (2025) and Benton, Hawthorne, & Isaacs (2016: 2).

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