I

Many thanks to this collection’s editors, Trent Dougherty and Justin McBrayer, for the opportunity to reply to the outstanding essays by Todd Long and Chris Tucker. I have thoroughly enjoyed reading and reflecting on these essays, and have learned a lot from them, as I know their other readers will as well. Alas, as it typically goes in Philosophy (and as I’ve been hired to do), I must now repay my friends’ fruitful efforts with some critical assessment.

In this reply piece, I have two main goals. First, I aim to show that what Todd calls minimal skeptical theism has the weakness that Chris ascribes to Bergmann’s skeptical theism in §4 of his paper. That is, I aim to show that Todd’s minimal skeptical theism fails to completely incapacitate a salient version of the argument from evil, and therefore is not (in Chris’s words) a “complete response” to the argument from evil. Second, I’ll try to defend, from the argument Chris develops in §4 of his paper, the claim that Bergmann’s skeptical theism really does completely incapacitate its target argument from evil.

Let’s distinguish, here at the outset, between two different arguments from evil that we meet in the chapters by Chris and Todd. First, there’s what I’ll call

Chris’s Focal Argument from Evil (p.0)

E1: If God exists, God wouldn’t permit the holocaust unless He had a good reason for doing so.
E2: There are no good reasons for doing so.
E3: Therefore, God does not exist.

Second, there’s what I’ll call

Todd’s Focal Argument from Evil (p.0)

First Premise: If God were real, then we humans would know why God’s purposes justifiably allow all the evil we know about.
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Second Premise: We do not have this knowledge.
Conclusion: There is no God.

These arguments differ in some significant ways. Assuming that knowledge is factive, First Premise is logically stronger, and as a result at least somewhat less plausible, than E1. On the other hand, E2 is logically stronger, and accordingly at least somewhat less plausible, than Second Premise. In what follows, I'll be focusing mainly (though not quite exclusively) on Chris's Focal Argument from Evil. My reason for this is twofold. First, I think Chris's Focal Argument from Evil looms larger in the literature on the evidential/inductive argument from evil and skeptical theism than does Todd's Focal Argument from Evil (which is reminiscent of argumentation we find in the literature on divine hiddenness). Second, Chris's Focal Argument from Evil seems to me to stand a better chance of success than does Todd's Focal Argument from Evil. The difference in plausibility between (the more plausible) E1 and (the less plausible) First Premise strikes me as greater than the difference in plausibility between (the more plausible) Second Premise and (the less plausible) E2—with the overall result that the conjunction of E1 and E2 strikes me as more plausible than the conjunction of First Premise and Second Premise.

II

Todd's minimal skeptical theism is the following argument (p.00, my emphasis):¹

11. We are not epistemically rational in believing that the reasons we can think of include all the justifying reasons (if any) that a perfect creator would have for allowing the evil we know about.
12. If we are epistemically rational in believing either The Inference or First Premise, then we are epistemically rational in believing that the reasons we can think of include all the justifying reasons (if any) that a perfect creator would have for allowing all the evil we know about.
13. We are epistemically rational in believing neither The Inference nor First Premise. [11, 12]

¹ Two notes in one. First, I'll simply carry over Todd's labels for the three propositions that constitute (what he calls) minimal skeptical theism. Second, recall what Todd labels The Inference (p.0; cf. Howard-Snyder 2009: 17): "On sustained reflection, we do not see how any reason we know of would justify God in permitting all the evil in the world; therefore, there is no reason that would justify God."
I want to argue two critical points about Todd’s minimal skeptical theism. The first critical point is, I think, relatively minor and legalistic: (00) is too strong, in the sense that it implies an implausible skepticism about epistemic justification (rationality).

Following Chris (see section 2.1 of his paper), let’s understand (what Todd calls) The Inference as being an instance of the following inductive argument schema:

\[
\text{Unqualified Inductive Generalization (p.0)}
\]

\[
\text{(UG1) } n\% \text{ Fs in the sample are Gs.}
\]

\[
\text{(UG2) Therefore, } n\% \text{ Fs are Gs.}
\]

Now, once we generalize Todd’s (12), it will have the following consequence:

\[
\text{(12-Consequence) A claim of the form UG1 epistemically justifies (rationally supports) a claim of the form UG2 for a thinker, T, only if T is justified in believing that T’s sample of Fs includes all extant Fs.}
\]

(12-Consequence) has the following implication: if you’re justified in believing that—or even justified in withholding whether—there are Fs lying outside your sample, then no claim of UG1’s form epistemically justifies (rationally supports) for you a claim of UG2’s form. Another way to put it: (12-Consequence) implies that (what Chris calls) Unqualified Inductive Generalization justifies only if you’re justified in believing that the relevant sample is exhaustive. Since this implication leads quickly to an implausible skepticism about epistemic justification (rationality)—a kind that, I assume, Todd would want to avoid—we should reject Todd’s (12) on the grounds that it places too strong a condition on having justification to believe The Inference. As currently stated, then, Todd’s minimal skeptical theism doesn’t defeat either of our Focal Arguments from Evil.

Of course, Todd could avoid this objection by replacing “... include all ...” with something that would yield a logically weaker, more plausible requirement on having justification to believe The Inference. One natural candidate, especially in the present context, is Chris’s “… are E-representative of ...” (pp.0–0). The revised version of (12) would be logically weaker and significantly more plausible. The revised version of (11) would be logically stronger but not, to my mind, significantly less plausible. Such a revision would, I think, make Todd’s minimal skeptical theism quite similar to Chris’s presentation and development of Bergmann’s skeptical theism.

We can set aside this first, rather legalistic objection to Todd’s minimal skeptical theism, for there’s a second problem that’s much harder to solve: minimal skeptical theism really does have the weakness that, according to Chris, plagues Bergmann’s skeptical theism.² Minimal skeptical theism lacks the resources to

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² I’ll clarify what I mean by “Bergmann’s skeptical theism” in the next section. For the moment, we can proceed without such clarification.
completely incapacitate Chris’s Focal Argument from Evil. As Chris would put it, Todd’s minimal skeptical theism isn’t a “complete response” to the relevant argument(s) from evil.

To begin to see this, imagine an advocate of Chris’s Focal Argument who eschews The Inference and instead claims that we can have non-inferential justification—arising from relevant exercises of moral/evaluative perception/intuition—to believe E2. Armed only with Todd’s minimal skeptical theism, what can we say to such a philosopher?

Not much, so far as I can see. First, the portion of minimal skeptical theism which claims that we lack justification to believe First Premise is perfectly consistent with our having justification to believe E1 (recall that the former is considerably logically stronger than the latter). Proponents of Chris’s Focal Argument from Evil could therefore coherently concede to Todd that we lack justification to believe (the relatively strong and implausible) First Premise but maintain that we do have justification to believe (the relatively weak and plausible) E1. So, the portion of skeptical theism which claims that we lack justification to believe First Premise doesn’t disallow our having justification to believe E1; that portion leaves E1 intact. Moreover, the envisaged advocate of Chris’s Focal Argument from Evil doesn’t invoke The Inference, and therefore can also coherently grant to Todd the remaining portion of skeptical theism—namely, the claim that we lack justification to believe The Inference.

So far as I can see, then, while minimal skeptical theism may (as Chris would put it) “score a genuine victory” against any advocate of Todd’s Focal Argument from Evil, and against many—perhaps even most—proponents of Chris’s Focal Argument from Evil, minimal skeptical theism doesn’t rule out the possibility that Chris’s Focal Argument justifies atheism for at least some thinkers. Fortunately—and pace Chris—, Bergmann’s skeptical theism can completely incapacitate Chris’s Focal Argument from Evil. At least, that’s the claim I’ll be defending in the balance of this paper.

III

I’ll be focusing on the objection to Bergmann’s skeptical theism that Chris develops and defends in §4 of his essay (“The Skeptical Theses and Non-Inferential Justification”). After reconstructing (and making some necessary repairs to) Chris’s objection to Bergmann’s skeptical theism, I’ll show that phenomenal conservatism— which Chris takes for granted in presenting his argument—actually entails the denial of his objection’s key claim. Chris’s reasoning thus defeats

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3 Recall Chris’s definition, which I’ll adopt as is: “if it seems to S that P, then, in the absence of defeaters, S thereby has non-inferential justification that P” (p.00, my emphasis).
itself, and so fails to establish that Bergmann’s skeptical theism isn’t a “complete response” to the pertinent argument from evil.

Here’s my initial reconstruction of the argument that Chris sets out in §4:

**Chris’s Objection to Bergmann’s Skeptical Theism**

1. Even if ST1–3 is true, a thinker may nevertheless have “very strong and stable seemings” that there are no God-justifying reasons for allowing the holocaust (p.00).

2. ∴ If Phenomenal Conservatism is true, then ST1–3 is compatible with a thinker’s having non-inferential justification that there are no God-justifying reasons for allowing the holocaust. [1, definition. of Phenomenal Conservatism]

3. If ST1–3 is compatible with a thinker’s having non-inferential justification that there are no God-justifying reasons for allowing the holocaust, then ST1–3 is compatible with a thinker’s justifiably accepting the conclusion of the argument from evil on the basis of its premises.

4. ∴ If Phenomenal Conservatism is true, then ST1–3 is compatible with a thinker’s justifiably accepting the conclusion of the argument from evil on the basis of its premises. [00]

5. Bergmann’s skeptical theism is a “complete response” to the argument from evil only if it rules out a thinker’s justifiably accepting the conclusion of the argument from evil on the basis of its premises.

6. ∴ If Phenomenal Conservatism is true, then Bergmann’s skeptical theism is not a “complete response” to the argument from evil. [00]

As it stands, Chris’s argument has two problems. First, because Chris sidelines a core element of Bergmann’s skeptical theism, (6) doesn’t follow from (4) and (5). The element I have in mind is this:

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4 Recall that, in Chris’s paper, the term “ST1–3” denotes this proposition: “We have undefeated reason to withhold judgment whether our sample of potential reasons for allowing the holocaust is representative of the potential reasons there are” (p.0). Chris treats (what he calls) ST1–3 as a concise restatement of the three propositions that Bergmann (2009, 2012) labels “ST1,” “ST2,” and “ST3.” I worry, though, that Chris’s ST1–3 doesn’t accurately capture Bergmann’s propositions. I assume that Chris’s ST1–3 implies that we lack undefeated reason to deny that our sample of potential reasons for allowing the holocaust is representative of the potential reasons there are. But Bergmann’s propositions are consistent with our having undefeated reason to deny that our sample of potential reasons for allowing the holocaust is representative of the potential reasons there are. (Note that a theist who concedes that our sample of potential reasons doesn’t include any God-justifying ones should deny that our sample is [what Chris calls E-]representative of the potential reasons there are.) We can solve this problem by adding the following material to Chris’s ST1–3: “... or we have undefeated reason to deny that our sample of potential reasons for allowing the holocaust is representative of the potential reasons there are.” Throughout my reply, the term “ST1–3” will denote the disjunctive statement that results from combining Chris’s ST1–3 with the indicated additional material.
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ST4: *At best*, we have undefeated reason to withhold judgment on whether the total moral (dis-)value we perceive in certain complex states of affairs (like the holocaust) accurately reflects the total moral (dis-)value they really have.⁵

As will soon emerge, I think proponents of Bergmann’s skeptical theism can defend their view from Chris’s objection by leveraging ST4. At this juncture, though, all we need to agree on is this: (6)—which is a claim about Bergmann’s overall skeptical theist position, which clearly comprises ST4 (cf. Bergmann 2009, 2012)—follows from prior steps only if those steps countenance ST4 along with Bergmann’s three other skeptical theses. Letting ‘Bergmann’s skeptical theism’ denote the result of conjoining ST1–3 with ST4, we can amend Chris’s argument by replacing each occurrence of “ST1–3” with “Bergmann’s skeptical theism.” Consider it done.

Why does Chris elect to ignore (what I’ve called) ST4? He writes (p.0, fn.5): “… I’m not sure I understand [ST4] and Bergmann holds that “it’s not needed to make the skeptical theist’s point” (2009: 379).” Let’s suppose Chris is right to interpret Bergmann as having claimed here that ST4 isn’t required for what Chris calls a “complete response” to the relevant argument from evil.⁶ Then one upshot of the argument I present below will be that Bergmann has at times underestimated ST4’s importance for a “complete response” to the argument from evil.

Even after we make the first recommended repair to Chris’s objection, a second problem remains. To see it, consider the substitute for (1) that the first repair will yield:

(1*) Even if Bergmann’s skeptical theism is true, a thinker may nevertheless have “very strong and stable seemings” that there are no God-justifying reasons for allowing the holocaust.

Like (1), (1*) fails to make the further normative claim that the thinker’s relevant seemings are undefeated. So, because (1*) doesn’t assert that Phenomenal Conservatism’s “no defeaters” clause is indeed satisfied, (2) doesn’t follow from (1*) and Phenomenal Conservatism. To establish (2), Chris will need to revise (1*) like this:

²⁵ More fully: *Either* we have undefeated reason to deny that the total moral (dis-)value we perceive in certain complex states of affairs (like the holocaust) accurately reflects the total moral (dis-)value they really have; or we have undefeated reason to withhold judgment on whether the total moral (dis-) value we perceive in such states of affairs accurately reflects the total moral (dis-)value they really have.

⁶ For the record, I have doubts about the accuracy of such an interpretation, though I won’t stress them here. I’ll just say that, as interested readers can easily verify, notwithstanding the bit that Chris quotes from Bergmann, Bergmann continually includes ST4 in the package of skeptical theses he utilizes in his (2009) and (2012).
(1**) Even if Bergmann’s skeptical theism is true, a thinker may nevertheless have *undefeated* “very strong and stable seemings” that there are no God-justifying reasons for allowing the holocaust.

Again, consider it done. So amended, Chris’s argument is clearly valid. Its basic premises are (1**), a duly modified version of (3) (i.e. one that replaces “ST1–3” with “Bergmann’s skeptical theism”), and (5). I’ll concede (3) and (5), taking aim at (1**) instead.

(1**) is not obviously true. What reasons does Chris provide for accepting (1)? And can they support (1**)?

Here’s what Chris says on behalf of (1):

I’m guessing most atheists have very strong and stable seemings to [the effect that there are no God-justifying reasons for allowing the holocaust], and even some theists report having such seemings. (00)

I’ll grant Chris the following, somewhat stronger claim, and argue that even it fails to justify (1**):

**Seemings:** Most non-theists (i.e. atheists and agnostics), as well as many theists, have very strong and stable seemings that there are no God-justifying reasons for the holocaust.

An initial point about seemings: We can probably ignore the portion that refers to *theists*. Since a *theist* arguably couldn’t have an *undefeated* seeming that there’s no God-justifying reason to allow the holocaust, the fact that a theist has such a seeming likely provides no significant support to (1**).

To begin to see why a theist couldn’t have an undefeated seeming that there’s no God-justifying reason to allow the holocaust, note that the proposition that there are no such God-justifying reasons is obviously incompatible with the proposition that God exists (i.e. E1 of Chris’s Focal Argument from Evil is obviously true). Plausibly, then, the epistemic situation of the *theist* to whom it seems that there are no God-justifying reasons for allowing the holocaust is relevantly similar to Alice’s epistemic situation in the following scenario (cf. Senor 1996: 551–2):

Alice looks across the quad and sees in the distance a person she takes to be her colleague Ed. However, Alice also believes that Ed is in France and will not return to the US for another six months.

We can fill in the details of this example so that Alice’s belief about Ed’s current whereabouts (namely, that he’s in France) keeps her visual experience as of Ed from (ultima facie, on balance) justifying her in believing that Ed is presently on campus. Similarly, the *theist’s* belief that God exists will keep her experience as of the absence of God-justifying reasons for allowing the holocaust from (ultima facie, on balance) justifying her in believing that there are no such reasons at all.
Here’s another case that strikes me as relevantly similar to that of the theist who has seemings of the pertinent sort. You’re playing that “game of trust” sometimes known as *Fall Back* (players let themselves fall backward to be caught by other players). Throughout your turn to fall, you are extremely confident that your partner will catch you, and so are extremely confident that you are *not* in any danger of hitting the ground. However, notwithstanding your extreme confidence in your partner and thus your physical safety, as you begin to fall backward, it strongly seems to you that you *are* in danger of hitting the ground. This seeming is defeated by your contemporaneous belief that you’re *not* in danger—i.e. the belief keeps the seeming from (ultima facie, on balance) justifying you in believing that you *are* in danger. Similarly, the *theist’s* belief that God exists will keep her relevant seeming (that there are no God-justifying reasons for allowing the holocaust) from justifying her in believing that there are in fact no such reasons.

In sum, no *theist* can have **undefeated** seemings of the pertinent sort. Accordingly, in asking whether Seemings justifies (1**), we can probably ignore the portion about theists. Nevertheless, to give Chris's objection to Bergmann's skeptical theism the best chance of success, I’ll set this worry aside in what follows.\(^7\)

I want to argue two critical points about (1**). First, a rather obvious and legalistic undercutter. (1**) is a claim about **undefeated** seemings that there are no God-justifying reasons for permitting the holocaust. By contrast, Seemings is *not* a claim about undefeated seemings with the relevant content. Rather, Seemings claims only that there are seemings, *period*, that there are no such God-justifying reasons. The relatively weak claim that there are seemings with the pertinent content, *period*, does not by itself constitute a strong reason to believe the considerably stronger claim that there are **undefeated** seemings of the relevant sort. Thus, when basing it solely on Seemings, we’re not well justified in asserting (1**).

Second, a not-entirely-obvious (I hope!) rebutter of (1**). Let’s suppose, with Chris, that Phenomenal Conservatism is correct. It turns out that, *if* Phenomenal Conservatism is correct, then (1**) is false. To begin to see this, let *Undefeated Seemings* denote this claim:

Some thinker, T, has undefeated seemings to the effect that there are no God-justifying reasons for the holocaust.

If both Phenomenal Conservatism and Undefeated Seemings are true, then our thinker T has (non-inferential, ultima facie) justification—in virtue of an exercise of moral/evaluative perception/intuition, directed upon the holocaust—to believe that there are no God-justifying reasons for allowing the holocaust.

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\(^7\) For a fascinating line of reasoning that casts doubt on the possibility of a (suitably reflective) *non-theist*'s having undefeated seemings of the relevant sort, see Crisp (2011).
(I'm assuming, uncontroversially I think, that T’s having the relevant seemings counts as an exercise of moral/evaluative perception/intuition.)

Now recall ST4. ST4 implies that, \textit{at best}, we have undefeated reason to withhold judgment on the reliability of moral/evaluative perception/intuition, at least when such perception/intuition is directed upon complex states of affairs like the holocaust. But, as Chris himself correctly suggests, a “mental state M can provide justification for holding belief B only if the subject doesn't have undefeated good reason to disbelieve [that] or withhold judgment about whether M reliably indicates B” (p.9). So, if Bergmann's skeptical theism—in particular, if ST4—is true, then our thinker T’s relevant moral/evaluative seemings do \textit{not} provide justification to believe that there are no God-justifying reasons for allowing the holocaust—and this consequent, note well, implies the \textit{denial} of what we just drew out (in the last paragraph) from the conjunction of Phenomenal Conservatism and Undefeated Seemings. So, we should conclude that if Bergmann's skeptical theism is true, then either Phenomenal Conservatism is false or Undefeated Seemings is false. It follows that if Phenomenal Conservatism is true, then either Bergmann’s skeptical theism is false or Undefeated Seemings is false—and this consequent, note well, implies that (1**) is false.

Thus, if Phenomenal Conservatism is true, then (1**) is false. So, assuming with Chris that Phenomenal Conservatism is true, we end up with a rebutter for (1**). A less committal (with respect to the question whether Phenomenal Conservatism is true), somewhat subtler way to put the objection: if I’ve reasoned rightly, then (the duly modified version of) Chris’s criticism of Bergmann’s skeptical theism \textit{defeats itself}, since it utilizes both Phenomenal Conservatism \textit{and} (1**), which turn out on deeper reflection to be incompatible. It seems that the argument Chris presents in §4 of his essay doesn’t pose a serious threat to Bergmann's skeptical theism after all.