that God is atemporal and always outside of time. Murphy's argument for the immediacy requirement won't work. Either God causes the natures' existence timelessly, where this is sufficient for sustaining them, or God does not. The (counterpossible) scenario where God ceases to exist and the natures persist in grounding their own norms takes for granted that there is a time at which the natures exist and God does not, as though God is *sempiternal* – in time (Padgett, 1992, see also Deng, 2018).

3 God and Moral Epistemology

Let's pivot now to questions about God and moral epistemology. Moral epistemology encompasses theories of what moral truths we plausibly know and how we come to know them, arguments about the epistemic justification (or lack thereof) of our beliefs about moral and metaethical theories. In the first two subsections we'll consider what difference theism is supposed to make to how much of the moral truth we know and how we know it. Then we'll consider an epistemic objection to grounding morality in theism. Throughout, we see that theistic and antitheistic arguments presuppose certain contestable conceptions of God that fly under the radar.

3.1 Theism and Moral Skepticism

Skeptical theism is a view about the scope of our moral knowledge given a thin traditional theism. Atheists proposed the core idea of skeptical theism as a potential response to the evidential problem of evil (E-PoE). Further refinements of the argument made the initial skeptical theist proposal seem inadequate (Draper, 1996). Theists since then have developed more sophisticated arguments to show that it *can* defeat the best versions of the E-PoE (Bergmann, 2001, Rea, 2013).

The way skeptical theism blocks a key inference of the Evidential Argument from Evil is by forwarding a skeptical account of our moral knowledge as applied to divine action. Once this skepticism is inserted into the debate, the question is whether the theists can stop the skeptical bleeding – that is, whether it entails that we have too little moral knowledge. We'll review the evidential argument for the E-PoE to which skeptical theism responds, the skeptical theist strategy, worries about introducing too much skepticism to save theism, and the question of what a theist needs to claim about God to use the skeptical theist's strategy.

3.1.1 The Evidential Problem of Evil

Early versions of the argument from evil introduced the so-called logical problem of evil. If God exists, God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent

(omniGod thesis). An omnibenevolent God wouldn't willingly allow certain evils to occur, and if that God were all powerful and could foresee evils' occurrence, God would stop them from occurring. The existence of God is logically incompatible with the occurrence of evils. Such evils do occur. Thus God doesn't exist (Mackie, 1955).

Most philosophers now admit that the logical PoE is too ambitious. All that's needed to overcome the argument is a defense: an account of possible justifying reasons for God permitting the evils we see. For then we can see that it is not impossible for the God of omniGod theism to exist and evils we know of to occur (e.g., Plantinga 1965). The logical PoE also must assume we have *complete modal* moral knowledge – of all the possible goods and evils that figure in an evaluation of permitting evils. Hence it has largely fallen out of favor.

The Evidential Argument from Evil enjoys the lion's share of the discussion:

(1) Some horrendous instances of evil occur in our world.
(2) We cannot identify any good that morally justifies an omniscient and omnipotent being permitting their occurrence.
(3) So probably, there is no good that would morally justify an omnipotent and omniscient being permitting their occurrence. (2)
(4) If God exists, God is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect. (omniGod thesis)
(5) A morally perfect being doesn't permit evil it knows of and can prevent without moral justification.
(6) So if God exists, God doesn't permit evils without moral justification. (4, 5)
(7) Suppose God exists.
(8) So if there is no good that morally justifies an omniscient and omnipotent being permitting horrendous evils, those evils do not occur. (6, 7)
(9) But probably, there is no good that morally justifies an omniscient and omnipotent being permitting horrendous evils, and they do occur. (1, 3)
(10) Therefore probably, God does not exist (Rowe, 1996). (7, 8, 9)

This argument requires much less in the way of moral knowledge than deductive arguments from evil. All we need is *probabilistic* moral knowledge – that it's unlikely that there is some good that morally justifies God in permitting horrendous evils that occur. The argument infers what probably is the case, morally speaking (3), from the goods and evils we know of (2).

Suppose Romina witnesses a horrendous evil – she is at a party and walks in on several drunken men sexually assaulting a young woman, Christina. She asks herself whether a totally powerful and knowledgeable God would have moral reason to permit this. *I can't think of any good that would justify God in standing*

by and letting this happen, she thinks. *If God does exist, then God wouldn't let this happen unless there were some good moral justification for it.* We would certainly understand if Romina doubts God's existence after this episode. What makes sense of it is the assumption that Romina hasn't missed any significant possible goods that would morally justify God's permitting the assault.

3.1.2 Skeptical Theism

Skeptical theism blocks this inference from (2) to (3) with an alternative moral epistemology. The theism of skeptical theism is defined by the omniGod thesis (Bergmann, 2001: 279). The moral skepticism involves the endorsement of three claims:

ST1: We have no good reason for thinking that the possible goods we know of are representative of the possible goods there are.

ST2: We have no good reason for thinking that the possible evils we know of are representative of the possible evils there are.

ST3: We have no good reason for thinking that the entailment relations we know of between possible goods and the permission of possible evils are representative of the entailment relations there are between possible goods and the permission of possible evils (Bergmann, 2001).

If Romina were to accept ST1-3, she might think: *What happened to Christina seems unredeemable to me, but I know very little about possible moral justifications; possibly, there are goods for Christina that I can't begin to imagine, and God's permitting this assault is necessary to Christina's experiencing those goods*. Romina can accept that what happened is a horrendous evil (1) and that no good she knows of would justify God's permitting it (2). But her uncertainty about her grasp of possible goods and evils keeps her from inferring (3) that probably there is no good that would morally justify God's permitting Christina's assault.

So far, so good. But look at things from Christina's perspective. She might expect that if God exists and allows her to suffer a horrendous evil for the sake of a good, God will offer her assurance or comfort. When God is silent, this raises her doubts. Rowe calls this the Argument from Divine Silence:

(1) When God permits a horrendous evil for a good beyond our epistemic ken, God will not be silent but will make every effort to be consciously present to us during our period of suffering, explain why he is permitting us to suffer, and give special assurances.
(2) Many humans suffer horrendous evils and experience divine silence.

(3) So it is not the case that God permits a horrendous evil for a good beyond our epistemic ken. (Rowe, 1996)

Skeptical theism can address the problem that arises from Christina's perspective, too. If ST1 and ST2 are true, we have reason to reject (1) because it assumes that a certain good – divine comfort – can temporarily ameliorate the evil of suffering, and that it's so good that God obviously has a requiring moral reason to give comfort to sufferers of evil. Skeptical theism says we're not positioned to know that. There could be further goods we don't know of that justify the divine silence following evil. We can't infer that probably there is no good that justifies the divine silence (Bergmann, 2001: 283).

3.1.3 The Too-Much-Skepticism Objection

This defense of theism against the E-PoE seems to entail an unpalatable moral epistemology. We don't want skeptical theism to commit us to *too much* moral skepticism. That would be dialectically unsatisfying, hiking up the price of rescuing theism from the E-PoE. Let's sharpen up the picture of how skeptical about moral knowledge the skeptical theist must be, then.

The skeptical theist asserts that the skepticism she means to endorse is

> extremely modest and completely appropriate, even for those who are agnostic about the existence of God. It is just the honest recognition of the fact that it wouldn't be the least bit surprising if reality far outstripped our understanding of it. (ibid.: 284)

One need only be skeptical of the claim that there's no moral justification for *God* to permit the evils we see occurring. In fact, skeptical theists sometimes present the challenge of the evidential problem in terms of "potentially *God-justifying* reason for permitting some horrific evil" (Bergmann and Rea, 2005, my emphasis).

Additionally, it's possible that we could come to know, of a particular evil, that there's no God-justifying reason for permitting it by other means than induction. I could have knowledge via moral intuition that the annihilation of infant souls is not the kind of evil any good could justify allowing, and infer that the goods and evils I know of are sufficient to judge this case. But my knowledge that there's no God-justifying reason for permitting infant annihilation isn't based on induction from goods and evils I know about (Bergmann, 2014: 212). Further, ST1-3 are claims about goods and evils, not deontic principles. We could know deontological moral principles like, "Never intend an evil that good may result," and that these principles constrain divine action as well as human action (Bergmann, 2012: 29). It could be that our moral knowledge regarding human actions is capacious, divine action, meager.

Can the skeptical theist circumscribe her skepticism in this way without incoherence or being ad hoc (Trakakis and Nagasawa, 2004; Almeida and Oppy, 2003)? The main concern is that skeptical theism's skepticism creeps into the domain where we think we have, and need, robust knowledge: morality that applies to ordinary human actions and attitudes. Call this the Too-Much-Skepticism objection (Rea, 2013: 486). The Too-Much-Skepticism objection could show that theism has negative implications for moral epistemology if skeptical theism is the best defense against the E-PoE.

On one version of the objection, skeptical theism requires us to mistrust the moral appearances, even when it comes to states of affairs and actions that we don't think of as beyond our epistemic ken (Jordan, 2006). Take an ordinary event like shopping at the grocery store, for example. ST2 indicates that, while grocery shopping for my family might seem to me a morally neutral or even good activity, for all I know there is a possible evil I perpetrate in grocery shopping. Possible evils need not resemble or be easily inferred from evils I know of, so for all I know, there is a great evil involved in my going grocery shopping that outweighs any good my shopping might do. If something as apparently innocuous as grocery shopping can be or cause evil unbeknownst to us on skeptical theism, then the view implies we don't have much safe moral knowledge.

Another version of the objection concerns its practical implications. A small child drowning in a pond looks like a thoroughly evil state of affairs worth preventing. Yet granting ST1-3, for all we know, there's a great good that justifies God's letting the child drown. (Maybe the child will be the youngest saint and receive a place of great honor in heaven forever.) Recognizing this may generate hesitation to save the child from drowning, lest we undermine the great good God intends to bring about in permitting this (Almeida et al., 2003: 505–6).

(1) We (human beings) are always (at least) morally permitted not to interfere with the purposes of God.
(2) For all we can tell, there are divine purposes in allowing certain evils.
(3) Therefore, for all we know, we are morally permitted not to interfere with those evils.

On skeptical theism, willingly allowing a child to drown is permissible. It's not just that any view that yields this result is deeply flawed, but that such a view could have wide-ranging and potentially detrimental practical effects.

In general, we think of correct moral judgments and decisions as requiring an all-things-considered perspective, taking into account all the relevant goods, evils, and entailment relations between them. When asking whether it's morally

permissible for a physician to perform surgery on a pregnant woman that will end the life of the fetus, we consider a host of possible goods, evils, and relations between them (whether the bad of the fetus dying can be outweighed by the good of saving the mother's life, for instance). Without some reasonable confidence in our ability to discern the considerations that deserve to be weighed, we face the possibility of decisional paralysis. As one critic says, "If we should be skeptical about the reliability of our all-things-considered value judgments, then we are morally paralyzed" (Rutledge, 2017: 269). Does skeptical theism commit the theist to paralyzing and wide-ranging moral skepticism?

Maybe not. Facts about goods and evils are one thing, facts about right and wrong actions are another. Rightness facts are mediated by moral knowledge: a person does something right or wrong only relative to the goods and evils she knows of. Or, perhaps there is a deontological principle M* that confers rightness on action based on what the agent knows. M* could direct an omniscient God to act very differently from us, and still be a general moral principle governing divine and human action.

Another reply would appeal to the familiar idea in literature on moral reasons that plausibly, there is some accessibility relation that must obtain between a person and a moral reason for that person to be held responsible for her action or called morally irrational for her action. The skeptical theist could endorse a factoring account of reasons where what reasons there are is a separate question from what reasons a person has; a person has a reason to perform an action only when the reason is epistemically accessible to her, and a person's rationality should be assessed on the basis of the reasons she has (Lord, 2018). Thus, if there are reasons against attempting to curb Christina's suffering completely based on goods outside Romina's epistemic ken, as in ST1-3, these have no bearing on what Romina *has* moral reason to do.

A skeptical theist can also circumscribe her skepticism by adopting a popular view of blameworthiness on which a person is blameworthy only if she meets certain knowledge conditions. Ignorance of goods, evils, and entailment relations between them is grounds for excuse, as long as that ignorance isn't itself blameworthy (Rosen, 2003). By making use of extant theories of reasons, rationality, and blame that relativize moral evaluations of actions to the agent's knowledge, skeptical theists can ensure that her moral skepticism doesn't creep into evaluations of human actions while still applying to divine actions (including omissions).

Taking stock, how much moral skepticism is entailed by skeptical theism? If theism is true, on this view, we should be skeptical that our judgments about the goodness and badness of states of affairs and objects are reliable. When it comes to actions, the story depends on the independent metaethical account of right

action, moral reasons or obligations, or blameworthiness the skeptical theist endorses.

On the one hand, whether an action is right or wrong may just depend on whether the state of affairs it constitutes or produces is good or bad. Similarly with whether an agent performing it is praiseworthy or blameworthy, whether we have moral reason to do it or refrain. If that sort of objectivist view is correct, then skeptical theism also entails that our moral evaluations of actions aren't very reliable.

On the other hand, whether an action is right or wrong may be a function of the goodness or badness of states of affairs and objects plus some accessibility condition – what facts about goodness and badness we know. If a moral action is wrong only if the person performing it has knowledge of the bads constituted and produced by it, then the skepticism of skeptical theism doesn't carry over to action. That is, as long as we know what goods and bads an agent is aware of, we can determine with a fair amount of accuracy which actions are right for her to perform.

3.1.4 The Divine Revelation Solution

Suppose we grant that theism entails skepticism only about possible goods and evils and entailment relations between them, *not* about our moral reasons, right actions, and apt blame. Some will find this dose of moral skepticism still too worrying. I want to diagnose this residual unease and suggest that a satisfying reply requires going well beyond thin traditional theism.

Here's the problem: it's unsettling to think that we are walking around, making moral judgments and acting on them, while totally unaware of many goods and evils that make a difference to which actions are objectively best. This is true even if we're not technically on the hook for the subpar actions we perform out of such ignorance. The skeptical theist's story about why we're not culpable for perpetuating evils we don't know of simply doesn't address *this* problem.

Put another way, if skeptical theism is true, then more informed and rational agents would be under radically different moral requirements than we are under. For our ignorance excuses us from meeting those requirements. But most of us, when we try to act morally, aren't just trying to act excusably. We're trying to act and live *well*. We want to respond appropriately to the moral goods there are. This orientation to the actual good drives moral inquiry. Skeptical theism tells us that if theism is true, our aspiring to discern moral truths is somewhat in vain. As long as skeptical theism provides resistence to the E-PoE, it simultaneously fuels the idea that reflection and philosophical investigation can't be sufficient

to infer, from goods and evils we know of, probabilistic claims about goods and evils there are.

Theists can reply to this objection if they take on additional commitments about God. First, they can assert that God truthfully reveals God's reasons for acting through some body of Scripture or other form of divine revelation (perhaps religious experience). Next, revelation gives us a way of knowing God's reasons for acting on particular occasions (Rea, 2013: 485, 495). The believer's understanding of goods and evils is partly informed by divine revelation; if God chooses to reveal divine purposes that take into account goods and evils we otherwise wouldn't know of, then divine revelation can expand a believer's knowledge of possible goods and evils considerably. Moreover, if God takes into account all possible goods and evils when issuing divine commands, then these commands can act as heuristic devices, allowing those who obey them to better conform to the goods and evils that matter for living well. Finally, the religious tradition that safeguards that revelation can help the believer interpret Scriptures or religious experiences appropriately (e.g., Stump, 2010: 179–197). Therefore, on varieties of theism where divine revelation provides this knowledge or moral heuristic, people need not worry that they have too narrow a vision of what matters to act and live well. For we have noninductive methods of obtaining this moral knowledge.

Of course, a theist who denies the authority of Scripture or lacks established principles for supporting particular interpretations of Scripture won't be able to make this appeal. For if she doesn't have antecedent reasons to affirm Scripture, then the fact that Scripture lines up with moral appearances won't provide much evidence for its veridicality if skeptical theism's skepticism unsettles faith in our moral perception. Neither will a theist whose principle for interpreting revelation allows the individual to judge for herself whether divine commands apply to her, or whether Scripture is to be believed. The most plausible reply to the Too-Much-Skepticism objection requires a view of God much thicker than the omniGod thesis used in the E-PoE and skeptical theist's reply.

3.1.5 Which Theists Can Be Skeptical Theists?

Not all traditional theists can be skeptical theists. But not all theists need to be. In closing, let's identify the varieties of theism in which skeptical theism finds a natural home, those hostile to skeptical theism, and how a different sort of thick theism can reply to the E-PoE without introducing widespread moral skepticism.

The skeptical theist epistemology is at home on theisms on which God is so different from humans that we are quite limited in what we can say and know about God. This gives us reason to think we don't know much about the goods

and evils that are relevant to the standard of action God must live up to, even if we know plenty about the human standard of action. Suppose God is all-loving, but God's love can't be described as equivalent to ideal human love. Whatever we know about love from the human case doesn't enable us to infer what God's love must be like (Rea, 2018: 63–89). Consequently, it makes sense to think of there being goods and evils and connections between them of which we know virtually nothing, but which don't bear on human ideals like perfect human love. Some apophatic theists say God is neither loving nor nonloving, but ineffable and transcendent. If it is a category mistake to speak of God as loving in a way analogous or similar to human love, then a claim that God is morally perfect or perfectly loving must be understood as nonfundamental, and not joint-carving (Jacobs, 2015).

Certain Islamic traditions have a conception of divine love that also suits skeptical theism. Al-Farabi and Avicenna imply that divine love doesn't involve personal relationship but "is the source and end of all creaturely goods and perfections, a love that is expressed most fully in God's providential care for us" (Stump and Green, 2015: 166). God cares providentially for humans by being the cause of their ultimate perfection. But for all we know, there are goods we don't know of that will enable us to achieve perfection. These goods could justify God's arranging the world in such a way that certain evils occur during our earthly lives. The *falsafa* tradition explicitly holds that humans obtain perfection in the afterlife. It consists in the understanding of God as first cause of being. On this account, a lack of moral knowledge in earthly life doesn't make a difference to whether one achieves human perfection. Providential care on the *falsafa* view, then, seems consistent with skeptical theism.

Theists disagree about what God's love implies about God revealing Godself to humans. Some traditional theists think of omnibenevolence as obviously entailing that God is known and knows humans personally. Some theists (and atheists) argue that being perfectly loving is not even conceptually compatible with either remaining hidden in the face of horrendous evils or failing to disclose relevant information about goods and evils or justifications for divine permission of horrendous evils to humans. This seems to be the underlying assumption in the Argument from Divine Silence. For those who think of perfect love this way, skeptical theism is a nonstarter (Schellenberg, 2015).

Here's the argument: First, God is whatever being is worthy of worship. Love is a divine attribute. Worship-worthy love must involve some self-revelation to the beloved. So God will reveal Godself to nonresistant nonbelievers and believers whom God loves. But nonresistant nonbelievers and others whom

God would love do not experience God revealing Godself to them. Apply this to Christina's case. If God exists, she can expect a revelation from God after her traumatic experience. Both she and Romina can know this, since it's a conceptual truth that God is loving in a way that is self-revealing. But the skeptical theist said we *can't* know this so-called conceptual truth: we can't know that there isn't some great good that justifies God in not revealing Godself to Christina in the wake of her trauma. Skeptical theism is incompatible with this conception of omnibenevolence.

Christian theism that takes the incarnation and atonement literally offers a poignant response to the problem of divine silence. For even if God remains hidden to a person for a limited period of time, perhaps to deepen the loving relationship, God has suffered and died, and has announced that this is for our redemption and comfort. In the atonement God displays the sort of great good that could justify horrendous human suffering, namely, the salvation of humankind and victory over death.

Other Christian philosophers argue that God's hiddenness won't endure for a person's entire life or without spiritual consent – the person's wishing that God's will be done – because divine presence is a necessary part of a loving relationship with God (Cockayne, 2018). On this view, God makes known to those suffering at least that some entailment relation obtains between the evils God permits them to suffer and great goods, or at the very least one particular good that the suffering enables God to bring about, namely closer union with God. This can be made compatible with skeptical theism as long as we say the moral knowledge of the God-justifying goods for which God permits particular evils comes about through perception, testimony, or revelation, not by induction from the other goods and evils and entailment relations we know of.

Note that if union with God is plausibly deepened through suffering certain evils, we can offer a distinct defense against the E-PoE without skeptical theism's ST1-3. That is, there is a good we know of that plausibly provides a God-justifying reason for God's permitting certain evils, contra the Evidential Argument's second premise.

Now consider a variety of traditional theism that can resist the E-PoE without inviting skeptical worries at all. The general move of the Thomistic views is to provide reason to deny that moral perfection is a divine perfection – that it is properly part of the concept of God. If God is not morally perfect, then the Evidential Argument from Evil can't get started. For premise (1) of that argument says that God would not allow evil unless there were a moral justification for God's doing so. The natural law move does leave us with some degree of moral skepticism when it comes to reasons that apply to God – they

aren't moral reasons. Happily, though, this skepticism doesn't bleed into the account of our moral knowledge.

The most recent argument for the claim that God is not necessarily morally perfect goes like this: The Anselmian God is perfectly loving. The extent to which God is perfectly loving doesn't outstrip the extent to which God is perfectly practically rational. But perfect rationality doesn't give one requiring reasons to promote the wellbeing of all creatures. So if morality gives agents reasons to promote others' wellbeing, then morality goes beyond rationality in this respect. God's being omnibenevolent doesn't guarantee that God is morally perfect (Murphy, 2017). If correct, the Evidential Argument from evil can't get started.

Other contemporary defenders of Thomism maintain that God does not belong to a genus or category of being; God is being itself. But for a being to be a moral agent, it must belong to a genus – namely, those beings whose nature makes moral action and character essential to their flourishing, such as human beings. The Thomist takes it to be a category mistake to ascribe moral perfection to God, since this assumes God's actions and character can be evaluated according to a standard set by a specific kind of nature (Davies, 2006). Hence this view has an argument against the initial premise in the evidential argument from evil – that God is morally perfect – and doesn't need to commit to any sort of moral skepticism in order to defend belief in God.

3.2 Theistic Replies to Debunking Arguments

In contrast to skeptical theism, some philosophers argue that theism uniquely explains our *robust* moral knowledge in the face of a family of challenges known as evolutionary debunking arguments. In this section we'll consider those arguments, replies that deny or don't require theism, and theistic replies. We'll also ask what assumptions about God must be at work for theistic responses to be compelling.

3.2.1 Evolutionary Debunking Arguments

Evolutionary Debunking Arguments (EDAs) challenge the possibility of widespread moral knowledge if moral realism is true (Joyce, 2001, Street, 2006). The argument starts with an empirical premise and a statement of moral realism:

> **Influence:** Evolutionary forces influence the development of our cognitive faculties, including the faculties we use to form moral beliefs and judgments.
>
> **Realism:** "If moral realism is true, there are at least some evaluative facts or truths that hold independently of all our evaluative attitudes." (Street, 2006: 110)

Further, given Influence, what our cognitive faculties are poised to do depends on what is adaptive. Having the cognitive power to discern mind-independent biological truths is adaptive: humans who can't recognize that a tiger is a predator are less likely to survive than those who can. But there's no obvious adaptive advantage to being able to recognize a mind-independent moral truth like "justice demands equal treatment of people of different races." Therefore,

> **Coincidence:** It is "extremely unlikely" that by happy coincidence, some large portion of our evaluative judgments ended up true due to natural selection. (Street, 2006: 122)

If Realism is true, then we would only end up with mostly true moral judgments if by an extremely unlikely coincidence, evolutionary pressures resulted in a faculty that tracked those truths. The moral realist is left with what Sharon Street calls a "Darwinian Dilemma":

> **Darwinian Dilemma:** If Realism is true, then we must embrace a "scientifically untenable" view of our cognitive faculties as tracking mind-independent moral truths or embrace skepticism about our moral knowledge. (Lott, 2018: 75)

A flurry of responses to this EDA has prompted important revisions. One secular reply with this effect points out a tacit but controversial assumption and argues against it. The early EDA assumes there are just two ways for our cognitive capacities to track the mind-independent moral truth to produce moral knowledge: by accident or by natural selection making them that way. Some secular realists claim this is a false dichotomy. Cultural context and training can also shape our capacities such that we generally track truths that aren't adaptive to track (Fitzpatrick, 2015: 886–7). Imagine Sara grows up in a community with a longstanding tradition of teaching children advanced mathematics and moral principles. Admittedly, there's nothing adaptive about having the ability to find an integral or discern whether one should eat meat, but Sara's community values this knowledge and passes it down. This long-standing tradition could explain why adults in Sara's community have reliable ability to track the mind-independent truth.

Debunkers reply by making more precise what our moral beliefs must look like to count as moral knowledge, and showing that beliefs gained by cultural influence won't count. We tend to think of knowledge as stable, sensitive, and safe. Formally,

> **Sensitivity**: S's belief that p is sensitive if and only if, in nearby possible worlds where p is false, S does not belief that p. (Ichikawa, 2011)

If Sensitivity is right, Sara's case doesn't illustrate a third way for us to get moral knowledge. For in nearby possible worlds Sara's culture could have remained the same but the moral truths been entirely different. In that case, Sara's exercise of her cognitive capacities would have led her and her peers to make systematically incorrect moral judgments. Their beliefs lack the sensitivity to count as knowledge.

A more recent EDA makes the assumption about moral knowledge explicit:

(1) "Our moral faculty was naturally selected to produce adaptive moral beliefs, and not naturally selected to produce true moral beliefs.
(2) Therefore, it is false that: had the moral truths been different, and had we formed our moral beliefs using the same method we actually used, our moral beliefs would have been different.
(3) Therefore, our moral beliefs are not sensitive.
(4) Therefore, our moral beliefs do not count as knowledge" (Bogardus, 2016: 640).

3.2.2 Failures of Secular Replies

A driving force behind theistic replies to EDAs is the apparent failure of secular realist replies. So, it's worth reviewing the best secular replies and objections to them to appreciate the motivation for theistic alternatives.

The most ubiquitous class of secular realist responses to EDAs is the minimalist response. Minimalists refrain from asserting any direct explanatory connection between moral truths and our moral beliefs. Instead, they posit a modal connection between moral truths and moral beliefs that gives our moral beliefs justification, even absent a direct explanatory connection (Korman and Locke, 2020).

A representative example of a minimalist response is the third-factor response. It aims to show that some factor besides the moral truth simultaneously explains our cognitive capacities' reliability in tracking moral truths and the obtaining of those moral truths. For instance, suppose it's a moral truth that humans have moral rights. Pietro has a belief that we have rights. This belief isn't adaptive, but it's adaptive for Pietro to have higher-order cognitive capacities, for this enables communities of people with this trait to survive disasters and recover from devastation more quickly. One reason is that such people tend to put effort into building technologies with long-term payoff, even if there is not short-term gain. Pietro's higher-order capacities – what enables him to understand and be motivated by the long-term/short-term tradeoffs – also dispose him to grasp the complex concept of a moral right (Wielenberg, 2010: 441–64). While the moral truth about rights doesn't

directly explain Pietro's beliefs about rights, we can explain why evolution would select for the capacities that would produce those true beliefs.

Third-factor accounts like this, while innovative and clever, have to assume a moral truth *that is under dispute* to get going. We must assume, in the example above, that there *are* moral rights, so Pietro's moral beliefs are correct. (Sometimes debunkers complain that this amounts to question begging, but this isn't quite right; realists are allowed to make use of some claims entailed by the truth of their view, just not the truth of their view, absent defeaters.) Remember, debunkers object that the realist has to rely on a scientifically implausible coincidence to be sure of the truth about moral rights. On this third-factor account, Pietro's moral belief is formed by a faculty whose reliability in the moral domain is a coincidence. Luckily, the faculty that produces adaptive advantages also tracks the moral truth. The secular realist offers no further explanation for the third factor's having both properties of being adaptive and being good. So the third-factor accounts leave us with an unexplained coincidence (Morton, ms: 3).

The bigger obstacle for minimalist replies to overcome is an epistemic problem, namely, that our moral beliefs should be unaffected by our denying a direct connection between the moral truth and those beliefs. Korman and Locke offer the following analogy: Lois finds herself with an inescapable feeling that Goldbach's conjecture is necessarily true; then she remembers she's been hypnotized by watching a video. She decides to suspend her belief about Goldbach's conjecture – after all, perhaps it was suggested to her in the video, and the hypnotist got her to believe the conjecture not on the basis of anything that would make it true. Now she doesn't have any reason to think that something that makes Goldbach's conjecture true explains her intuitive belief. The rational thing to do in light of this is *suspend* her belief in the conjecture (Korman et al., 2020). The analogy teaches a lesson about explanatory connections and the rationality of belief. It isn't rational to retain a belief, B, when you lose a belief that whatever grounds the truth of B isn't explanatorily connected to your having B. Even if B is *in fact* safe or sensitive, by conceding that having B isn't explained by the truth of B, you violate a kind of internal rational requirement in holding onto B.

Applying this lesson to EDAs, the minimalist agrees to put to the side the claim that her moral beliefs are directly explained by whatever makes them true. Once she does this she gives up the game. For it's irrational to hold onto her moral beliefs in the course of the argument. She should suspend them, since she thinks they're explained by some non–truth-related factor (like the hypnosis in the Goldbach's example). Pietro continuing to believe that there are moral rights, while accepting that belief doesn't come about

because it is true, doesn't make sense. Further, suppose Pietro learns his beliefs about rights are safe or sensitive. That would provide some evidence that there *is* an explanatory connection between his moral beliefs and the world. So it doesn't make sense to try to isolate the modal connection between beliefs and the facts as though it could exist with no explanatory connection (ibid.: 22–23).

3.2.3 Theistic Replies to Debunking

Traditional theism has resources to respond to EDAs that secular moral realists lack, according to atheists and theists in the debate. If they're right, theism provides a uniquely convincing defense of moral realism against evolutionary debunking arguments. Our present concern is whether that's true and whether its scope is appropriate, or only *some* theisms have this advantage.

The secular moral realist seems stuck with the assumption that our faculties track the moral truth reliably by massive coincidence or not sensitively enough to produce moral knowledge. But if God controls the ethical facts and causal order, then the charge of massive coincidence could be dropped (Bedke, 2009: 109). Thus, even atheists claim theism as the only hope for realists to respond to the debunking challenge:

> Things look different if we turn to God. Assuming God can know the truth in ethics, even if it is irreducible, he may create in us, or some of us, reliable dispositions. On this account, ethical principles *can* explain how we are disposed to form true beliefs [thus meeting the nonaccidental reliability constraint]. This is, I think, the only hope for ethical knowledge if the facts are constitutively independent of us. (Setiya, 2012: 114)

In these and similar passages, the line of reasoning seems to run:

(1) Grant Influence and Coincidence.
(2) On traditional theism, God directly creates or controls the development of human cognitive faculties.
(3) God knows or controls all the mind-independent moral truths.
(4) If traditional theism is true, then there is some further controlling causal influence ensuring human faculties track the mind-independent moral truth. (2, 3)
(5) If traditional theism is false, then Realism entails a scientifically implausible claim or we have no moral knowledge. (Darwinian Dilemma)
(6) Therefore, either traditional theism is false and moral realism entails moral skepticism, or traditional theism is true and we probably have moral knowledge.

Some theistic arguments to this effect lean on familiar reasoning from reformed epistemology to support (2). Here is the familiar line of thought: If God exists, we likely have certain truth-tracking cognitive faculties. When a belief is produced by the properly functioning cognitive faculties working according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth, that belief is warranted and thus counts as knowledge. Belief in God's existence is the result of properly functioning cognitive faculties working according to a divine design plan aimed at truth. Belief in God's existence is knowledge.

We can run a parallel argument by substituting "moral belief" for "theistic belief":

(1) "If God exists, then God created us in his image, loves us, desires that we know and love him, and is such that it is our end to know and love him."
(2) It is good for humans to have moral knowledge.
(3) "If God created us in his image, loves us, desires that we know and love him, and is such that it is our end to know and love him, then God is probably such that" God would create us with the ability to achieve what is good for us.
(4) So if God exists, then God probably created us in such a way that we would come to hold certain true moral beliefs.
(5) "If God probably created us in such a way that we would come to hold certain true [moral] beliefs, then [moral] beliefs are probably produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth (and is thereby probably warranted)" (Moon, 2017; see Plantinga, 2011: chs. 3–4).

This argument is supposed to show that thin theism entails that we have robust moral knowledge.

Unfortunately, this particular argument fails for the very reason that third-factor accounts fail. It relies on a *substantive* moral premise *in the target range* of the evolutionary debunking argument: that a morally perfect being would ensure that humans have moral knowledge. In other words, while not all charges of question-begging stick to third-factor accounts, charges that one relies on a substantive premise under dispute are threatening, and this is precisely what the argument above does. The belief that moral perfection requires that particular divine action is a moral belief subject to evolutionary influence (Morton, ms).

The theist can revise the reply in three steps. First, she needs to distinguish the kind of moral knowledge EDAs target: substantive moral knowledge about what in particular is good or evil, right or wrong, independent of anyone's evaluative attitudes. Second, if a moral truth is mind dependent or not

substantive, a moral realist is free to rely on it in her argument. Third, if the theist supposes God loves humans and God's reasons depend on that love, then any moral truths grounded by this theistic claim are mind dependent – they depend on God's evaluative attitudes. Now the theist can run this argument:

(1) God is rationally perfect, responding appropriately to the reasons there are.
(2) God loves human beings.
(3) Because of God's love of human beings, God has a mind-dependent reason to bring about our good.
(4) Our good requires our having moral knowledge.
(5) We have no reason to think there is a countervailing or undercutting reason for God to not bring about our moral knowledge.
(6) A perfectly rational being will act on the basis of the reasons there are in the absence of countervailing or undercutting considerations for that action.
(7) God acts on a reason God has to bring about our moral knowledge (Morton, ms: 17–18).

This revised argument makes no substantive assumptions about what is morally good or bad.

3.2.4 Thick Theisms and EDAs

The successful theistic reply to EDAs requires additional assumptions about what God is like and what we can know about God's attitudes.

First, the reply assumes that God asserts a fair amount of control over the development of human cognitive faculties and/or the moral facts. For God must be able to bring it about that humans have moral knowledge. And the argument from reformed epistemology gives an account of how this happens – God directly creates or indirectly controls the development of whatever cognitive faculty produces moral beliefs. Or, God might leave our faculties alone but control moral truths such that we reliably track them, whatever kind of faculties evolution produces. God's being the omniGod or creator doesn't entail that God actively or intentionally guides the evolutionary development of humans or controls the moral facts, however. This is a substantive assumption about divine action to be added to thin theism.

Second, the argument assumes God loves and as a result, desires to promote the good of all human beings in premises (2) and (3). This is critical because the reason to bring about our moral knowledge needs to depend on an evaluative attitude, in this case God's desire. For then no premise of the argument is a mind-independent moral truth of the sort the EDA calls into question. But we've already seen one way some theists resist this claim about God.

Remember Murphy's argument (subsection 3.1.5) that the Anselmian God doesn't have requiring reason to promote the wellbeing of creatures, only a requiring reason to not harm them.

Some skeptical theists might not endorse premise (3) or the conclusion of this theistic reply. The reply requires an inference from God's being loving to God bringing about our moral knowledge. But skeptical theism blocks the inference from the existence of an omnibenevolent God to knowing what, specifically, God intends:

> Alvin Plantinga assumes that if God exists it is obvious that our belief-forming faculties are reliable . . . given our scepticism, we are not sanguine about [this] inference (God might well have other interests, motives, etc. than the few that we are able to decipher). (McBrayer and Swenson, 2012: 145)

Is God's desire for us to have moral knowledge, given its role in our wellbeing, one of the few divine motives we can decipher?

Suppose it is. Remember that skeptical theists are not committed to broad skepticism, but only to the view that in some cases we can't know what God would do (Moon, 2017). Since God is omniscient and omnipotent, we might derive general conclusions about God's intentions and actions from claims about God's knowledge. For instance, if E occurs and God knows that his actions would result in E, then God intended E (Moon, 2017). But this principle of inference can be cast into doubt by counterexamples.

> Suppose God intends to make a bush look like it is on fire. God might also know that this event will cause a nearby plant to cast a shadow. But the casting of the shadow might not have been God's intention . . . God could have been completely indifferent to the shadow. (ibid.)

Maybe we can derive support for the claim that God intends and brings about our having moral knowledge via another inferential principle like

> If God has some desire for E to occur and God knew that his actions would result in E's occurring, then God intended for E to occur. (ibid.)

Unfortunately, this principle also faces a counterexample. Suppose God desires to be in relationship with Fred. Possibly, God also has a reason to not use this desire as God's reason for action. Perhaps God's directly pursuing Fred would be coercive and lead to a relationship in which Fred doesn't freely love God. God might then creatively will another action that has a happy byproduct: enabling Fred to be in relationship with God through Fred's free decision (ibid.). Here, knowing what God desires doesn't give us knowledge of what God intends, even if God is omniscient.

Thus, even granting that God desires human wellbeing (perhaps because of our conception of omnibenevolence), skeptical theists shouldn't grant the revised theistic reply to EDAs. The reply relies on an inference from (2) to (3) and (5). But for all we know, God might have a reason to not act on God's desire for our wellbeing by giving us moral knowledge. God might have reason to create a world where evolutionary influence distorts our cognitive faculties. Maybe such a world affords God more opportunities to forgive us and save us from graver evils and noetic effects of sin than in the world where our cognitive faculties produce moral knowledge.

There is a notable tension, then, between skeptical theism and theistic replies to general debunking arguments, even though both are supposed to operate on the same thin traditional theism. Andrew Moon (2017) suggests that what he calls the bare-theism-based argument given by Plantinga (and presumably our version of it applied to moral beliefs) should be replaced by religion-based arguments. While Plantinga's argument "moves from the bare existence of God, to claims about God's intentions" the religion-based arguments proceed "from substantive claims about God's intentions already made or implied in an established religion" (ibid.). Religion-based arguments serve as a paradigmatic example of the kind of moves I've stressed we need to make in discussions of theism and morality more generally.

For example, a certain version of Christianity can offer the following theistic argument against the debunking challenge. First, "God loves humans, has special plans to redeem humans and bring about relationship with them, and intends for himself to be glorified among them" (Moon, 2017). Second, imagine that God expresses in Scriptures that God can't be in relationship with beings who are morally impure or bad according to their kind, and so God can't achieve God's stated purpose without humans being morally good. Add the plausible view that one can't be morally good without moral knowledge (that is, no one can be morally good by sheer accident or without acting based on knowledge). These substantive commitments about what God wants and intends allow the Christian to say that if God exists, our cognitive faculties reliably track mind-independent moral truths.

Another strand of Christian thought inspired by Aquinas circumvents the need for sensitive moral knowledge altogether. On this view, the noetic effects of sin are so drastic that there is no guarantee that we know what in particular is good or what God wants from us. Instead, we only know that whatever God wills, God wills it under the description "good" and whatever God nils, God nils under the description "evil." God extends grace to human beings by making friendship with God, rather than moral uprightness, the only condition for perfect happiness in the afterlife. And friendship with God, God determines,

only requires that the human friend not intentionally set themselves against God's purposes – that is, will what they think God nils and nil what they think God wills (Jeffrey, 2015). So even when a human is mistaken about what in particular is good or bad, she can act in ways required for eventual perfect happiness by acting according to conscience (Jeffrey, forthcoming). For then she meets the condition for friendship with God.

We can draw two lessons from the discussion of moral epistemology in this and the previous section. One, thin theism by itself underdetermines one's moral epistemology. It doesn't guarantee that our moral knowledge is robust, nor does it guarantee it is incredibly limited. Two, we need to pay attention to particular thick theisms to draw conclusions. Not every variety of traditional theism affords a good reply to Evolutionary Debunking Arguments, but promising responses can be generated from within religious views that accept certain substantive claims about God's intentions and purposes.

3.3 The Naturalist Explanationist Argument

The final set of arguments in moral epistemology we'll consider target all versions of moral nonnaturalism, including theistic ones, as epistemically unjustified. The debate begins with a problem with belief in moral properties called Harman's Challenge. Below we'll look at Harman's Challenge, the naturalist realist response to it – the Explanationist Argument – and whether it creates an unsurmountable difficulty for accounts that ground moral properties in some theistic property.

3.3.1 Harman's Challenge and Naturalist Realism

Begin with Harman's Challenge:

(1) We only have reason to believe in real moral properties or facts if they are part of the best explanation of observable phenomena. (Enoch, 2007: 24)
(2) The best explanation of observable moral phenomena doesn't require the existence of real moral properties or facts. (ibid.)
(3) Therefore we don't have reason to believe in real moral properties or facts.

Two points about Harman's Challenge are worth noting. As Enoch explains, "What underlies the explanatory requirement is, after all, a highly plausible methodological principle of parsimony. Kinds of entities should not be unnecessarily multiplied, redundancy should be avoided" (ibid.: 26). Further, the kind of explanation at issue in the explanatory requirement is epistemic. It's about what we have reason to believe, not a metaphysical thesis about the nonexistence of moral properties. This means that Harman's Challenge leaves

untouched the possibility that a theistic account of morality is true but not epistemically rational to believe.

Harman's Challenge puts pressure on moral realists to show that realist moral properties do play some important role in the best explanation of observable phenomena. Naturalist moral realists have responded by offering so-called Explanationist Arguments. While there are several versions in the literature, we'll focus on a recent formulation:

(1) "We have reason to believe that a property P is genuine if a predicate S figures ineliminably in a good explanation of observed phenomena and in that explanation S refers to P.
(2) Moral predicates feature ineliminably in good explanations of observed phenomena, and in those explanations they refer to moral properties.
(3) We have reason to believe that moral properties are genuine" (Sinclair, 2011: 15).

This argument tells us we may justifiably believe in moral properties because the terms we use to refer to them play an ineliminable role in the best explanation of observed moral phenomena.

Initially, there doesn't seem to be anything distinctively naturalist, or anti-supernaturalist, about the explanationist argument. Couldn't the theist run the very same argument for realism about moral properties and then add her theistic analysis of those properties? The data-driven arguments of sections 2.1–2.3 seem to do precisely this.

Naturalists claim that they have a leg up on nonnaturalist and supernaturalist accounts of moral properties. For Harman's Challenge implies we're licensed to believe in observable, empirically testable entities or unobserved entities with observable effects. Nonnatural properties, and certainly supernatural properties, are not observable or empirically testable; nor are they supposed to have empirically observable effects. By contrast, naturalist realism says that moral properties reduce to natural properties (like being conducive to survival or to group fitness). The property of being just is whatever natural properties constitute it. And when we use the moral predicate "just," we refer to that or those natural properties. But natural properties are per hypothesis empirically testable or have observable effects, given some theory that explains their causal role in bringing about what we observe.

Here is an analogy. We are perfectly epistemically justified in believing in muons, though we can't observe them, because we can empirically verify their effects and our physical theory works out the causal connection between muons and observed phenomena. Similarly, we are perfectly epistemically justified in believing in natural properties like goodness or justice that have causal effects that can be empirically tested.

3.3.2 Varieties of Theism and Supernaturalist Realism

A theist who grounds moral properties in supernatural properties supposedly cannot comply with the rules set out by Harman's Challenge. The theist who says being morally obligatory reduces to being-commanded-by-God, for instance, insists that being commanded by God is the referent of whatever moral predicate figures in the best explanation of moral phenomena. But a property like being-commanded-by-God isn't empirically testable. And, the naturalist assumes, it won't have empirically testable effects either. So it fails to figure in the best explanation of the phenomena while meeting Harman's Challenge.

Generating a reply on behalf of theistic views is not so easy. It may be that our *beliefs* in supernatural properties figure in the best explanation of moral phenomena. For example, perhaps our *belief* that moral obligations come from a divine lawgiver best explain the observed phenomena of our feeling bound by obligations or our predicate "morally obligatory" – this seemed to be Anscombe's point. But Harman's Challenge tells us that this isn't sufficient, for our supernatural beliefs might explain the moral phenomena, but this doesn't entail that the *real properties* our beliefs are *about* must exist for us to explain the moral phenomena. Our belief that moral obligations are divine commands could be systematically mistaken and still explain why we have the feeling that, say, moral obligations are binding or are second-personal.

Suppose the theist claims that the phenomenon of people's beliefs *that moral obligations are divine commands* is best explained by *the existence of supernatural properties* like "being commanded by God." Would this vindicate supernaturalist moral realism? This seems unlikely without a further story, or a theoretical view about justification like phenomenal conservatism on which seemings generate justification of belief. But the story or theory will need to be nuanced, for parallel moves look untenable: the widespread belief in witches in earlier centuries wasn't best explained by the existence of witches, nor does the best explanation for belief in Big Foot appeal to the existence of Big Foot.

An alternative, I suggest, is to hold a variety of thick theism on which God can be a cause of things in the natural order, including moral phenomena. For instance, suppose God is related to the natural order in the way suggested by some of the replies to evolutionary debunking arguments such as Morton's. On Morton's view, a result of having moral knowledge is that one has a higher chance of achieving human (nonmoral) wellbeing. Suppose we can observe and measure human (nonmoral) wellbeing, and several people have this wellbeing. Morton can argue that, since God creates our cognitive faculties and guides