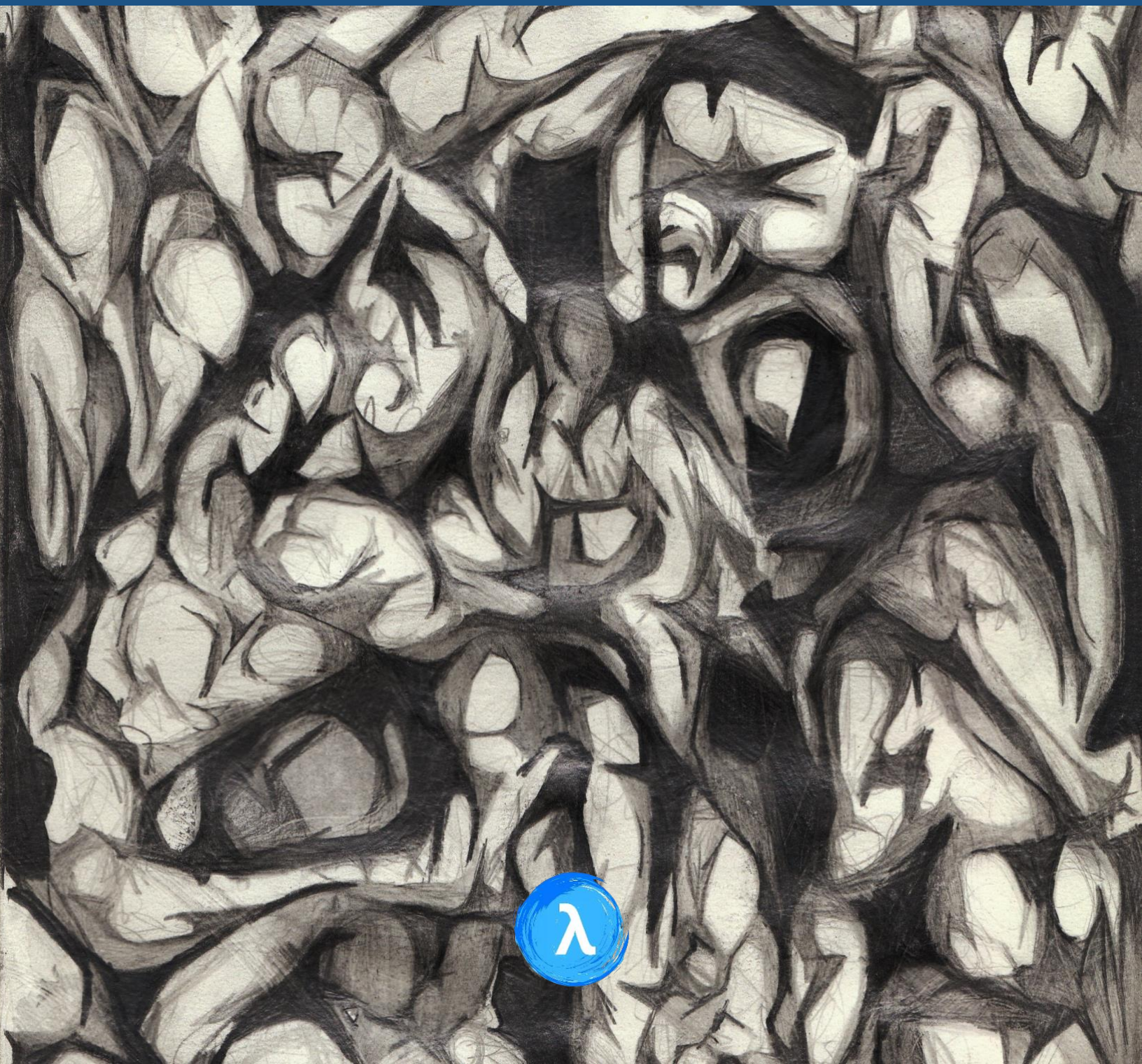
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Editorial and Introduction

Leon Yang

Writing is a difficult task. It not only requires skill, passion, and perseverance, but also a sort of carelessness. Most certainly, the first draft will be ridden with errors. Most certainly, the first draft will not be the final one. This is all part of the writing process. Too many times, writers—myself included—worry about how the first draft might turn out. Do the words flow coherently? Is this written concisely? This is exactly how we stop ourselves from writing. We are often too worried about perfection that we become too afraid to even start. We forget that mistakes are normal and that especially as writers, we always have the chance to fix them.

I used to think that this issue occurred simply because of a desire to pursue perfection. Yet as I frustrated myself with more and more unfinished drafts and half-baked sentences, I started to realize the underlying reason: others. As writers, we want our work to be acknowledged by others. We want others to praise and recognize the effort and thought poured into our words. We want our future selves to be amazed at and proud of our writing. This is the problem. More often than not, we bend over backwards for people we do not owe anything to. We care about mistakes merely because people expect us to not make any. Yet we forget that part of the writing process *is* the correction and editing. The polishing of ideas and replacements of words all contribute to a final good that is then *and only then* packaged and delivered to the reader. The authors that we encounter do not produce their work in a single sitting. Indeed, Rome was not built in one day! We are not reading their first drafts, but instead a culmination of months of constant fixes, tweaks, and touch-ups. Every project has a beginning, and writing is no different. And thus, I encourage everyone to simply put pen to paper, and with some time, the ink that flows onto the page will come together to form a beautiful painting.

More broadly, I also want to urge everyone to not care about how others will view your writing. Do not conform to what others want you to be. Participate. Everyone has something to say, so speak up. And if you cannot speak, then write. But do not care, and most importantly, do not conform.

We hope you will enjoy reading the culmination of many months of work.
Sincerely,

The Editors

Stanislav Petrov's Beliefs: A Framework for Doxastic Responsibility

Ryan Park
Stuyvesant High School, New York, USA

Abstract

This essay proposes a framework for when one should be *held* responsible for their beliefs through a case study of Stanislav Petrov, a Soviet officer involved in the 1983 nuclear false alarm incident. I first argue that people are responsible for all their beliefs. I then determine that one believes *responsibly* if and only if the belief is blameless, defending the Blamelessness Thesis over the Praiseworthiness Thesis in the process. This definition of necessary and sufficient conditions for believing responsibly helps elucidate when one should be held responsible for believing irresponsibly. The essay also reconciles doxastic involuntarism, that one does not control what one believes, with doxastic responsibility, and then counters doxastic voluntarism. It concludes by explaining a critical nuance—that people should also be held responsible for lacking certain beliefs.

1. Introduction

It is September 26, 1983, and Soviet Lieutenant Colonel Stanislav Petrov is alerted that a warning system has detected five missiles launched from the United States.[1] Military protocol dictates Petrov must raise the alarm, deferring to superiors who would likely proceed to retaliate. Yet Petrov refuses to believe in the veracity of the reports. Under enormous strain and transgressing protocol, Petrov dismisses the alert as a mistake (as it would ultimately prove).[2] His wise choice prevents probable nuclear war.

For this decision, Petrov is hailed today as "the man who may have saved the world."[3] If so, he clearly believed *responsibly*; though if he had believed and therefore acted otherwise and initiated nuclear war, we would be justified in *holding him responsible* for it.

This essay proposes a framework for when one should be *held* responsible for what one believes. First, I disambiguate the different senses of "responsibility." After doing so, I first argue that people are responsible for all of their beliefs. I find that one should be *held* responsible when believing *irresponsibly*. As a result, I discuss the conditions for believing *responsibly*. I conclude by arguing that people should also be *held* responsible for lacking certain beliefs.

2. Responsible, Responsibly, and Responsibility.

As Rik Peels notes, the word "responsible" has many contextually dependent meanings. In this essay, I will distinguish between (1) believing (*ir)responsibly*, (2) my belief being my *responsibility*, and (3) being *held responsible* for my belief. Our driving question is then to determine the conditions for (3): when we can be held responsible for any beliefs. At a baseline, I take it to be a necessary requirement that the belief one is being *held* responsible for (and, by extension, the holder of the offending belief) is to blame for some damage or harm.[4] But, how and whether to align (1) or (2) with (3) is not immediately obvious. Let us start with what I will call the *Belief-Responsibility Requirement* which aligns (2) and (3): to be *held* responsible for a belief requires that one is *responsible for* said belief. In this light, I ought to be held responsible for my beliefs *if*:

A. My belief (or lack thereof) is the actual or potential cause of harm, and

B. My belief (or lack thereof) is, to some minimally significant extent, my own responsibility.

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[1] David Hoffman, "I Had a Funny Feeling in My Gut," *Washington Post*, February 10, 1999, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/coldwar/shatter021099b.htm.

[2] Pavel Aksenov, "Stanislav Petrov: The Man Who May Have Saved the World," *BBC*, September 26, 2013, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-24280831.

[3] Aksenov, "Stanislav Petrov."

[4] Rik Peels, *Responsible Belief: A Theory in Ethics and Epistemology* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

3. Doxastic Involuntarism

Typically, we believe that one can only be responsible for actions within their voluntary control. Doxastic involuntarism, however, is precisely the position that we *cannot* control what we believe. Using William Alston's example, one cannot simply choose to sincerely believe that one plus one is three.[5] Similarly, Pamela Hieronymi argues that it is impossible for one to simply will to believe something even if one believe that it would be good to do so, whereas it is possible for one to physically do something because one believes that it would be good to do so (as with exercise).[6] Note here that even if a hard determinism turns out to be true, it is *still* the case that there seems to be something phenomenologically different between the control we seem to exert over actions and beliefs.

But, if the involuntarist thesis is true, it seems *prima facie* incompatible with *responsibility for* belief, and therefore with being *held* responsible for belief. In other words, in order to secure our responsibility for our beliefs, something cannot wholly be correct in the involuntarist picture.

First, consider the prospects of refuting involuntarism *tout court*. Several substantial arguments have been made in defense of a voluntarist model in which one has some measure of control over one's beliefs. Matthias Steup's "Up-To-Me-Ness" model, one of the most influential of these contributions, presents belief formation as consisting of three moments: (i) an indeterministic state during which one is in the process of weighing at least two possibilities, (ii) the moment one decides which possibility to believe, and (iii) when one starts believing the chosen proposition and cannot voluntarily cease doing so.[7] The voluntarist argument relies on the indeterministic state designated by part (i): at that moment, it is apparently up to the believer to decide between possibilities, which is what s/he does in (ii). This decision implies doxastic control.

But this reliance is not well-founded. The extent to which one actually controls what to believe in (i) is minimal to the point of insignificance because one will automatically begin involuntarily internalizing a judgment regarding it in (ii). Indeed, just because one theoretically has control over what to believe in (i) does not mean in practice that this even counts as control—because no continuation of doxastic control proceeds from it, and even the preceding "free" choice between possibilities will be influenced by external factors and emotional pressures beyond one's voluntary control.

This, however, does not spell the end of doxastic responsibility. It may be possible that even if the involuntarist is correct in that our beliefs are involuntary, we may *still* end up able to

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[5] William P. Alston, *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge* (Cornell University Press, 1989).

[6] Pamela Hieronymi, "Responsibility for believing," *Synthese* 161, no. 3 (2008): 357–373, https://doi.org/10.11229-006-9089-x.

[7] Matthias Stepup, "Doxastic Voluntarism and Up-To-Me-Ness," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 26, no. 4 (2018): 611–18, https://doi.org/10.1080/09672559.2018.1511148.

be held responsible for them. Hieronymi challenges the presumption that voluntary control is a prerequisite for responsibility—instead, she considers doxastic involuntarism evidence that one *should*, in fact, be held responsible for one's beliefs. Because one's beliefs are involuntary, the way one believes provides the truest reflection of one's moral character, which is precisely what we are judging[8].

With this in mind, the *Belief-Responsibility Requirement* cannot do. Rather than aligning *responsibility for* any particular belief as a necessary requirement for being *held* responsible, we instead hold one responsible precisely if they were holding beliefs *irresponsibly*. In other words, aligning (1) with (3). Let us call this the *Responsible-Belief Requirement*: I ought to be held liable for my beliefs *iff*:

A. My belief (or lack thereof) is the actual or potential cause of harm, and

C. My belief (or lack thereof) was held, to some minimum extent, irresponsibly.

Returning to our example of Stanislav Petrov for an illustration, if Petrov had believed that the United States was legitimately attacking and dutifully triggered nuclear war, it would subsequently be reasonable to *hold him responsible* for starting it, even if his judgment of evidence was beyond his control and led him to believe through no voluntary effort of his own. We are still justified in holding Petrov accountable because he had several reasons to dismiss the alert—satellite radio operators had told him they had detected no missiles; he had been trained to expect an all-out attack, not just five missiles; and he had known that the missile detection system was rushed in development.[9,10] Had he raised the alarm, it would have revealed him to be impulsive and uncritical, character traits that are fair to hold one responsible for possessing. Under these conditions, Petrov would have been held responsible for believing that the United States had launched the missiles, as this hypothetical belief would have (A) been the actual or potential cause of harm and (C) been held *irresponsibly*. This argument thus reconciles doxastic involuntarism with doxastic responsibility.

4. Responsible Belief is Blameless Belief

So far, however, it remains unclear what believing responsibly or irresponsibly entails. To fully determine whether one should be held responsible for one's beliefs, it is first necessary to clarify the conditions when one believes responsibly. The most convincing definition for responsible belief is that it is equivalent to blameless belief (the Blamelessness Thesis, or BT), which argues

[8] Pamela Hieronymi, "Responsibility for believing."
[9] Aksenov, "Stanislav Petrov."
[10] David Hoffman, "Funny Feeling in My Gut."

one believes responsibly *iff* one's belief is blameless. Its main opponents contend that responsible belief is praiseworthy belief (or PT), where one only does so *iff* one's belief is praiseworthy. PT is ostensibly supported by Brian Weatherson's example of a cricket captain who is praised for coming up with imaginative field placements.[11] The captain's belief comprises two components: one, that these particular placements are possible; and two, that these particular placements will be successful. This situation appears to support PT because it demonstrates how PT reconciles doxastic responsibility with doxastic involuntarism: the captain seems to deserve more praise for believing and coming up with such placements than another captain who did not, even though the former did not choose to come up with them, (one can never choose to become so inspired). Conversely, it appears that BT fails to capture this nuance; if both captains are blameless (one cannot apparently blame the other captain for failing to come up with equally imaginative placements on the spot), it would follow that both captains believed equally responsibly and therefore deserve equal praise.[12]

However, this application of PT ultimately fails to convince, as the captain does indeed have some measure of responsibility over his otherwise spontaneous beliefs in inspired placements. Though these beliefs are dependent on the contingencies of the game, at all times leading up to it, the captain can choose to spend his time watching as many matches and holding as many practices as possible. This free conduct in one's spare time, committed in these particular ways, would increase the likelihood of imaginative field placement during the game. Therefore, the captain's imaginative placements would reflect, to an extent, his past efforts in training his imagination, which is fair to praise him for.[13] In comparison, it would be fair to blame the other captain for failing to adequately train his imagination for future cricket placements. The result of this argument is that we have good reason to hold the other captain responsible through BT, reconciling BT with doxastic involuntarism.

This situation recalls that used to illustrate Hieronymi's argument, where Petrov should have been held responsible if he had raised the alarm even if he chose to believe, through no voluntary input of his own, that the Soviet Union was under attack. Just as the cricket captain who fails to come up with imaginative placements should be held responsible because he failed to train his imagination, so Petrov should have been held responsible had he believed in the warnings because he would have failed to exercise critical thinking, and his belief would be irresponsibly held, demonstrating an inadequate training for false alarms.

5. Intellectual Obligations

[11] Brian Weatherson, "Deontology and Descartes's Demon," *The Journal of Philosophy* 105, no. 9 (2008): 540–569, https://doi.org/10.5840/jphil2008105932.

[12] Rik Peels, *Responsible Belief*, 46.

[13] Rik Peels, *Responsible Belief*.

BT requires a definition of what it means to believe blamelessly. I take it, following Peels, that one believes blamelessly when one has not violated any intellectual obligations.[14] Put otherwise, responsible belief (or, alternatively, believing responsibly) is equivalent to holding beliefs that are justified with respect to one's knowledge base, while satisfying intellectual obligations.[15]

Perhaps the most influential conception of intellectual obligation is the Jamesian goal of holding as many true beliefs as possible and as few false beliefs as possible. This goal has three variations: "one aims to believe (i) more true propositions and fewer false propositions, or (ii) more true propositions and an equal number of false propositions, or (iii) an equal number of true propositions and fewer false propositions."[16] Each of these three possibilities aligns with the Jamesian goal in some way, with (ii) rejecting the obligation to reduce the number of false beliefs, (iii) rejecting the obligation to increase the number of true beliefs, and (i) requiring action for both true and false beliefs.

Peels holds (i) and (ii) to be unreasonable because any obligation that requires holding more true beliefs would entail a situation in which everyone is constantly violating their obligations, as people would be expected to learn more about everything all the time, which defeats the purpose of specific obligations. If this were the case, Petrov would have violated his obligations to learn more not only regarding matters directly relevant to the nuclear alert situation but also everything else, from chess to ancient Mesoamerican warfare. Instead, Peels argues that a more realistic obligation is (iii). This would entail a moral universe in which no one has any obligation, by virtue of being human, to learn anything about anything. Instead, we would only be responsible for polishing existing beliefs, minimizing any residual errors therein, without any obligation to acquire positively new knowledge and beliefs.

However, it also seems to be the case that one can be held responsible for a lack of certain beliefs. For instance, in democratic societies, it seems reasonable that citizens have *some* obligation to be informed on politics and current events to both sharpen existing positions and acquire new ones in order to better decide on courses of action that have the potential to drastically affect many people's lives, with some actions objectively better than others. For instance, if we wish to avoid the continued devastation of the planet by climate change, citizens have an obligation to learn about it and related matters, formulate and hold beliefs relating to them responsibly (which will then promote responsible action like recycling), and vote for politicians and policies that are likely to reduce its harmful impact. If this obligation did not exist, a future in which billions suffer from the avoidable effects of climate change would be possible without the entire population violating any obligations.

If this is the case, however, Peels total rejection of (i) and (ii) is not wholly correct: we *can*

[14] Rik Peels, *Responsible Belief*.
[15] Rik Peels, *Responsible Belief*.
[16] Rik Peels, *Responsible Belief*, 102.

be obligated to increase the number of true beliefs we hold, in addition to weeding out false/incorrect beliefs. Thus, a revised version of intellectual obligations that escape's Peel's critique is in order. Rather than being obligated to increase true beliefs point-blank, one may have some minimum requirement of true beliefs, or, alternatively, a domain-specific obligation to increasing true beliefs—corresponding to more general deontological duties. Thus, for the citizen, it may be the case that one has a civic duty to stay (somewhat) informed of current events, while for the sports captain, it may be a duty to stay highly informed on sports strategies (by regularly watching film, reading, etc.), as a result of his duty *qua* captain to lead his team. Responsibly believing, then, becomes a matter of satisfying one's existing duties insofar as they contain doxastic elements, and a general duty to remove false beliefs.

6. Conclusion

If Petrov had believed, against his better judgment but with no voluntary input, that the United States had indeed launched nuclear missiles, causing him to raise the alarm and leading to nuclear war, it would be reasonable to hold him responsible for this destruction and holding belief that caused it. Although involuntary, Petrov's hypothetical belief that the United States had launched missiles, would be irresponsible, precisely because holding it demonstrates a violation of his doxastic obligations (per BT) to remain informed about his instruments, and it would have been the cause of immeasurable harm by causing nuclear war. The framework developed throughout this essay provides justification for this conclusion.

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Are We Obligated to Give to Charity?

Eloise Thomas
Cheltenham College, Gloucestershire, United Kingdom

Abstract

It is a common assumption that it is a good to give money to charity, which leads to the belief that we should give to those in need. However, I will be arguing that whether it is good to give money to charity depends upon the likelihood that the money will help those most in need. Drawing on Zizek, I will consider a different use of the word 'charity' based off its root in the Latin *caritas*. Using Zizek, I will emphasize the importance of structures in countries being stable for giving money to charity to be effective. As such, I conclude that we *do* have a moral obligation to give money to *only* those charities which challenge unjust structures, even if libertarians such as Nozick and Narveson would disagree with me.

1. Introduction

We ordinarily believe that giving to charity is good (or brings about good results), and that therefore we may have *some* moral obligation to give to charity. Giving money to charity facilitates the wealthier providing help and support towards the more vulnerable, especially individuals lacking access to basic needs such as shelter or food. Peter Singer represents this ordinary view, only argued to its logical conclusion: giving money to charity is always required insofar as it is at least minimally effective at alleviating suffering. Thus, in his "Famine, Affluence and Morality," Singer writes, "If it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance, we ought, morally, to do it."[1] This is illustrated in his drowning child and starving child thought experiment through which he argues there is a moral requirement to donate money to alleviate suffering globally, where it is possible to help others from a distance.[2]

Although those including Peter Singer argue that giving to charity is almost always a good, it must be conceded that not all donations are *necessarily* good, even in the utilitarian sense. Giving money to charity can be associated with several problems, including mismanagement or corruption, increased dependency within communities or exacerbating existing conflicts. Utilitarians such as Jeremy Bentham would analyze the certainty of how probable it is that the money would benefit the people receiving it/who it is meant for as this is a criterion of the Hedonic Calculus—a charity's management and track-record become critical to the 'certainty' and 'fecundity' of any pleasure generated by money given through charity.[3]

Thus, one needs to look at where the money goes as a factor that could influence whether money should be donated. Charities could be disreputable or mismanaged; there have been numerous instances where significant sums have been raised but it is unclear where the money went. An example where giving money to charity has not resulted in positive outcomes is when the American Red Cross raised nearly $500 million towards earthquake response efforts in Haiti in 2010, however the majority of this did not reach the civilians in need; only six permanent homes were built, and the vast proportion of money was unaccounted for.[4]

2. Charity as *Caritas*

But, even putting issues of mere efficacy aside, charity can be argued as a superficial solution

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[1] Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1, no. 3 (1972): 231, http:/ww.jstor.org/stable/2265052.

[2] Additionally, Singer has co-founded the organization "The Life You Can Save" which facilitates giving money to charities fighting extreme poverty, available at https://www.thelifeyoucansave.org/.

[3] Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Dover Publications, 2007).

[4] Justin Elliot and Laura Sullivan, "How the Red Cross Raised Half a Billion Dollars for Haiti and Built Six Homes," *ProPublica*, June 3, 2015, https://www.propublica.org/article/how-the-red-cross-raised-half-a-billion-dollars-for-haiti-and-built-6-homes.

which creates a vicious cycle perpetuating the unjust systems which engender and bolster the exact conditions that the charitable act aims to alleviate. Indeed, Slavoj Zizek's argues that charity only masks the underlying exploitation and inequality in societies, so the true meaning of charity is that it plays the role of a 'moral bandage.' Per Zizek, in modern society, the true meaning of charity has evolved, suggesting that it is more commonly a mechanism which plays the role of soothing the guilt of the wealthy without directly addressing systemic injustices. He argues that the most loving and *charitable* thing to do is to directly challenge the unjust hierarchy and describes this as 'violent love.'[5] Here, Zizek derives love from the Latin *'caritas*,' also often translated as 'charity.' Reclaiming *caritas*, Zizek reframes charity not as a 'moral bandage' of giving money, but as an act of disrupting unjust hierarchies which seek to oppress those most in need and which would appropriate any piecemeal donations. In this light, merely giving money is not necessarily obligatory and, in fact, possibly impermissible when it prevents more substantive change. Rather, if we are to have a duty to charity at all, it *must* be to that charity, properly understood, which challenges underlying systemic injustices rather than being a moral bandage.

This dovetails with John Rawls' view as demonstrated in his *A Theory of Justice* about charity and being a way to promote social justice and reduce inequality. Here, Rawls does not unequivocally outline an argument for a moral obligation to charity, however his framework implies that a just society would ensure the basic needs of all citizens are met by redistributing resources in a way that benefits the least advantaged in society. Therefore, those whose basic needs are not met (such as those without shelter or food) should be assisted by those in society who are living in affluence and can afford to give (they have a duty to give): "Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are to the greatest benefit of the least advantage."[6] Thus, Rawls suggests we should create more just structures through an equity-driven approach and agrees with Singer that we have a moral obligation to help all, yet says to give help to those who need it more.

3. Do We Have *Any* Duty to Give?

On the other hand, agreeing with the statement and saying we are not morally obliged to give money, Jan Narveson, in his essay "We Don't Owe them a Thing!" presents a libertarian viewpoint that we do not have a responsibility to those we haven't harmed: "We are certainly responsible for evils we inflict on others, no matter where, and we owe those people compensation… Nevertheless, I have seen no plausible argument that we owe something, as a

[5] Slavoj Zizek, *The Parallax View* (The MIT Press, 2006), 282.
[6] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, 2005), 266.

matter of general duty, to those to whom we have done nothing wrong."[7] Similarly, in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Robert Nozick writes, "Taxation of earnings from labor is on a par with forced labor."[8] He introduces a libertarian approach, where individuals have the right to their property and *any* forced redistribution (including charity under coercive systems) is unjust. Nozick argues that while voluntary charitable giving is commendable, there is no moral obligation to do so. Charity, as part of a coercive system and forced redistribution, is therefore wholly unjust. Ultimately, both Nozick and Narveson raise emphasis on personal freedom and choice in ethical matters such as the one presented. Accordingly, there is no requirement for abstract duties to strangers.

However, while Narveson holds that we do not owe anybody anything unless we have harmed them, the existence of certain unjust structures means wealthy consumers *are* doing indirect harm to exploited producers. What, though, about Nozick's libertarian view that humans have no moral obligation to give any of their money to charity to help those in need if they have earned it legally? Money could be earned 'legally,' but not necessarily 'morally' if it is on the back of systems which are unjust. Thus, even holding Narveson's (or Nozick's) libertarian position, we *still* may have an obligation to give to charity. Precisely by intertwining Zizek's critique of charity with Narveson's, we end up with an *increased* burden not merely to donate to charity in general, but to follow Zizek specific call to improve the structures in order to ameliorate the indirect harm we have done. Here, indirect harm means harm caused by purchasing from unethical sources where producers are exploited, or citizens harmed by allowing money to be accumulated by oppressors. On Narveson's own logic, consumers who have purchased from any business or supported any organization which is oppressive owe something indirectly to the oppressed.

However, as mentioned earlier, directly giving charity in the form of money may exacerbate existing problems, and so it might not be a good act. Nevertheless, there are other charities which could operate outside of the spheres of influence of the oppressors who are seeking to challenge the unjust power structures. It is to these charities that consumers, particularly those who have done indirect harm, owe their moral obligation of giving money to charity. Organizations such as Trócaire, with their Access to Justice program, seek to "empower women and men to challenge unjust power structures that keep them in poverty."[9]

4. Conclusion

[7] Jan Narveson, "We Don't Owe Them a Thing! A Tough-Minded but Soft-Hearted View of Aid to the Faraway Needy," *The Monist* 86, no. 3 (2003): 419, https://doi.org/10.5840/monist200386323.

[8] Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Blackwell, 1974), 169.

[9] "Access to Justice," Trócaire, accessed October 18, 2024, https://www.trocaire.org/our-work/access-to-justice/.

In conclusion, while Peter Singer would support giving money to charity and giving to all, Slavoj Zizek holds that money is a means by which the wealthier in society can feel less guilty by giving money to charity and that instead we should challenge unjust hierarchies. Taking both these views into account, I argue that the money given to charities may not even reach the vulnerable who the money is raised for due to problems such as corruption, and that this should be considered through the criterion of 'certainty' from the Hedonic Calculus for Utilitarians. So, giving money to charity is not necessarily a good as it avoids, and potentially feeds into, systemic injustices and perpetuates the problems it is trying to solve. It can only be a good if corruption and systemic injustice in a country is very low to non-existent, meaning that the money will have a high likelihood of yielding positive consequences for those who need it the most. Regarding the second component of the statement focusing on one's moral obligation to give money to charity, Peter Singer claims we are all morally obligated to give. Rawls aligns with this in saying that we should give to those whose basic needs are not met, as a just society would ensure necessities for all citizens. Sharply contrasting with this, Nozick argued that people are entitled to their holdings they earn justly, thus there is no moral obligation to give money to charity. Nozick and Narveson share some libertarian elements, but Narveson suggests we do not have a moral obligation to charity if we have not harmed the individuals the charity is set up to benefit. Nevertheless, where better off citizens have indirectly supported oppression, such as purchasing goods or services which have exploitation at their root, then they are obligated to give to charity to atone. As there are charities which sit outside yet challenge systemic injustices, so we must choose to give to these charities to ensure the aid gets to the people it is intended for. Thus, we are morally obligated to give to charities to reduce global suffering and inequality.

Assuming that the social, economic, and political structures are just, and that the money donated will not likely be appropriated by an oppressive or corrupt individuals, government, or other organizations with excessive power in relation to the rest of the country's citizens, it is good to give money to charity. Therefore, I disagree with the statement that we are not morally obliged to do so where we have directly or indirectly supported unjust structures which perpetuate exploitation. We have a moral responsibility to one another as members of society.

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Shared Perceptions, Constructed Realities: Vasubandhu's Idealist Philosophy and Intersubjectivity

Gelila Chang
Florida, USA

Abstract

In Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu's *Twenty Verses on Consciousness Only*, Vasubandhu argues against the belief that external reality is an indispensable factor of the world and human existence. Instead, he proposes the other side of the coin, according to which objects are assumed to exist exclusively in the perceiver's mind. Among the three main objections addressed by Vasubandhu, this paper focuses on the issue of intersubjectivity: how multiple individuals can perceive the same object if there are no external, mind-independent objects. This paper, with reference to the specific examples of *Twenty Verses* and real-life circumstances, argues in favor of Vasubandhu's idealist solution to intersubjectivity. By comparing Vasubandhu's mind-only position with a realist perspective, the paper highlights how Vasubandhu's explanation, grounded in the role of collective mental imprints and consciousness, offers a more coherent and plausible account of perception. In contrast to the realist assumption of an objective external reality, Vasubandhu's interpretation reveals a deeper understanding of how perceptions can be shaped by the mind, ultimately presenting a more compelling alternative to the realist view.

1. Introduction

In Vasubandhu's *Twenty Verses on Consciousness Only* (*Vimsatika*), he articulates the idealist or mind-only (Yogacara) position, asserting that external, mind-independent objects are unnecessary to explain our experiences. He posits that all experiences are manifestations of the mind. By contrast, the realist holds that external objects exist, independently of our perceptions of them. In *Twenty Verses*, Vasubandhu addresses three main objections to his mind-only theory: 1) Why objects seem restricted in space and time, 2) Intersubjectivity, and 3) How can actions be effective if everything is mental representation.

In this paper I focus on Vasubandhu's response to the problem of intersubjectivity to defend the idealist, mind-only position as a plausible alternative to the realist account. Specifically, by emphasizing the role of collective mental imprints, Vasubandhu shows the mind-only position offers a coherent explanation for shared, intersubjective experiences without invoking mind-independent objects. First, I outline the realist's objection to Vasubandhu and his response, next I bring in additional examples, including the case of mass hallucinations. I end by replying to further objections.

2. Vasubandhu's Basic Argument

In *Twenty Verses*, the objection is raised that if external objects do not exist, then intersubjectivity cannot be explained. How can different individuals experience the *same* things (including each other) if there are no external objects? For the realist, shared perceptions among individuals are best explained by the existence of external objects that exist independently of anyone's mind. In everyday life, different people consistently report the same thing. For example, multiple people can look at a tree and agree on its shape, color, and location. Alternatively, if one person says, "The sky is blue," and another person agrees, it indicates that both are perceiving the same external sky. This consistent mutual verification supports the existence of external objects that different minds are perceiving similarly.

In response, Vasubandhu describes a scenario involving ghosts who all perceive a river filled with pus. This perception is shared among the ghosts, meaning they all see the same thing. However, in this case, the reason for this shared perception is that the ghosts are experiencing similar karmic ripening. Their past actions and mental states have led to a situation where they collectively perceive this river of pus. But this river of pus need not, and does not, exist externally. It is not a physical figure that can be found in the physical world. Instead, it is a figure within the minds of the ghosts. Vasubandhu applies this scenario to human perception: just as the ghosts' shared perception of the river of pus is a result of their collective mental state, Vasubandhu argues humans can have shared perceptions of objects because their minds are in similar states or have undergone similar karmic influences. This explanation implies that external, mind-independent

objects are *not necessary* for explaining shared human perceptions. Per Vasubandhu's argument, the consistency and agreement in perceptions among individuals can be explained by shared cognitive frameworks or similar mental processes, rather than by the existence of an objective, external reality.

3. Mass Hallucinations

In what follows, I will attempt

Some real life examples supported Vasubandhu's view, for example the Phantom limb pain (PLP). PLP refers to ongoing painful sensations that seem to be coming from the part of the limb that is no longer there. The limb is gone, but the pain is real.(Amputee) One of the best known physicians of the Civil War era was Silas Weir Mitchell. In an article from 1866 in Atlantic Monthly, Mitchell described a neurological examination of a theoretical soldier who had lost all four limbs in a battle. In describing patients with missing limbs, he was one of the first to offer a description of phantom limbs, the perception that an amputated limb was still intact: "Where the leg, for instance, has been lost, they feel as if the foot was present, but as though the leg were shortened. If the thigh has been taken off, there seems to them to be a foot at the knee; if the arm, a hand seems to be at the elbow, or attached to the stump itself" (Mitchell, 1866). This phenomenon supports Vasubandhu's claim that external, mind-independent objects are not necessary to account for our experiences. In the case of Mitchell, there is no external limb present, yet the patient's mind constructs a very real and tangible experience of it. This could prove that—The sensations are entirely generated by the mind. However, an objection to this claim might be that the sensation is caused by the fact that there was once a physical arm present, one could argue that the memory of the limb and its associated neural pathways contribute to the sensation of pain, giving credence to the idea that physicality is what is truly real for us, even if the physical thing is now gone. To respond to this objection, we should recognize that the sensation of pain(especially in the case of wounded by war) for those patients arises without any current external stimulus, which ultimately suggests that the experience is internally generated by the mind. In the case of phantom limb pain, the mind can continue to generate sensory experiences even after the object no longer physically exists. This implies that the mind is not completely passively receiving input from external environments but is also actively constructing sensory experiences from itself. The absence of the external limb does not prevent the brain from creating the perception of pain or the sensation of an intact limb. This is consistent with what Vasubandhu's mind-only position supports: The mind, rather than external objects, is the primary source of our perceptual experiences.

Additionally, the occurrence of phantom limb pain in congenital amputees—individuals born without a limb—further supports Vasubandhu's argument. According to the National Library of medicine, a study of phantom limbs in people with congenital limb deficiency. This

study provides a statistic that at least 20% of the congenitally limb-deficient subjects have experienced phantom limbs pain. The phantoms are detailed and can be described in terms of size, shape, position, movement and temporal properties(R Melzack, 1997). These individuals can experience sensations in a limb they never physically possessed, highlighting that the mind alone is capable of generating these experiences. This phenomenon challenges the notion that physicality is the primary basis for our experiences and supports the view that our perceptions and sensations can arise purely from the mind's constructs. From the perspective of perception, even if a limb is missing or has never existed, the brain still generates signals that create the illusion of the limb's presence. These signals do not come from the external world but are "constructed" by the brain based on memories of the limb and past sensory experiences. This suggests that a person's senses are less under the influence of physical reality and more the result of the mind's imagination through psychological expectations and previous memories. This phenomenon demonstrates that human experiences and sensations can be entirely generated by internal mental processes, without relying on external physical objects. This aligns with Vasubandhu's Yogacara (mind-only) theory, which posits that our perceptions and experiences fundamentally arise from the workings of the mind, rather than the existence of an external world.

Furthermore, an example that supports Vasubandhu's view is the Rubber Hand Illusion. In this experiment, a person's real hand is hidden from view, and a rubber hand is placed in front of them. When both the real hand and the rubber hand are stroked simultaneously, the person begins to feel as if the rubber hand is their own. This illusion demonstrates how the mind can create a sense of ownership and reality for something that is not actually part of the external world. The rubber hand illusion highlights how our perceptions can be manipulated by the mind, suggesting that what we consider to be external objects can be constructs of our consciousness.

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Is God Evil? Examining Christianity's Greatest Flaw

Govindha Chadalavada
Western Reserve Academy, Ohio, USA

Abstract

In today's world, one may be quick to assume that views of Atheists and Agnostics are starting to become well respected, but this is not necessarily the case. According to a 2022 Pew Research Survey, 49% of Protestants and 37% of Catholics still believe that it is necessary to believe in God to be moral and have good values. There seems to be this notion that non-believers of a Christian god are illogical and know that they are wrong, but refuse to believe so. However, in this paper, I delineate the problem of evil, an issue that I find with Christian theology. It is important to note that I believe Christianity is an unfalsifiable religion but there is reason for serious doubt found through the problem of evil. I will discuss the problem of evil through the lens of determinism, free will, and moral relativism.

1. The Argument

The most common argument used against the Christian god, and arguably the most valid, relates to the problem of evil. The argument suggests that if God is considered omnibenevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient, then there is no justification for the evil and suffering that exists in this world. Before getting into the depths of the argument, it is important to understand where these qualities of God come from. Omnibenevolence is shown in Psalm 145:9, stating "The Lord is good to all and His tender mercies are over all His works;" omnipotence is proven in Psalm 115:3, which says "He [God] does whatever he pleases;" and omniscience in shown in 1 John 3:20, when John states, "God is greater than our heart, and knows all things" (NKJV Bible). If these premises are not true, the faith would lose the essence of what has made it so widespread for a multitude of reasons. For example, if God is not all-knowing, then humanity cannot fully trust God's judgement, and God begins to be seen as similar to humans. Similarly, if God is not all-loving, the value of God's grace and heaven would be greatly diminished.

The problem of evil suggests that God cannot logically exist under Christianity's conditions, due to the existence of evil in the world. To show the validity of this argument, I will first show that evil actually exists. Then, I will show that God is allowing evil to exist and that there is no positive ulterior motive for Him to do so. Then, I will make the valid

conclusion that the Christian God cannot logically exist under the given circumstances we live in.

2. Subjective Morality

A common response to the problem of evil from believers goes along the lines of, "When one says that something is wrong, they are transporting themselves into a world where ethics are objective, which is impossible without God." This argument is not sound even under the lens of moral relativism however, as the actions that many Atheists call "evil" are also evil from a Christian viewpoint. For example, the murder of an innocent infant is considered objectively bad in Christianity, but it is not stopped by God. This concept can be applied to any of the many sins that are listed in the bible. Since there are so many acts that are considered atrocities under a Christian framework, the question of moral relativism is irrelevant to the problem of evil.

3. Humans Understand God

Another common response from Christian Apologists argues that there is no way to know why evil exists because there is no way to fully understand God. This argument is much trickier, because it uses the premise that God is omnipotent and can counter any sentiment against Christianity. While believing that we cannot understand evil because God works in mysterious ways is unfalsifiable, "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (NKJV Bible 1 Corinthians 14.33). Furthermore, if humans cannot understand God on such a fundamental level, then the very basis of faith in Christianity is dismantled, because God could be working in ways that are too confusing for humans to understand. Thus, any possible interpretation of God's will could not be accurate, and even God's words would not be able to be taken at face value. There would be no use in the Bible, nor any religious document.

4. Free Will

The best counter to the problem of evil in my opinion focuses on the concept of free will. According to many Christians, God allows for evil in the world since our world has free will. This idea suggests that God considers free will to be what is omnibenevolent, meaning that there may be some downsides to free will, but they are still permissible, because free will is what is most omnibenevolent.

First, most Christians support the idea that one is unable to sin in heaven yet still has free will. There are already certain choices people cannot make (no one can fly or teleport), and since the idea of a sinless world with free will is possible, why would God not make our universe this way and instead make atrocities such as genocide or enslavement possible? Some apologists argue God made Earth this way because life on Earth gives people time to choose if they want to live eternity with or without God, but this idea of "choice" is very misleading. A "choice" involves knowing that both options are viable, and the "choice" in this circumstance comes with the presupposition that every human knows God exists in their heart, which I know is not the case for me.

Second, I find it hard to believe that humans even have much free will when there is such a strong correlation between past experiences and actions. As neuroscientist David Eagleman states, "Our actions are guided by an intricate interplay of genetic predispositions, neural wiring, and environmental stimuli. What we perceive as free will is often the result of unconscious processes driven by these factors. While we believe we are in control of our choices, much of what we decide is influenced by elements beyond our conscious awareness" (Eagleman). Although some may subscribe to compatibilism, the view that both determinism and free will can coexist, I argue they also affect our options. The very nature of determinism is that the past, something outside of your control, determines your decision, which would entail that you had no control over said decision, since you have no control over the past. Moreover, much of one's beliefs are pre-determined before their birth, through geography. If a boy is born in Egypt, he will most likely be a Muslim. If he is born in India, he will most likely be Hindu. If he is born in Israel, he will most likely be Jewish. If being a non-Christian disqualifies the boy from entering heaven, this is an outcome that he will not be able to choose to avoid.

Finally, there are numerous accounts in the bible of miracles from God, such as when the sun stood still for Joshua, which seem to suggest God can and does meddle in human affairs. (NKJV Bible 10.12) It seems entirely possible that an omnipotent god could in some way stop egregious acts, without fully negating free will. Philosopher J.L. Mackie states, "If God has made men such that in their free choices, they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good?" (Mackie 201, 1955).

5. Suffering Caused by God

There is also evil that is unrelated to free will. For example, according to Ritchie and Rosado (2022), 40 to 50 thousand people die every year from natural disasters, a phenomenon that is impossible for humans to will into existence. It is shown from

Numbers 16:30-34 that God sends these natural disasters to judge humans for their sins (NKJV Bible). Many proponents of Christianity argue that these natural disasters came to be because humans brought sin to the sinless world. However, many infants die each year due to natural disasters, and most of these infants did not sin. Many sinless infants also die due to horrendous diseases, such as cancer. Many try to justify the death of infants by saying these infants will be given a place in heaven, but this concept does not take away the fact that God caused unnecessary suffering. Would a Christian consider it to be moral if I were to destroy another's house, but then fully pay for the damages? Why is different logic used for God? Many reply, "God gave you life, so God can take it away." However, most Christians would still consider destroying the house morally reprehensible even if I built the house. Others point out that the infant could have become a deeply immoral person or converted to another religion, but both
of these people still exist in our world. So, why does God only kill some of these infants that will enter a dark path? Moreover, would it not be more logical for God to allow these infants to play out their free will?
It also is not apparent why this suffering that is the result of original sin is still taking place after the New Testament, as under the new covenant, the reigning concept is forgiveness. People no longer need to be killed or punished for the sins they commit, yet natural disasters and diseases seem to be an exception to this rule.

6. Morality of God

The argument that God can judge humans by the sin they commit assumes that God is an objective judge of moral actions. At first glance, this concept makes complete sense because of God's omniscience, but after deeper examination, a problem arises. What exactly is it that makes God the judge of whether an action is objectively good or bad? Some may try to cite God's omniscience, but this implies that God knows moral truths that are external to him, which means moral truths exist external to God. This suggests that there are limits to God's authority, which directly contradicts the omnipresence of God that is seen in Psalm 139 (Wierenga). If something is good simply because God demands it, anything God says becomes arbitrary and subjective.
This argument, first coined in Plato's Euthyphro, is called the Euthyphro Dilemma. In the dialogue, Euthyphro says, "the pious is what all the gods love, and the opposite, what all the gods hate, is the impious." This argument is often criticized for creating a binary for the existence of objective morality. Many say that objective good is not a result of God's commands but is instead reflected in the very nature of God. However, this does not disprove the dilemma in any way. What is it about God's nature that makes it good? Either

God's nature is good because God says it is, or it is good because it conforms to something external. So, how can a God without objective morality cause human suffering in the name of goodness?

7. Conclusion

It is important to emphasize that this omnipotent and omniscient god knew the amount of temptation to sin, along with the effects that would have on humanity when he created it. He knew how much suffering humanity would endure; he knew how many people would be killed in his name; and he knew and still knows that he could end all of it at any point in time. Yet, he not only allows but causes such disgusting acts of evil and suffering. Therefore, the evidence points towards a conclusion without this Christian God.

While Theists bring up good talking points, there is not enough evidence to show that the Christian god would create a world like this. As Christopher Hitchens said in a 2008 debate, "It's not just the problem of suffering, it's the problem of undeserved suffering. There's nothing more, in a way, I think, revolting than the sight of the innocent and the defenseless being harmed. And I think that's an argument that would make it very, very difficult to argue that there's a divine plan" (Hitchens, 2008). Either my understanding of morality and free will is absurdly incorrect, or the Christian god does not exist.

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Call for Papers and Reviewers

We hope that you have enjoyed reading the first ever issue of the *High School Journal of Philosophy and Ethics!* This journal, of course, would not have been possible without the hard work of the many authors who have submitted, and the reviewers who have spent time giving much-needed feedback and authority.

To that end, we hope that this edition will encourage you to participate, whether as a writer or a reviewer. Indeed, in editing this current volume, our shortage of reviewers meant that we were only able to publish so many articles. In other words, this means that if your article was not featured in this publication, it may very well have been because we were not able to get to it in time! All of this is to say two things:

1. We strongly urge all those who are curious about *anything* to try their hand at writing and submitting a paper, *especially* those who have already submitted. Those who have submitted may email us at admin@hsjpe.org to request a status update.

2. If you are reading this, have a formal philosophical background (or in a related field), and are willing to assist, please do not hesitate to contact us at the same email: admin@hsjpe.org. We are quite flexible with the refereeing workload!

For hopeful writers, we hope that this edition has served not only as inspiration that anyone can write a great philosophy paper, but also will serve as a model for future writing. In particular, we would like to stress that the papers shown do not represent *all* that philosophy can be. Merely, they showcase examples of what we believe are clear, original yet showcasing, interaction with the literature and well-argued.

Best of luck philosophizing!