**The “Inductive” Argument From Evil: A Dialogue\***

The article starts by defining four women, Iris, Beatrice Leaver, Athea Ist, and Agnes Tic. With the exception of Iris, each name is a clear indication to their religious beliefs. Bea Leaver is religious, Athea Ist is an atheist, and Agnes Tic is an agnostic. Iris’ six-year-old daughter has just died and Iris herself has been hospitalized for depression. The other three have gone to visit her and help her through her crisis.

In Agnes’ living room, Agnes, Athea, and Bea are discussing Iris’ downwards spiral and where it all went wrong. Agnes recounts how Iris divorced her now ex-husband Bo eight months ago. When Iris started dating Jim, Bo “went over the edge” (1.1 In Agnes’s living room). On New Year’s Eve the new couple ran into Bo in a bar and Bo and Jim got into an altercation and Bo was thrown out. When Iris came home, she found Bo waiting inside and he threatened her. Iris knocked him out and went to bed. She was woken up by a brother (it’s unclear whose), who found Iris’ daughter, Carrie’s, body beaten and strangled to death. Bo was arrested and Iris thinks he was high on angle dust again when he murdered her.

Agnes goes on to say that Iris “blames herself for not calling the police while Bo was unconscious” (1.1 In Agnes’s living room). She tells how Iris has begun to question her belief in God and segues into telling about how she has started to question her own beliefs about God because how could a good God allow such bad things to happen? After encouragement from Bea and Athea, Agnes remembers how their ethics professor claimed that “evils like this conclusively prove that there’s no God” (1.1 In Agnes’ living room).

After encouragement from Athea, Agnes begins to share her proof that God doesn’t exist. What follows is effectively the Epicurean Paradox where if God cannot prevent evil, God is not all powerful and if God does not want to prevent Evil, then God is not good. This raises the question of why evil exists if we do accept that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good because such a being should be able to easily eradicate all evil.

Athea counters this by saying that religion does hold that God is omnipotent but in order to allow people to keep their free will, God must refrain from interfering in the lives of the people. She then notices how much time has passed and suggests continuing the conversation over dinner.

At dinner at the House of India, Athea agrees with Agnes that a good God “would not allow evils like Carrie’s death unless doing so served some “sufficient good.”” Athea argues that no matter what, as humans, we will not be able to see “sufficient good” and that this is what gives us reason to believe there is no God. Agnes asks about arguing from ignorance such as concluding there is no extraterrestrial life because we don’t know of any. Athea continues that through inductive reasoning, we can conclude that there is no God because we will never determine something to be so good that it exceeds the amount of suffering as a result of Carrie’s murder. Continuing, she says that because her argument doesn’t provide 100% certainty, it’s possible that some day there could be enough proof that God does exist.

The group breaks down Athea’s argument into premises and conclusions in a manner similar to that of the Epicurean Paradox as detailed previously. Bea, as a religious person, counters the argument that we don’t see a “God-justifying good” because they might be too small to see directly. Bea asks if we see “any good that might justify God in allowing this evil?” (1.2 At the House of India). Just because we don’t see the good doesn’t mean that there is no good. Lastly, she asks if they could find some evidence that counterbalances Athea’s arguments. Agnes cuts in and suggests taking the conversation down the road over desserts.

At dessert, Bea speaks to how she, as a religious person, reconciles these questions. She says that God puts good and evil decisions before us and gives us the free will to choose between them. The conversation continues, again running through various facets of the Epicurean Paradox. Bea says that she believes that God does sometimes step in to prevent greater evils from taking place and if God were to prevent more of them, we would lose free will. The trio then go on to discuss how much God could intervene before affecting free will. Bea mentions how if God is all-knowing, God’s duties might be different due to differing levels of knowledge about the situation at hand. Agnes raises the question of how God decides when to intervene between two identical situations. She asks if God has a limit on how many interventions can be made and proposes that that’s too much effort and God just made the universe and is letting it play out.

Bea closes out by summarizing the arguments thus far and asks if, since they don’t see any God-justifying good, is there sufficient evidence that there is no such good. Agnes responds by proposing to continue the conversation over brandy at a place around the corner.