

Introduction: The Resurrection of Theism

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SUMMARY

This article is Dr. Craig's Introduction to volume three of the Truth Journal on "New Arguments for the Existence of God." It charts the resurgence in our day of Philosophy of Religions and interacts briefly with the thought of such important theistic philosophers as Plantinga, Swinburne, and Leslie.

INTRODUCTION: THE RESURRECTION OF THEISM

Back in the mid-1960's *Time* magazine ran a cover story for which the magazine's cover was completely black, except for three words emblazoned against the dark background in bright, red letters: "IS GOD DEAD?" The article described the then current "Death-of-God" movement in American theology. But, to paraphrase Mark Twain, it seemed that the news of God's death was premature. At the same time that theologians were writing God's obituary, philosophers were re-discovering His vitality. Just a few years after its "Death-of-God" issue, *Time* carried a story with a similar red on black cover, only this time the title read, "Is God Coming Back to Life?" Indeed, so it must have seemed to those theological morticians of the sixties. During the 1970's interest in philosophy of religion continued to grow. By 1980, *Time* found itself running a major story entitled, "Modernizing the Case for God," which described the contemporary movement among philosophers of religion to refurbish the traditional arguments for God's existence. *Time* marveled, In a quiet revolution in thought and argument that hardly anybody could have foreseen only two decades ago, God is making a comeback. Most intriguingly, this is happening not among theologians or ordinary believers, but in the crisp intellectual circles of academic philosophers, where the consensus had long banished the Almighty from fruitful discourse. [1]

According to the article, the noted American philosopher Roderick Chisholm believes that the reason that atheism was so influential a generation ago is that the brightest philosophers were atheists; but, he says, today many of the brightest philosophers are theists, and they are using a tough-minded intellectualism in defense of that theism.

This volume of *Truth* attempts to bring to its readers some of those defenses of theism from several of its brightest minds as well as critiques from some of theism's leading detractors. In this Introduction, I hope to assist the reader by explaining a bit of the debate in which the various contributions find their context and by offering some commentary of my own on a few of the contributions themselves.

I.

One of the most exciting developments in the field of religious epistemology has been the move, spearheaded by Alvin Plantinga, to defend the rationality of theistic belief not based on argument. According to Plantinga, belief that God exists is what he calls a "properly basic" belief—that is to say, is not based on inference from other beliefs but is rationally warranted in the circumstances of one's immediate experience of God. Now it must be confessed that such a view is not entirely new—as Roy Varghese notes in his interview with Plantinga (see Table of Contents), much the same sort of religious epistemology has been long espoused by Hick, Mascall, and others. Why then has Plantinga received so much attention for his efforts in religious epistemology? The answer, I think, is two-fold: (i) Plantinga, unlike his epistemological fellows, develops his case fully within the context of and in informed dialogue with the currents of contemporary analytic philosophy. Thus, he rather felicitously presents what he calls the "Reformed Objection to Natural Theology" as a critique—groping, implicit, and inchoate as it may be—of the position of epistemological foundationalism. With that, Plantinga springs into the mainstream of contemporary epistemological debate. (ii) Plantinga's position as one of America's major philosophers ensured that whichever avenue he explored subsequent to his epochal *Nature of Necessity* would be followed with great interest. Having already made important contributions in the philosophy of religion concerning the ontological argument and the problem of evil, Plantinga's handling of issues in religious epistemology could be expected to be intriguing and fruitful.

Already in *God and Other Minds*, Plantinga had made a first foray in the direction of the rationality of theism not based on argument by maintaining that if it is rational to believe in the existence of other minds besides one's own, then it is rational to believe in God.[2] For the analogical argument for other minds is parallel to the teleological argument for God's existence. Though both arguments succumb to the same failing, it is still rational to believe in other minds and hence, *pari passu*, in God. James Tomberlin pointed out that Plantinga's argument assumes that belief in God is basic, that is, non-inferential, [3] and in his subsequent work this was precisely the line that Plantinga took.

In his "The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology," Plantinga attacks what he calls the evidentialist objection to theistic belief. [4] According to the evidentialist, one is rationally justified in believing a proposition to be true only if that proposition is either foundational to knowledge or is established by evidence that is ultimately based on such a foundation. According to this viewpoint, since the proposition "God exists" is not foundational, it would be irrational to believe this

proposition apart from rational evidence for its truth. But, Plantinga asks, why cannot the proposition "God exists" be itself part of the foundation, so that no rational evidence is necessary? The evidentialist replies that only propositions that are properly basic can be part of the foundation of knowledge. What, then, are the criteria that determine whether or not a proposition is properly basic? Typically, the evidentialist asserts that only propositions that are self-evident or incorrigible are properly basic. For example, the proposition "the sum of the squares of the sides of a right triangle is equal to the square of the hypotenuse" is self-evidently true. Similarly, the proposition "I feel pain" is incorrigibly true, since even if I am only imagining my injury, it is still true that I feel pain. Since the proposition "God exists" is neither self-evident nor incorrigible, then according to the evidentialist it is not properly basic and therefore requires evidence if it is to be believed. To believe this proposition without evidence is therefore irrational.

Now Plantinga does not deny that self-evident and incorrigible propositions are properly basic, but he does demand, "How do we know that these are the only properly basic propositions or beliefs?" He presents two considerations to prove that such a condition is too restrictive. (i) If only self-evident and incorrigible propositions are properly basic, then we are all irrational, since we commonly accept numerous beliefs that are not based on evidence and that are neither self-evident nor incorrigible. For example, take the belief that the world was not created five minutes ago with built-in memory traces, food in our stomachs from the breakfasts we never really ate, and other appearances of age. Surely it is rational to believe that the world has existed longer than five minutes, even though there is no way to prove this. The evidentialist's criteria for properly basicity must be flawed. (ii) In fact, what about the status of those criteria? Is the proposition "only propositions that are self-evident or incorrigible are properly basic" itself properly basic? Apparently not, for it is certainly not self-evident nor incorrigible. Therefore, if we are to believe this proposition, we must have evidence that it is true. But there is no such evidence. The proposition appears to be just an arbitrary definition-and not a very plausible one at that! Hence, the evidentialist cannot exclude the possibility that belief in God is also a properly basic belief.

And in fact, Plantinga maintains, following Calvin, that belief in God is properly basic. Man has an innate, natural capacity to apprehend God's existence even as he has a natural capacity to accept truths of perception (like "I see a tree"). Given the appropriate circumstances- such as moments of guilt, gratitude, or a sense of God's handiwork in nature-man naturally apprehends God's existence. Hence, Plantinga insists that his epistemology is not fideistic, since there are circumstances that make belief in God a properly basic belief. In fact, it may be more correct, he

admits, to say that the proposition "God exists" is not itself properly basic but is entailed by other beliefs that are truly basic, such as "God is convicting me of sin" or "God is speaking to me." Hence, one is perfectly rational to believe in God wholly apart from evidence.

In his "Reason and Belief in God," Plantinga developed these thoughts in considerably greater detail and endorsed the "central insight" of the Reformers that "the correct or proper way to believe in God . . . was not on the basis of arguments from natural theology or anywhere else; the correct way is to take belief in God as basic." [5] He makes four principal claims in this connection: (i) Taking belief in God as properly basic does not commit one to the relativistic view that virtually any belief can be properly basic. He points out that one can recognize properly basic beliefs without having an explicit criterion of proper basicity. Hence, the Christian theist can reject the proper basicity of other beliefs-like belief in the Great Pumpkin-even though he lacks a criterion for proper basicity and holds belief in God to be properly basic. (ii) Though properly basic, belief that God exists is not groundless. Just as certain perceptual beliefs, like "I see a tree," are properly basic *given the appropriate circumstances*, so belief in God is properly basic in certain appropriate circumstances. Neither the existence of the tree nor of God is *inferred* from the experience of the circumstances. But it is being in the appropriate circumstances that renders one's belief *properly* basic; the belief would be irrational were it to be held under inappropriate circumstances. Thus, belief that God exists is not arbitrary or gratuitous, for it is properly held by a person placed in appropriate circumstances. (iii) A person who accepts belief in God as properly basic may be open to arguments against that belief. For someone may present him with arguments against theism which are based on propositions and argument forms he also accepts as basic. These counter-arguments constitute defeaters for his basic belief in God, and if that belief is to remain rational for him, he must find some defeater of the defeater. Otherwise he will be forced to abandon some of his basic beliefs in order to restore consistency in his noetic structure, and theism may well be the belief that he chooses to jettison. (iv) Taking belief in God as properly basic is not a form of fideism. For the deliverances of reason include not just inferred propositions, but also propositions taken as basic. God has so constructed us that we naturally form the belief in His existence under appropriate circumstances, just as we do belief in other minds, perceptual objects, and so forth. Hence, belief in God is among the deliverances of reason, not faith.

Plantinga's work in the area of religious epistemology is very welcome, for he adroitly manages to steer his ship between the Charybdis of theological rationalism (Plantinga calls it "evidentialism") and the Scylla of fideism in a way that is wholly consonant with biblical teaching. Still, at least two

questions need further clarification: (1) Does the theist *know* that God exists, or is his belief merely rational? (2) What is the relationship between a properly basic belief and an incompatible belief based on evidence?

With regard to the first question, Plantinga agrees that rationality has no necessary connection with truth. In certain circumstances, it may be rational to accept a belief that is, in fact, false, or to reject a belief that is, after all, true. Perhaps the available evidence is preponderant for some belief that is, unbeknownst to us, false, while the evidence for the true belief may be slim or self-contradictory. But the same thing may be said of properly basic beliefs. It is rational, for example, to believe that the world was not created five minutes ago. But maybe it was! Now this raises the obvious question, how do we know that our belief that God exists, while properly basic and rational, is not, nonetheless, false? At first Plantinga seemed inclined to dismiss this problem, claiming that all we can really hope to get at is rationality, not truth. As finite, fallible minds, our epistemic duty is to be rational, not to hit upon truth. But this leaves the theist in the rather disquieting position of not being able to say how or whether he knows that God exists and may in the end lead to skepticism. More recently, therefore, Plantinga has directed his efforts toward providing an account of what it is for belief to be knowledge. [6] Accepting the traditional definition of knowledge as justified true belief, Plantinga has rejected coherentist and reliabilist accounts and has sought to develop a distinctively theistic account of justification. Although in the works already cited above, Plantinga speaks repeatedly of a properly basic belief's being justified, such language is apt to be misleading, since Plantinga is not addressing the issue of justification insofar as it plays a role in the concept of knowledge. Rather, he is talking about a person's being within his epistemic rights (and so justified in this sense) in accepting a belief non-inferentially or basically. It would be less misleading, I think, to say that a person who forms a basic belief in the appropriate circumstances is *rationally warranted* in accepting that belief. For the question still remains open whether that belief is justified and so knowledge for the person involved. In his first contribution to this volume, Plantinga seeks to address that question by proposing an account of justification according to which a belief is justified if one's cognitive faculties are functioning properly, that is, as God designed them to, in forming that belief. He claims that the theist has a ready answer to the question of what it means for our cognitive faculties to function correctly, whereas the atheist has failed to provide an answer to this question. Taking his cue from Calvin's claim that there is in man an innate *sensus divinitatis*, Plantinga holds that God has so constituted us that we naturally form the belief that God exists when placed in appropriate circumstances. It is only due to sin that

persons under appropriate circumstances do not form this belief; they are, in effect, cognitively dysfunctional. In his "Self Profile" in the recent *Alvin Plantinga Festschrift*, Plantinga makes it clear that, in his opinion, a person whose cognitive faculties function properly in appropriate circumstances and who thus forms the belief that God exists has justified true belief, or knowledge, of God's existence:

Just as we have a natural tendency to form perceptual beliefs under certain conditions, so says Calvin, we have a natural tendency to form such beliefs as *God is speaking to me*, or *God has created all this*, or *God disapproves of what I've done* under widely realized conditions. And a person who in these conditions forms one of these beliefs is within his epistemic rights, displaying no epistemic defect; indeed, Calvin thinks, such a person *knows* the proposition in question. . . . In sum, on the Reformed or Calvinist way of looking at the matter, a person who accepts belief in God as basic may be entirely within his epistemic rights, he may thereby display no defect or blemish in his noetic structure; indeed, under those conditions he may *know* that God exists. This seems to me correct. [7]

For Plantinga, then, a person who forms the belief that God exists under the appropriate circumstances knows that God exists.

But this takes us on to that second question, the relationship between a properly basic belief and an incompatible belief supported by evidence. Although Plantinga's detractors have characterized his view as fideistic, [8] my misgiving here is precisely the opposite: that Plantinga seems on the verge of falling into a sort of crypto-evidentialism. For in considering whether a person who holds to belief in God as properly basic may be open to argument, Plantinga appears to allow that belief in God so held may be overcome by argument, so that the theist in order to be rational may have to abandon his belief in God. Granted, Plantinga asserts that the theist in such a predicament may instead abandon belief in one of the argument's premises or in the argument form itself, but the fact remains that if the theist has a greater degree of belief in those premises and argument forms, then it will be theism that must go. If he is unsure which he believes more deeply, then he will be left in doubt, an existential predicament which is destructive of the spiritual life. Plantinga clearly denies that a person who takes belief in God as basic remains rationally warranted in that belief no matter what counter argument or counter evidence arises. [9] The circumstances which ground his belief confer only a *prima facie* justification, not an *ultima facie* justification, to that belief. Earlier in "Reason and Belief" Plantinga had been concerned to show that a fourteen-year-old theist was rational in believing in God apart from any argument or evidence. But now, returning to the

example, he envisions a situation in which such a youngster ought give up his faith:

Like the fourteen-year-old theist . . . , perhaps I have been brought up to believe in God and am initially within my rights in so doing. But conditions can arise in which perhaps I am no longer justified in this belief. Perhaps you propose to me an argument for conclusion [sic] that it is impossible that there be such a person as God. If this argument is convincing for me-if it starts from premises that seem self-evident to me and proceeds by argument forms that seem self-evidently valid- then perhaps I am no longer justified in accepting theistic belief. [10]

Plantinga calls a condition which overrides my *prima facie* justification for *p* a *defeater* for my belief that *p*. Now many people have been brought up to believe in God, observes Plantinga, but then they encountered various potential defeaters for that belief. "If the believer is to remain justified, something further is called for-something that *prima facie* defeats the defeaters." [11] This is the task of theistic apologetics. For example, if I am confronted with the antitheistic problem of evil, then "what is required, if I am to continue to believe rationally, is a defeater for that defeater," such as the "Free Will Defense." [12]

But this I find very disquieting. Since almost every intelligent, adult theist is bombarded throughout his education and adult life with multifarious defeaters for theism, it seems that for a great many, if not most, people, rational argument and evidence will be indispensable to the sustenance of their faith. But then belief that God exists will hardly be comparable to other basic beliefs, like "I see a tree" or "I had breakfast this morning," for it will have to be surrounded by an enormous and elaborately constructed citadel, bristling with defensive armaments to ward off the enemy. In such a case, one wonders how much has been gained by making belief in God properly basic. Such faith is a far cry from that spoken of by the Reformed theologians in whose train Plantinga claims to stand. True, one's apologetic defenses do not now come to supply the inferential basis of one's theistic belief, as Plantinga points out. [13] The failure of the antitheistic problem of evil does not, for example, constitute evidence *for* God's existence. Only if one's defeater-defeaters take the form of positive or offensive apologetic arguments-for example, defeating the problem of evil by arguing from the existence of evil to the objectivity of values and thence to God via a moral argument-might one's belief in God cease to be basic on account of one's apologetic (this would occur only if one also regarded his theistic belief as then inferred from his argument rather than just confirmed by it). It is also true that, according to Plantinga, one's defeater-defeater need not be a sophisticated argument, but perhaps simply the knowledge that someone else has argued responsibly against the defeater. But for all these qualifications, it is still the case that in order for one's faith to be

rational, a great deal of argument and evidence may be necessary for the believer. So while Plantinga may not lapse back into evidentialism *per se*, he does seem to adumbrate a sort of neo-evidentialism. According to Plantinga, "the evidentialist objector . . . should be construed as holding that the theist who believes without evidence thereby violates an intellectual obligation or at any rate displays a flawed noetic structure." [14] But with regard to most any intelligent, adult believer, this is a statement with which Plantinga must be in whole-hearted agreement. Belief in God unaccompanied by evidence is irrational.

The problem with such a religious epistemology, it seems to me, is that it still, like theological rationalism, sanctions what Martin Luther called the magisterial use of reason. That is to say, theistic belief is still subject to potential rational defeaters and cannot be rationally held unless such defeaters are defeated. But a little reflection will show that such an epistemology is as religiously inadequate as evidentialism. Consider, for example, a young German student of pietistic Lutheran upbringing who, desiring to become a pastor himself, goes off to the University of Marburg to study theology. There he sits under various professors of Bultmannian stripe and finds his orthodox theistic faith constantly under attack. He looks about for answers, but finds none in either his reading or in discussions with other persons. He feels utterly defenseless before his professors' criticisms, having nothing but the reality of his own experience of a personal God to oppose to their arguments. Now on Plantinga's view as thus far explained, such a student seems to be irrational to continue to believe in God; he has an epistemic obligation to give up his faith. But surely this is unconscionable. For it makes being a theistic believer a matter of historical and geographical accident. Some persons simply lack the ability, time, or resources to come up with successful defeaters of the anti-theistic defeaters they encounter. Plantinga claims to have shown that there are, to his knowledge, no irrefutable defeaters of theism. Well and good; but what about all the millions of persons prior to Plantinga who were not so ingenious, who did not, for example, see the distinction between a defense and a theodicy, and who, like Plantinga, found all proposals of the latter sort "tepid, shallow, and ultimately frivolous?" [15] Even Plantinga's colleague Philip Quinn, himself a distinguished theistic philosopher, confesses that he sees no solution to the problem of evil and therefore has "very substantial reasons" for believing that God does not exist. [16] The point is not whether Quinn is correct-indeed, Plantinga does, it seems to me, supply defeaters of the purported defeaters of theism-, but rather that there must be millions of people like Quinn, who, due to contingent factors of geography and history, are at a loss as to how to answer the objections to theism they confront. Are we going to deny them, on pain of irrationality, the joy and

privilege of personal faith in God? If so, will they therefore be eternally lost for not believing in God? To answer affirmatively seems unthinkable; but to answer negatively seems contrary to the biblical teaching that all men are "without excuse" if they do not believe in God (Rom. 1:20). So long as we retain the magisterial use of reason, the sting of evidentialism has not been removed.

It is for this reason, therefore, that Plantinga's clarification and development of his view of the relationship between a basic belief and potential defeaters in the second selection in this volume is so welcome. In this selection, which is a portion of his reply to Quinn, Plantinga deals with the issue of whether an intellectually sophisticated adult can take belief in God as properly basic. In dealing with defeaters of theistic belief, Plantinga now differentiates between two types of refutation the theist might give: he might produce an *undercutting* defeater for the purported defeater, that is, show that the defeater has not been proved; or he might offer a *rebutting* defeater, that is, show that the purported defeater is false. We may call both types of responses *refutatory* defeaters because they attack the purported defeater itself and aim to show that it is not rationally compelling. But there is another way to defeat an alleged defeater: one may produce what we might call an *overwhelming* defeater of the defeater, that is, produce a defeater which, while not directly refuting the potential defeater, nevertheless exceeds it in warrant and is incompatible with it, so that the potential defeater is overpowered by the new defeater. Now what Plantinga asks is why some belief itself may not have sufficient warrant to overwhelm its potential defeaters; it would in that case be an intrinsic defeater-defeater. He provides an engaging illustration of someone who knows that he has not committed a crime, but against whom all the evidence stands. Such a person is perfectly rational to believe in his innocence even if he cannot refute the evidence against him. In the same way, says Plantinga, why could not belief in God be so warranted that it constitutes an intrinsic defeater of any considerations brought against it?

With this Plantinga has moved, I think, in the direction of the Reformers and the New Testament. For the Reformed theologians, the basis of faith which could withstand all rational attacks was the *testimonium spiritus sancti internum*. For Calvin, apologetics was a useful discipline to confirm the Spirit's testimony, but it was by no means necessary. A believer who was too uninformed or ill-equipped to refute anti-theistic arguments was rational in believing on the basis of the witness of the Spirit in his heart even in the face of such unrefuted objections. The Reformer's doctrine was grounded squarely on the New Testament teaching about the work of the Holy Spirit. According to both Paul and John, it is the inner witness of the Holy Spirit that provides the ultimate assurance that one's faith is true (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15-16; Jn. 14:16-26; I Jn. 2:20, 26-7; 3:24; 4:13; 5:7-10a).

Paul uses the term *plerophoria* (complete confidence, full assurance) to indicate the surety that the believer possesses as a result of the Spirit's work (Col. 2:2; I Thess. 1:5; cf. Rom. 4:21; 14:5; Col. 4:12). Nor is the Spirit's work restricted to believers; He is at work in the hearts of unbelievers in order to draw them to God (Jn. 16:7-11). Being a theist, then, is not a matter left to historical and geographical accident; even a person confronted with what are for him unanswerable objections to theism is, because of the work of the Holy Spirit, within his epistemic rights, nay, under epistemic obligation, to believe in God.

It seems to me, therefore, that the biblical theist ought to hold that among the circumstances that rationally warrant and, indeed, justify theistic belief is the witness of the Holy Spirit, and that non-propositional warrant is an intrinsic defeater of any potential defeater that might be brought against it. It is here that William Alston and Illyd Trethowan's contributions on religious and moral experience as the grounds for properly basic belief in God become relevant. Though their philosophical viewpoints are diverse, each attempts in his own way to show how an immediate experience of God constitutes the circumstances for a non-inferential knowledge of God's existence.

II.

Even if one agrees that belief in God is a properly basic and justified, true belief, that fact does not evacuate argumentative theism of all significance, for the formulation of sound arguments for and the refutation of objections to theism are an important enterprise which serves as confirmation of the believer's faith and perhaps as persuasion for the unbeliever to embrace theistic belief. C. Stephen Evans's contribution, which opens this section, lays out nicely some of the prolegomena to natural theology and focuses in particular on the "signal of transcendence" in human personhood. Evans stands in the tradition of Pascal (though without the latter's disdain for philosophic proofs of theism) in his emphases on the proper basicity of theistic belief (cf. "reasons of the heart"), on our being created at an epistemic distance from God so as not to be rationally coerced into belief (cf. Pascal's dictum that God has given us evidence sufficiently clear to convince those with an open heart, but sufficiently vague so as not to compel those whose hearts are closed), on the risk of atheism and the need for existential involvement in this quest (cf. Pascal's Wager), and on the mystery of human personhood (cf. "What a chimaera, then is man . . . !"). Evans's comments on "the burden of proof" can be contrasted profitably with Nielsen's account in his contribution. One of the healthiest general features of Evans's approach is its taking seriously the sort of themes developed in existentialism and interacting with these as a theist. Too

much philosophy of religion has become a sort of game of spectators; but Evans reminds us that we are all involved in the quest of life's meaning and cannot, therefore, afford to affect the standpoint of the disinterested spectator. These are life and death issues, and we are involved, like it or not, and must decide. A cumulative case for theism may be built, he believes, and the traditional theistic arguments-some of which shall be examined in this volume-are a part of that case.

The project of natural theology which Evans and others want to carry out, however, collapsed, in the minds of many, with the critiques offered by David Hume and Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century. This impression persists, as Hugo Meynell notes in his contribution, despite the fact that these objections are often system-dependent and that system roundly refuted and rejected.

Meynell does not essay so much to rehabilitate the traditional arguments in light of Hume and Kant's objections, but chooses rather principally to argue for God on a basis that is immune to their attacks. He argues that the intelligibility of the universe points, as Kant realized, to a source of intelligibility in terms of mind, but, taking his cue from the Idealists, proceeds to contend that this source cannot be the human mind, but some Absolute Mind. I should be interested to learn how German thinkers would react to Meynell's reasoning, appealing as he does so strongly to their own philosophical traditions, traditions which, it must be said, are once again exercising a powerful influence on German theological thought.

Richard Swinburne, as a result of his trilogy *Faith and Reason*, *The Coherence of Theism*, and *The Existence of God*, [17] has emerged as perhaps the world's foremost exponent of argumentative theism. He argues that the cumulative evidence of the cosmological argument, the teleological argument, the argument from mind, the evidence of miracles, and religious experience is such that the hypothesis that God exists is more probable than its denial. Although critics have attacked Swinburne's analysis and use of the notion of probability, [18] it seems to me that the worth of his arguments does not stand or fall with the framework of the probability theory in which he presents them, that his simpler claim in the contribution to this volume, which briefly summarizes his arguments, that "the hypothesis of the existence of God makes sense of the whole of our experience and...does so better than any other explanation which can be put forward" stands regardless of any failings which might be found in his epistemological superstructure.

Swinburne's nemesis was his late predecessor at Oxford University, John Mackie, whose posthumously published *Miracle of Theism* promoted Mackie to the status of theism's leading critic. Indeed, in a phenomenon reminiscent of seventeenth century Deism's influx from England into

Germany, a recent German reviewer of the translation of Mackie's book exclaimed that belief in God now seemed all but impossible in light of Mackie's objections. And yet, upon analysis, many of Mackie's objections can be seen to be false and, in fact, superficial. [19] The closing section of Swinburne's article contains his response to some of Mackie's criticisms of Swinburne's arguments.

Professor H. D. Lewis invites us in his paper to contemplate a fundamental question concerning the mystery of existence, a question which Aristotle characterized as the apex of philosophical wonder and which in my own life seized me as a child: *How does one explain the origin of the universe?* Despite the asseverations of Hume and Mackie, I can only agree with Lewis that the notion of the universe's popping into being uncaused out of non-being cannot be honestly affirmed by a sincere seeker after truth. And yet, as Lewis maintains, is it not also rationally inconceivable that the universe be beginningless, that the series of past events should regress *ad infinitum*? The idea that there should be a transcendent being in a timeless state beyond the beginning which brought space and time into existence might also strike us as fantastic and incredible. The least incredible scenario might seem to be that nothing at all exists and that, therefore, there is nothing to be explained-but as Lewis says, that alternative is simply not open to us. A transcendent cause of the universe's origin is admittedly a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, to borrow Otto's phrase, but I believe that analysis does not disclose it to be incoherent or unintelligible. In my own contribution, I push Lewis's argument farther and argue that we must conclude to a personal Creator of the universe. Lewis appeals to other considerations like the objectivity of moral value, the complexity of the universe, and religious experience to render more perspicuous the nature of the universe's Creator, and the rough outline of a natural theology thereby emerges.

As one moves from questions concerning the origin of the universe to questions concerning the nature of the universe, one encounters in contemporary discussions the hotly debated "anthropic principle," which served to rekindle interest in the teleological argument for God's existence. Swinburne touches this issue in his response to Mackie's critique of the argument. Swinburne seems clearly correct in saying both that in a deck of cards there is a strong presumption of random order and that the discovery of order by suits and seniority in all packs sampled warrants the inference that the other packs are so arranged. Similarly, we should believe both that the ordered sample of the universe we observe is not discontinuous with the whole and that such orderedness calls for explanation. But the difficulty with Swinburne's application is that since the complex conditions of the universe (unlike those of the cards) are necessary for our existence, we

cannot observe anything but an ordered sample. The universe at large could be a desert of chaos, but we should not realize it because necessarily we can observe only a segment containing conditions requisite for our existence. This principle-that necessarily, intelligent life must observe conditions compatible with its existence-has come to be known as the Anthropic Principle.

Proponents of anthropic reasoning join with the theist in holding that the complex order of the observable universe does require an explanation other than chance coincidence, but they part with the theist by offering an explanation in terms of some sort of wider Universe or World-Ensemble theory according to which the Universe-as-a whole is not ordered as is our observable universe and that our observing the ordered segment (which arises by chance) is not surprising, since it is impossible for us to observe anything else.

The philosopher who has occupied himself most extensively with the Anthropic Principle is John Leslie, to whom Swinburne alludes. Though self-confessedly neither a Christian nor even a traditional theist, Leslie has argued repeatedly that the observed delicate balance of conditions requisite for the existence of intelligent life at this point in cosmic history does require an explanation and that the explanation of intelligent design is superior to any alternative. He argues against those who would short-circuit the demand for an explanation by objecting that since the universe is unique, the probability of its present complexity cannot be assessed, or that though the balance of conditions in the universe is improbable, still any improbable condition will obtain once and that "once" could be the first time. [20] According to Leslie, without the Many-Worlds cosmology, the claim that no explanation of the universe's order is needed is "ludicrous"; it is like a person emerging unscathed after being machine-gunned from fifty yards for fifty minutes and who shrugs off the need for any explanation of his being alive by saying that all the bullets' missing, though improbable, could happen and that he wouldn't be there to ask about it unless that possibility were realized. [21] According to Leslie, the standard objections to the design argument threaten to delay the development of science, for if these objections were correct, there would be no reason for developing Many-Worlds cosmologies, which are important to science. He notes that there is no independent evidence for the existence of many worlds *except* for the existence of intelligent life itself and that the attraction of the Many-Worlds scenario for many scientists shows that they recognize that the fine-tuning apparently present in the universe does cry out for explanation. But the evidence for a Many- Worlds model is equally evidence for an intelligent designer. Both hypotheses are rendered more probable by the observed features of the universe than they would be in the absence of such features. This conclusion alone, it seems to me, is

highly significant, for it confronts us with a dilemma, both horns of which involve heavy metaphysical commitments. Are we going to posit God or a World Ensemble? According to Leslie, this is the choice that we must make if we do not choose simply to ignore the problem.

Leslie has so far made only tentative thrusts at an adjudication of this dilemma, though his preference is clear. [22] He points out that most of the Many-Worlds theories are obscure and incomplete and that the God- hypothesis is neither unscientific nor more obscure than those theories. Moreover, individual models for generating the World Ensemble can be criticized. A Many-Worlds proponent might appeal to the Many-Worlds Interpretation of quantum physics, or inflationary cosmologies involving a multiplicity of bubble universes, or oscillating models in which the worlds exist serially in time, or a spatially infinite universe of causally disjoint regions. But, for example, the oscillating model is both observationally and theoretically flawed, since there apparently exists neither sufficient density of matter to close the universe nor any physics to produce a re-expansion after a contraction. Inflationary models have problems of their own, but in any case still require certain precise conditions of the Universe-at-large in order to generate bubbles. In a spatially infinite Universe not sharing on the large scale the delicate balance of conditions in our local region it is vastly more probable that a small area of order should develop than that our local region should be so large as it is; moreover, as our horizon continues to expand we do not observe a limit to the order displayed in our local region, but perceive continuity with the region(s) juxtaposed to it. Despite such problems, people continue to believe in Many-Worlds scenarios, opines Leslie, because they feel that without them there is no explanation of how intelligent life did originate. [23]

But what about the hypothesis of divine design? Leslie admits that if we conceive of God along the lines of a personal being for whose existence and attributes there is no explanation, then the Many-Worlds scenario is preferable. But Leslie plumps for what he characterizes as a Neo-Platonic concept of God as the creativity of ethical requiredness. That is to say, if I understand Leslie correctly, the universe exists as it does because it *should*; it is morally necessary that a universe of free agents exist. This ethical requiredness of the universe has a sort of creative power to it that makes the world exist. If there is a personal deity, he, too, is the result of this more fundamental principle. Presumably, Leslie calls this conception Neo-Platonic because according to that metaphysic the One, which takes the place of Plato's Good, produces the world in being, the first emanation being the Mind, which in turn produces the world. The God of traditional theism would be like Plotinus' Mind and Leslie's God like the ultimate form of the Good.

But why is the traditional concept of God so unpalatable? Leslie's critique on this score is disappointing and surprisingly weak. [24] Proceeding from the Leibnizian question, "why is there something rather than nothing?" Leslie rejects the answer of God conceived as either a factually or a logically necessary being. For if God is only factually necessary, then He exists logically contingently, albeit eternally, and no reason is supplied for His contingent existence. On the other hand, God cannot be shown to exist necessarily in the logical sense, for when the ontological argument asserts, "It is possible that God exists," this possibility is epistemic only and, hence, does not show that God's existence is logically possible.

But this objection seems confused. If God is merely a factually necessary being, then there are possible worlds in which He does not exist. But then it is logically impossible for Him to exist in all possible worlds, that is to say, it is logically necessary that He exist contingently. But then, assuming that God is the explanatory ultimate, it makes no sense to seek a reason for His existence. To demand a reason for His existence is to ask for a logically necessary being which accounts for the fact that God exists. But on this hypothesis, it is logically impossible that there be such a being, for if it were possible it would exist in every possible world, including this one, and so God would not be the explanatory ultimate. Hence, if God is a merely factually necessary being, it is logically impossible for there to be a reason for His existence. One need only add that it is wrong-headed to indict a position for not supplying what is logically impossible.

On the other hand, why hold that God is merely factually necessary? The Leibnizian principle of Sufficient Reason might lead us to reject the concept of God as a merely factually necessary being and hold instead that He is logically necessary. The failure of the ontological argument as a piece of natural theology is irrelevant to the coherence of this conception of God. Leslie correctly points out that when the ontological argument asserts that the proposition "a maximally great being exists" (where maximal greatness entails being omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect in every possible world) is possible, there is an ambiguity between "epistemically possible" and "logically possible." To say that such a proposition is epistemically possible is only to say that for all we know it is true. So understood, it makes sense to say, "Possibly a maximally great being exists, and possibly He doesn't." This sense is insufficient for the purposes of ontological argument. But if we are talking about logical possibility, then to say "A maximally great being exists" is possible entails that He does exist. For if He exists in any possible world, then by definition He exists in all. Thus, if this proposition is possibly true in the logical sense, it is necessarily true. Now I agree with Leslie that the ontological argument seems to fail because all

we intuit is that a maximally great being is epistemically possible, but we cannot say *a priori* whether His existence is logically possible. But how is this even relevant to the issue at hand? The coherence of the logical necessity of God's existence does not depend on the success of the ontological argument or our intuitions. It is possible that the ontological argument fails to prove God's existence, and yet for all we know God's existence is logically necessary. Philosophers such as Plantinga, Robert Adams, and William Rowe have, wholly apart from the ontological argument, defended the coherence of God as a logically necessary being, [25] and Leslie says nothing to impugn this notion. Using the Leibnizian query as his starting point, Leslie ought to conclude to the existence of a being which is by nature such that if it exists in any possible world, it exists in all; such a being must exist in *this* world in order to explain why something exists rather than nothing, and, therefore, in *all* worlds, thereby obviating the need for an explanation of its existence. [26] In this way Leslie's quite legitimate demand for a reason for the existence of something rather than nothing would yield an answer for the universe's existence without requiring one for God's existence, and this without examining the ontological argument.

As for Leslie's own alternative conception of God, I think that its lack of explanatory power seems painfully clear. How can there be design without the previsioning of an intelligent mind? Personal agents, not impersonal principles, design things. If one says that the traditional God is a sort of personal demiurge who designed the world, then how can he be produced in being by an abstract principle? Abstract objects such as numbers, propositions, and properties have no spatio-temporal locations and sustain no causal relations with concrete objects. So how does the abstract object posited by Leslie cause a concrete object like God to exist?

Still, I do not want to depreciate Leslie's insight that value may provide a key to developing one's metaphysics. But I believe this insight can be (and has been) appropriated by traditional theistic philosophers. I am thinking here of William Sorely, whose Gifford lectures of 1918, *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, are perhaps the finest defense of the moral argument for God's existence. Beginning from the disunity of existence and value, Sorely notes that these seem disjoined because one cannot deduce "ought" from "is." But Sorely believes this procedure is mistaken and needs to be stood on its head: he believes that "ought" is the guide to what is, that is to say, that ethics is fundamental to metaphysics. Sorely goes on to argue on the basis of our apprehension of objective moral value that in order for the moral ideal to be valid, it must be ontologically anchored in a personal and eternal existent, that is, God, who is the ground of both the natural and moral orders; in so arguing, he rejects (what approximates to Leslie's view) spiritual pluralism, which

posits values independent of persons. In Professor Leslie's writings, I have not detected an acquaintance with Sorely's work, and it is my sincere hope that he might find in Sorely a kindred spirit who might redirect his thinking so as to embrace traditional theism, while retaining his insights on the importance of value for existence.

I think it is clear as a result of these contributions that philosophical theism is very much alive and well today-indeed, when one recalls the bleak days of the "Death of God" movement in the sixties, it is not unfair to speak of a veritable resurrection of theism. The selections in this volume show that specifically religious epistemology is philosophically *au courant* and that new life has been breathed into the cosmological and teleological arguments as well. One could say the same of the ontological and moral arguments, too, though these have not been featured in this volume. Although the authors contributing to this volume include some of theism's ablest defenders, what is remarkable is that there are scores of others not included in this volume, many of whom are equally or even more gifted, and many of whom are young and up-coming as philosophers, who are also defending the theistic world view. It is an exciting time to be doing Philosophy of Religion.

Footnotes

[1]

"Modernizing the Case for God," *Time*, April 7, 1980, pp. 65- 6.

[2]

Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967).

[3]

James Tomberlin, "Is Belief in God Justified?" *Journal of Philosophy* 67(1970): 31-8.

[4]

Alvin Plantinga, "The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology," *Proceedings of the Catholic Philosophical Association* 15 (1970): 49-62; cf. Alvin Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Rational?" in *Rationality and Religious Belief*, ed.C. F. Delaney (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), pp.7-27.

[5]

Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality*, ed.Alvin Plantinga and

Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 72.

[\[6\]](#)

See, for example, Alvin Plantinga, "Justification," unpublished paper read at various conferences.

[\[7\]](#)

Alvin Plantinga, "Self-Profile," in *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen, Profiles 5 (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1985), p.64.

[\[8\]](#)

Any lingering doubts about Plantinga's being a fideist ought to be laid permanently to rest by his lecture "Two Dozen (or so) Theistic Arguments," 33rd Annual Philosophy Conference, Wheaton College, October 23-5, 1986.

[\[9\]](#)

Plantinga, "Reason and Belief," p. 83.

[\[10\]](#)

Ibid., p. 84. It is noteworthy that the youngster who believes in theism is in no better epistemic condition than the youngster who believes in the Great Pumpkin or Santa Claus. For in such cases the belief is grounded in the testimony of the youngster's parents. Indeed, the child who believes in Santa Claus is better off than the pubescent theist, for the former has all sorts of empirical confirmation of his belief. Thus, there are circumstances in which outlandish beliefs can be properly basic. On Plantinga's view, the theistic youngster, however, enjoys the advantage that as he matures intellectually his belief in God may be sustained and reinforced by his being in the sort of circumstances that rationally warrant his believing that God exists. In fact, these circumstances may provide for him *prima facie* justification, so that in the absence of contravening conditions he then *knows* that God exists (Ibid., pp. 86-7).

[\[11\]](#)

Ibid., p. 84.

[\[12\]](#)

Ibid.

[\[13\]](#)

Ibid., pp. 84-5.

[\[14\]](#)

Plantinga, "Self-Profile," p. 59.

[\[15\]](#)

Ibid., p. 55.

[\[16\]](#)

Philip Quinn, "In Search of the Foundations of Theism," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985): 481.

[\[17\]](#)

Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977); idem, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); idem, *Faith and Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

[\[18\]](#)

See Robert Prevost, "Swinburne, Mackie, and Bayes's Theorem," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 17 (1985): 175-84; Robert Prevost, "Theism as an Explanatory Hypothesis: Swinburne on the Existence of God" (Ph.D. thesis, Oxford University, 1986).

[\[19\]](#)

See, for example, Alvin Plantinga, "Is Theism Really A Miracle?" *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986): 109-34. Mackie's critique of miracles is particularly shockingly superficial. Contrast Stephen S. Bilynskyj, "God, Nature, and the Concept of Miracle" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1982).

[\[20\]](#)

See John Leslie, "God and Scientific Verifiability," *Philosophy* 53 (1978): 71-9; John Leslie, "Cosmology, Probability, and the Need to Explain Life," in *Scientific Explanation and Understanding*, CPS Publications in Philosophy of Science (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1983), pp. 53-82.

[\[21\]](#)

John Leslie, "Modern Cosmology and the Creation of Life," in *Evolution and Creation*, ed. E. McMullin, University of Notre Dame Studies in Philosophy of Religion (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), p. 105.

[\[22\]](#)

See John Leslie, "Anthropic Principle, World Ensemble, Design," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 19 (1982): 141-51; John Leslie, "Observership in Cosmology: the Anthropic Principle," *Mind* 92 (1983): 573-9; John Leslie, "Probabilistic Phase Transitions and the Anthropic Principle," in *Origin and Early History of the Universe* (Liege: University of Liege Press, forthcoming).

[\[23\]](#)

Leslie, "Observership in Cosmology," p. 575.

[\[24\]](#)

See John Leslie, "The World's Necessary Existence," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 11 (1980): 207-24.

[\[25\]](#)

Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 197-221; Robert Adams, "Has It Been Proved That All Real Existence is Contingent?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 8 (1971): 284-91; William L. Rowe, *The Cosmological Argument* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), chap. 4.

[\[26\]](#)

See the helpful comments by Thomas V. Morris, review of *The Quest for Eternity*, by J.C.A. Gaskin, *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986): 334.