Theism and Atheism
Opposing Arguments in Philosophy

EDITORS IN CHIEF
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TOPIC 1: DEFINITION

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David B. Twetten, Associate Professor, Marquette University
Brian Carl, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Dominican House of Studies
Mark Johnson, Associate Professor, Marquette University
Francisco Romero Carrasquillo, Associate Professor, Universidad Panamericana

This chapter discusses how theism and atheism are best defined, primarily as a function of what “God” or “god” means. It sets out the range of meanings that “god” and “God” can have in different argumentative contexts, suggesting that proofs for God’s existence need not immediately conclude to the existence of a being with personal or omni-attributes. It also explores the notions of analogy and apophaticism, given that these themes condition the way many theists understand the affirmation that God exists. The chapter thereby offers principles that should govern the proper use of words in theism versus atheism debates.

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Robert Nola, Emeritus Professor, The University of Auckland

This chapter discusses atheism, theism, and agnosticism and the nature of some of the definitions of these doctrines. Rather than address arguments for or against god (or God), the chapter also considers definitions that can clarify what these doctrines mean. It also discusses concepts of god as spelled out in various kinds of definition.

TOPIC 2: METHOD

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Robert Audi, Professor, University of Notre Dame

This chapter presents many of the main issues that must be understood to arrive at an appropriate method for appraising the rationality of theistic worldviews. It outlines several conceptions of theism; it explores the kinds of evidences possible for it and compares those with the kinds appropriate to confirming scientific theories; and it specifies a range of positive attitudes, such as faith and hope, that theists may have regarding the existence of God. The chapter considers both the kind and degree of rationality of theistic attitudes and the need for rationality in actions based on those attitudes. Both theistic attitudes and certain actions based on them are shown to be important, and their rationality is also shown to be both a highly complex matter and a status that is not ruled out on methodological grounds.

Method: Atheism ..................................................................................................................................49
Graham Wood, Lecturer, University of Tasmania
Suppose that you are given two worldviews, one championed by a theist and one championed by an atheist. What method or methods should be used in attempts to assess the comparative merits of these worldviews? What kinds of considerations should feed into these methods? This chapter begins with a discussion of themes central to answering these two questions, including specifying two worldviews to allow for meaningful comparison. Then a series of topics is addressed for the benefit of a person, identified as the "undecided person," who does not yet endorse either worldview, in order to establish if there are reasons to prefer the atheistic worldview presented here.

**TOPIC 3: LOGIC**

**Logic: Theism**

Mashhad Al-Allaf, American University of Ras Al Khaimah

This chapter considers the plausibility of theism by giving attention to the logic of argumentation offered for the existence of God. It also discusses the various attributes of God, including omnipotence, omniscience, and impassibility.

**Logic: Atheism**

Peter Millican, Gilbert Ryle Fellow and Professor of Philosophy, Hertford College

This chapter discusses whether theism can be either established or refuted on broadly logical grounds, and considers the role of logic in theistic and anti-theistic argument. In the first section, I briefly review some systems of formal logic, highlighting some issues about logical proof and providing background to the subsequent discussion. In the next section, I make some important general points about logic and its limits: what we can reasonably expect to achieve by logical argument. I then turn to the question of whether theism can be refuted a priori on the basis of internal inconsistency, discuss how it might be defined so as to evade such refutation, and briefly consider arguments for and against theism that are aprioristic in the sense of being based on minimal empirical data (such as the existence of contingent things, or the existence of evil). The last main section examines the ontological argument, which purports to establish theism purely a priori.

**TOPIC 4: DOXASTIC FOUNDATIONS**

**Doxastic Foundations: Theism**

Paul K. Moser, Professor of Philosophy, Loyola University Chicago

This chapter focuses on some epistemic concepts and their bearing on theism. It considers the nature of belief both as assent and as a disposition involving trust. It also characterizes foundational evidence of God’s reality in terms of divine self-manifestation in human moral conscience, whereby a unique kind of agapē-conviction can arise.

**Doxastic Foundations: Atheism**

Ali Hasan, Associate Professor, University of Iowa

Richard Carrier, Educator (PhD), The Secular Academy

This chapter centers around the question of whether theism is rational. We begin by discussing different theories of rationality, and introducing some importantly related epistemic concepts and controversies. We then consider the possible sources of rational belief in God and argue that even if these provide some positive support, the fact of religious disagreement defeats the rationality of theism.

**TOPIC 5: RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE**

**Religious Experience: Theism**

Samuel Lebens, Senior Research Fellow, University of Haifa

What is the philosophical significance of religious experience? Could a religious experience give you reason to believe in God? If so, what sort of experience? If not, why not? And could the religious experiences of others give you reason to believe in God even if you’ve never had such an experience yourself? In this chapter, we explore these questions.

**Religious Experience: Atheism**

John R. Shook, Lecturer in Philosophy, Bowie State University
The aim of this chapter is to clarify what is meant by “religious experience,” discuss the ways in which such experiences can be explained, and assess what kind of evidential support they offer to either theism or atheism. Atheism uses a variety of arguments concluding that religious experiences cannot justify the idea that a God is involved.

**TOPIC 6: FAITH AND REVELATION**

**Faith and Revelation: Theism**

Robert Fastiggi, Professor of Systematic Theology, Sacred Heart Major Seminary

This chapter defines revelation and its relation to scripture. The discussion covers topics such as the qualities of divine revelation, nonreligious explanations, assessing claims and who decides whether some claim is true or false, how claims are recorded, how reason is related to faith, and how considerations about faith and revelation might support theism.

**Faith and Revelation: Atheism**

Evan Fales, Emeritus, University of Iowa

Long tradition connects revelation with faith, understood as trusting the truth of revelation, the divine source of which is assured by miracles. Recent alternative conceptions of faith and revelation (Søren Kierkegaard, William Clifford, William James) are critically examined, and difficulties in distinguishing genuine revelation from imposture and deception are evaluated, including many-contenders objections and the evidential weight of religious experience. Finally, we examine the difficulties that attend the reception and interpretation of putative revelations, even assuming divine provenance.

**TOPIC 7: MIRACLES**

**Miracles: Theism**

Ira M. Schnall, Lecturer (retired), Bar-Ilan University

In this chapter, we first examine what a miracle is supposed to be from a theistic point of view. Then we consider whether, or to what extent, reports of miracles are to be believed. Finally, we deal with the role of miracles in theistic religions, and in particular, whether miracles can establish the truth of theism.

**Miracles: Atheism**

Arif Ahmed, University Reader in Philosophy, University of Cambridge
Richard Carrier, Educator (PhD), The Secular Academy

This chapter distinguishes three main conceptions of miracles: extraordinary events, violations of the laws of nature, and divine interventions. Further discussion looks at whether miracles of any type are possible. The chapter considers David Hume’s argument that we have no reason to think that any events considered miracles are actual. Finally, the chapter asks whether we should regard talk of miracles not as a description of anything that happened but rather as an interpretation of events that are agreed on all hands.

**TOPIC 8: RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY**

**Religious Diversity: Theism**

Daniel Rynhold, Professor of Jewish Philosophy, Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies, Yeshiva University

This chapter considers religious diversity and its philosophical implications. Topics discussed include the purported challenge to theism posed by the links between religious diversity and geographical and biographical contingencies; theistic approaches to diversity including exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, and relativism; and the extent to which religious diversity supports theism.

**Religious Diversity: Atheism**

Tiddy Smith, Professor, University of Otago

This chapter explores the nature of religious diversity, the various theological responses to it, and how the existence of such diversity serves to undermine theism.
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Victor M. Salas, Associate Professor of Philosophy, Sacred Heart Major Seminary
This chapter discusses the principles of causality and sufficient reason and their relation to theism.

Causation and Sufficient Reason: Atheism ................................................................. 281
Felipe Leon, Professor, El Camino College
This chapter discusses the nature of causation and its fundamental role in the debate between theism and atheism. The discussion covers cosmological arguments that deploy causal or explanatory principles to prove God’s existence.

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Aaron Segal, Lecturer, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
This chapter discusses whether the existence of a priori knowledge bears positively on theism, and argues tentatively that it does.

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Felipe Leon, Professor, El Camino College
The primary aim of this chapter is to explore whether considerations about a priori domains and abstract objects favor atheism over theism.

TOPIC 11: OUR UNIVERSE

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Robert J. Spitzer, S.J., President, Magis Center of Reason and Faith
James Sinclair, Senior Physicist, United States Navy
This chapter will discuss the arguments that have been made in favor of theism on the basis of the finetuning of our universe for life. It will discuss the objective basis of fine-tuning, six instances of it in our universe, and consider six candidates as an ultimate explanation for it—a theory of everything, inflationary cosmology (and its variants), cyclic cosmologies (including Penrose’s conformal cyclic model), a multiverse, Tegmark’s Level IV multiverse, and transcendent intelligence. Using a general abductive argument, it concludes that the most likely ultimate explanation is transcendent intelligence.

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Neil A. Manson, Professor of Philosophy, University of Mississippi
Sahotra Sarkar, Professor, University of Texas at Austin
Cory Juhl, Professor, University of Texas at Austin
This chapter discusses putative scientific evidence for the existence of God from biology and from physics and cosmology. After presenting some of those items of evidence and articulating the arguments based on them, the authors explain why that evidence and those arguments either disconfirm or do not support theism over atheism.

TOPIC 12: HUMAN HISTORY

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Brendan Sweetman, Professor, Rockhurst University
This essay discusses the arguments in favor of theism and atheism through a consideration of human evolutionary history, including the relationship between evolution and scriptural revelation, the role of chance in evolution and science, as well as the problem of evil and suffering in the universe. The question of design in nature, along with the development of human civilizations and the demographics of theistic belief, is also a focus.
Human History: Atheism

Michael Ruse, Lucyle T. Werkmeister Professor and Director of HPS Program, Florida State University
Susana Nuccetelli, Professor, St. Cloud State University
Keith Parsons, Professor of Philosophy, University of Houston–Clear Lake
Gregory Paul, Independent Scholar, Baltimore
Matthew Wade Ferguson, Doctoral Candidate in Classics, University of California, Irvine

Theism, the belief that the God of Abrahamic religions objectively exists, faces a challenge from evolutionary accounts of belief in supernatural agencies. It does put the burden of argument on theists, who must argue persuasively for either the epistemic justification of their fundamental belief or for the inaccuracy of the evolutionary hypothesis.

TOPIC 13: HUMAN BEINGS

Human Beings: Theism

Brendan Sweetman, Professor, Rockhurst University

This chapter defends the view that theism is a better explanation than naturalism of the remarkable phenomenon of the human mind and its activities. It discusses arguments concerning dualism and materialism, consciousness and intentionality, personal identity, and free will and moral agency. Related issues such as determinism, God and freedom, true beliefs and knowledge, and the significance of “God of the gaps” objections are also considered.

Human Beings: Atheism

Kenneth Williford, Associate Professor and Chair, University of Texas at Arlington
Konrad Talmont-Kaminski, The Head of the Society and Cognition Unit, University of Bialystok
Diane Proudfoot, Professor, University of Canterbury
Mariam Thalos, Professor of Philosophy, University of Tennessee

This chapter observes the way theists have supposed that metaphysical considerations about human beings have supported theism over atheism. The chapter further discusses questions about consciousness and intentionality, reason, personal identity, and freedom. It is argued that the incompleteness of current neuroscientific accounts of these phenomena does not lend any significant support to a theistic account of them.

TOPIC 14: ETHICS

Ethics: Theism

Michael J. Harris, Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge

This chapter first discusses whether the existence of moral norms constitutes proof of the existence of God. It then evaluates various forms of the divine command theory of ethics. Finally, the chapter considers certain concepts such as human rights, conscience, and virtue as supporting theism, atheism, or neither.

Ethics: Atheism

Jason Thibodeau, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Cypress College
Thaddeus Metz, Professor, University of Johannesburg
Bruce Russell, Professor, Wayne State University
David Neil, Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Wollongong

The aim of this chapter is not to consider particular ethical questions; it is to ask whether there are general facts about morality and our ability to make moral judgments that count in favor of either theism or atheism.

TOPIC 15: MEANING

Meaning: Theism

Mirela Oliva, Associate Professor, University of St. Thomas
This chapter discusses the ways in which theism provides answers to the question of the meaning of life. Theists read this modern question as a quest for the ultimate meaning of our life that entails the understanding of our existence in the great scheme of things created by God. Theistic positions fall under two main categories, namely pluralism and singularism. This latter is in turn specified in four classes: metaphysical, experiential, narrative, and subjective.

Meaning: Atheism

Thaddeus Metz, Professor, University of Johannesburg

This chapter explores what it means to live a meaningful life. It also evaluates the idea that belief in God is required for such a life.

TOPIC 16: SUFFERING

Suffering: Theism

Siobhan Nash-Marshall, Mary T. Clark Chair of Christian Philosophy, Manhattanville College

This chapter discusses what evils exist in the world with a specific focus on suffering. Natural evil and moral evil are explained in this chapter as well as the problem of evil.

Suffering: Atheism

Bruce Russell, Professor, Wayne State University
Daniel Linford, Graduate Student, Purdue University

This chapter discusses the existence of suffering as it pertains, in several dimensions, to traditional theism. A central component of this chapter concerns the conflict between theism and the premise that excessive gratuitous evil exists.

TOPIC 17: SCIENCE

Science: Theism

Guy Consolmagno, Director of the Vatican Observatory, President of the Vatican Observatory Foundation

This chapter discusses the relation between religion and science, providing an overview of contemporary science and the very nature of scientific knowledge. Predominant methods of science are detailed as well as its proper subject matter and goals, which are essential for addressing questions about whether scientific knowledge seems to support or to conflict with the sacred texts of theism.

Science: Atheism

Herman Philipse, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, Utrecht University
Richard Carrier, Educator (PhD), The Secular Academy
Kenneth Williford, Associate Professor and Chair, University of Texas at Arlington
Keith Augustine, Executive Director and Editor-in-Chief, Internet Infidels
Taner Edis, Professor, Truman State University

A proper assessment of the bearing of scientific inquiry on theistic religion requires recognition that conflict, mutual consistency, independence, or concilience are possible, but depends on the methods accepted and the claims made in each domain at particular times and places—which can, and have, varied. This chapter, therefore, focuses on questions relating to whether the best methods, findings, and theories in contemporary scientific disciplines support, cohere with, or conflict with commitments made by theistic theologies.

TOPIC 18: THEORIES OF RELIGION

Theories of Religion: Theism

Margaret I. Hughes, Tutor, Thomas Aquinas College

After giving a brief overview of the history of the development of theories of religion, this chapter delves into scientism, which is the foundation on which many contemporary theories rest. It considers the way in which scientism has come to dominate a certain approach to studying religion,
and then offers a critique of this approach. It concludes that faith is necessary in order to come to a fuller understanding of the phenomenon of religion because, unlike an approach based in scientism, faith allows for an openness to finding what is true in any religion.

Theories of Religion: Atheism

Konrad Talmont-Kaminski, Head of the Society and Cognition Unit, University of Bialystok
Evan Fales, Emeritus, University of Iowa
Todd Tremlin, Lecturer, Central Michigan University
Gregory Dawes, Professor, University of Otago

This chapter discusses whether there are satisfactory natural theories of religion. Furthermore, the authors consider whether these natural theories favor atheism.

TOPIC 19: PRUDENTIAL/PRAGMATIC ARGUMENTS

Prudential/Pragmatic Arguments: Theism

Joshua Golding, Professor of Philosophy, Bellarmine University

This chapter discusses pragmatic arguments for religious commitment, such as the wager-approach, the will-to-believe, and an argument for pragmatic faith.

Prudential/Pragmatic Arguments: Atheism

Richard Feldman, Professor of Philosophy, University of Rochester
Malcolm Murray, Professor, University of Prince Edward Island
Charles Pigden, Associate Professor, University of Otago
Evan Fales, Emeritus, University of Iowa

The aim of this chapter is to decide whether, in the absence of adequate evidence of the (probable) truth or falsity of theism, we may be justified in making a religious commitment on prudential or pragmatic grounds.

TOPIC 20: FINAL RECKONINGS

Final Reckonings: Theism

Joseph W. Koterski, S.J., Associate Professor of Philosophy, Fordham University

The first half of this chapter examines Augustine of Hippo’s use of philosophical distinctions to clear away various difficulties that stand in the way of pursuing such questions as the existence of God and the relations between some of the attributes normally attributed to God (omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence) and the problems presented by evil and freedom. The second half of the chapter examines natural law theory to make a case that morality requires the existence of God.

Final Reckonings: Atheism

Graham Oppy, Professor of Philosophy, Monash University

This chapter explains how the sum of the considerations in the previous chapters fit together in a comprehensive case for preferring atheism to theism.

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TOPIC 3

Logic: Theism

Maahbad Al-Allaf
American University of Ras Al Khaimah, United Arab Emirates

This chapter considers the plausibility of theism by giving attention to the logic of argumentation offered for the existence of God. It also discusses the various attributes of God, including omnipotence, omniscience, and impassibility.

THE RATIONAL FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH

Is it possible to prove that God exists? This chapter considers the relation of logic and theism by examining the reasoning used in two types of philosophical argumentation: a priori arguments (those based on premises that are prior to and independent of experience) and a posteriori arguments (those based on a premise known by experience). The chapter shows that different systems of logic are sometimes operative, for some make use of a first-order predicate calculus while others employ a higher-order calculus and modal logic.

THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The logic behind the ontological argument for God is purely a priori. It uses the idea of the perfect being when it defines God as a being than which none greater could be conceived and then works to show that we must grant that such a being exists, for if it lacked existence, then we would not have been discussing what we claimed to be discussing, namely, that than which nothing greater can be conceived. A classic version of this argument comes from Saint Anselm, who says in his Proslogion (1926, chapter II):

AND so, Lord, do you, who do give understanding to faith, give me, so far as you knowest it to be profitable, so understand that you are as we believe, and that you are that which we believe. And indeed, we believe that you are a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding above, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.

In chapter 3, Anselm concludes:

For, it is possible to conceive of a being that cannot be conceived not to exist; and this is greater than one that can be conceived not to exist. Hence, if that than which nothing greater can be conceived, can be conceived not to exist, it is not that than which nothing greater can be conceived. But this is an irreconcilable contradiction. There is, then, so truly a being than which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist; and this being you are, O Lord, our God.

The argument is based on the very definition of God as utterly perfect. To avoid the fallacy of assuming what he intends to prove, Anselm uses a definition of God that even someone who denies