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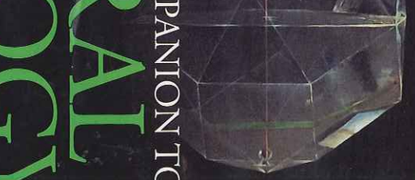

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The last few decades have witnessed a stunning resurgence of philosophical interest in God and theology. Although much of this renaissance is focused on the rationality of theistic belief apart from evidence, there is a gathering movement in philosophical circles to re-establish natural theology's legitimate role in justifying belief in God's existence.

The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology gathers together original contributions from a variety of leading philosophers to provide a timely and thought-provoking exploration of the nature and existence of God as manifested in the existence, order, and character of the natural world. Each of the in-depth essays explores at length a particular theistic argument – from Contingency and Consciousness to Reason and Religious Experience – with the distinguished authors providing analysis and evaluation of each argument, offering original insights and new perspectives on perennial questions.

The result is an engaging and deeply profound examination of the question of God's existence based on human reason and evidence from the natural world.

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Edited by

William Lane Craig
and
J. P. Moreland

吴尽文
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Contents

List of figures vi
Notes on contributors vii

Introduction ix
William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland

1 The project of natural theology 1
Charles Taliaferro

2 The Leibnizian cosmological argument 24
Alexander R. Pruss

3 The *kalam* cosmological argument 101
William Lane Craig and James D. Sinclair

4 The teleological argument: an exploration of the fine-tuning of the universe 202
Robin Collins

5 The argument from consciousness 282
J. P. Moreland

6 The argument from reason 344
Victor Reppert

7 The moral argument 391
Mark D. Linville

8 The argument from evil 449
Stewart Goetz

9 The argument from religious experience 498
Kai-Man Kwan

10 The ontological argument 553
Robert E. Maydole

11 The argument from miracles: a cumulative case for the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth 593
Timothy McGrew and Lydia McGrew

Index 663

List of Figures

3.1 Some metaphysical options concerning the existence of abstract objects. 107
3.2 Analogy of the universe as a city laid out in a grid. 126
3.3 Model classes based on exceptions to the Hawking–Penrose singularity theorems. 132
3.4 A Gott–Li universe time machine. 133
3.5 In chaotic inflation, an initial generic manifold undergoes regional inflation. 140
3.6 The String Landscape inflationary model. 141
3.7 Post-2003 cosmological model building based on finding exceptions to the Borde–Vilenkin–Guth Theorem. 143
3.8 Penrose depiction of Friedmann–Robertson–Walker (FRW) cosmology. 146
3.9 The de Sitter universe. 146
3.10 Evolution of an Emergent universe from a metastable loop quantum gravity state. 150
3.11 Baum–Frampton phantom bounce model. 152
3.12 Families of quantum gravity cosmologies. 159
3.13 String cosmology models and proponents. 160
3.14 Construction of the pre–Big Bang inflation (PBBI) model is given at the "asymptotic past triviality" or APT point. 162
3.15 Rate of universe expansion versus time in the pre–Big Bang inflation model. 163
3.16 Pre–Big Bang inflation as a string quantum transition. 164
3.17 Pictorial description of the ekpyrotic cycle. 167
3.18 Candidate loop quantum gravity (LQG) cosmologies. 169
3.19 Quantum models with an explicit beginning to the finite past. 175
3.20 Creation *ex nihilo* of a universe. 176
3.21 Transition to "normal" time in a Hartle–Hawking approach. 177
3.22 Quantum tunneling of the universe to an inflationary condition. 184

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Introduction

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG AND J. P. MORELAND

The collapse of positivism and its attendant verification principle of meaning was undoubtedly the most important philosophical event of the twentieth century. Their demise heralded a resurgence of metaphysics, along with other traditional problems of philosophy that verificationism had suppressed. Accompanying this resurgence has come something new and altogether unanticipated: a renaissance in Christian philosophy.

The face of Anglo-American philosophy has been transformed as a result. Theism is on the rise; atheism is on the decline. Atheism, although perhaps still the dominant viewpoint at the American university, is a philosophy in retreat. In a recent article in the secularist journal *Philo*, Quentin Smith laments what he calls "the desecularization of academia that evolved in philosophy departments since the late 1960s." He complains that:

> [n]aturalists passively watched as realist versions of theism . . . began to sweep through the philosophical community, until today perhaps one-quarter or one-third of philosophy professors are theists, with most being orthodox Christians. . . . in philosophy, it became, almost overnight, 'academically respectable' to argue for theism, making philosophy a favored field of entry for the most intelligent and talented theists entering academia today.[1]

Smith concludes, "God is not 'dead' in academia; he returned to life in the late 1960s and is now alive and well in his last academic stronghold, philosophy departments."[2]

The renaissance of Christian philosophy over the last half century has served to reinvigorate natural theology, that branch of theology that seeks to provide warrant for belief in God's existence apart from the resources of authoritative, propositional revelation. Today, in contrast to just a generation ago, natural theology is a vibrant field of

1. Smith (2001). A sign of the times: *Philo* itself, unable to succeed as a secular organ, has now become a journal for general philosophy of religion.
2. Smith (2001, p. 4).

study.[3] All of the various traditional arguments for God's existence, as well as creative new arguments, find prominent, intelligent proponents among contemporary philosophers. Moreover, genuinely new insights have been acquired into traditional problems raised by nontheists such as the problem of evil and the coherence of theism.

In this volume, we bring together some of the foremost practitioners of natural theology writing today and give them the opportunity to develop their arguments at length and to interact with the arguments' critics. The resulting volume is a compendium of theistic arguments on the cutting edge of philosophical discussion.

The volume opens with an essay on the *project of natural theology* by Charles Taliaferro. He not only provides a historical perspective on contemporary debates over theistic arguments but, even more, also emphasizes the importance of issues in the philosophy of mind for the viability of natural theology. To anyone who is not open to the notion of an immaterial mental substance distinct from a material substratum, the whole project of natural theology is abortive. For God just is such an unembodied mind, distinct from and the Creator of the physical universe. Taliaferro, therefore, seeks to show that we are far from warranted in being confident that substantial minds are impossible, so that we must be open to the project of natural theology.

Alexander Pruss explores the first theistic argument under discussion in this volume, the *argument from contingency* or the version of the cosmological argument classically associated with G. W. Leibniz. The argument attempts to ground the existence of the contingent realm of things in a necessarily existent being. Prominent contemporary proponents of theistic arguments of this sort include Richard Taylor, Timothy O'Connor, Robert Koons, Richard Swinburne, Stephen Davis, and Bruce Reichenbach, among others. Pruss identifies and discusses at length four key issues that any successful defense of such an argument must address:

1 the status of the Principle of Sufficient Reason;
2 the possibility of an infinite regress of explanations;
3 the applicability of the Principle of Sufficient Reason to the explanatory ultimate; and
4 the theological significance of the argument's conclusion.

A cosmological argument of a different sort, one largely neglected until recent decades, is the so-called *kalam cosmological argument*. Based upon the finitude of the temporal series of past events, the argument aspires to show the existence of a personal Creator of the universe, who brought the universe into being and is therefore responsible for the universe's beginning to exist. Philosophers such as G. J. Whitrow, Stuart Hackett, David Oderberg, and Mark Nowacki have made significant contributions to this argument. In their

3. The change has not gone unnoticed even in popular culture. In 1980, *Time* magazine ran a major story entitled "Modernizing the Case for God," in which it described the movement among contemporary philosophers 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" (*Time* 1980). The article cites the late Roderick Chisholm to the effect that the reason that atheism was so influential a generation ago is that the brightest philosophers were atheists; but today, in his opinion, many of the brightest philosophers are theists, using a tough-minded intellectualism in defense of that belief that was formerly lacking on their side of the debate.

treatment, William Lane Craig and James Sinclair examine afresh two classical philosophical arguments for the finitude of the past in light of modern mathematics and metaphysics and review remarkable scientific evidence drawn from the field of astrophysical cosmology that points to an absolute temporal origin of the cosmos. With this argument, we begin to see the intimate and fascinating links between natural theology and developments in contemporary science that philosophers cannot afford to ignore.

Those links are in full view in Robin Collins's treatment of the *teleological argument*. John Leslie, Paul Davies, Richard Swinburne, William Dembski, Michael Denton, and Del Ratzsch are among the many defenders of this argument today. Focusing on the fine-tuning of nature's laws, constants, and initial conditions, Collins asks how this amazing fine-tuning is best explained. In unfolding his answer, Collins carefully formulates a theory of probability that serves as the framework for his argument, addressing such key issues as the nature of probability, the principle of indifference, and the comparative ranges of life-permitting values versus assumable values for the finely tuned parameters. He argues that the evidence strongly confirms the hypothesis of theism over an atheistic single universe hypothesis and, moreover, that appeals to a multiverse or a many-worlds hypothesis in order to rescue the atheistic position are ultimately unavailing. Finally, he assesses the significance of his conclusion for the overall case for theism.

The argument from fine-tuning concerns the design of the universe with embodied moral agents in view. We focus on such agents in moving from the external world to the internal world of human persons in J. P. Moreland's essay on the *argument from consciousness*. Setting aside panpsychism on the grounds that, first, it is a label for the problem of consciousness' origin and not a solution and, second, theism and naturalism are the only live options for most Western thinkers, Moreland lays out the ontological constraints for a naturalist worldview that follow most plausibly from a naturalist epistemology, etiology, and core ontology, to wit, there is a burden of proof for any naturalist ontology that ventures beyond strict physicalism. Moreland then presents and defends the central premises in an argument for God from the existence of consciousness or its lawlike correlation with physical states (the argument for God from consciousness, here after abbreviated as AC). Given AC as a rival to naturalism, there is an additional burden of proof for a naturalist ontology that quantifies over *sui generis* emergent properties such as those constitutive of consciousness. After characterizing epistemically the dialectical severity of this burden, in the final section, Moreland rebuts the three most prominent naturalist theories of the existence of consciousness, namely, the views of John Searle, Colin McGinn, and Timothy O'Connor. Contemporary advocates of this argument include Charles Taliaferro, Richard Swinburne, and Robert Adams.

Partially due to the theistic connection between finite consciousness and God, a cottage industry of versions of physicalism has sprung up to eliminate consciousness in favor of or to reduce consciousness in one way or another to something physical. While this will be a hard sell to many, the existence and nature of reason cannot easily be treated along these lines on pain of self-referential inconsistence. Thus, Victor Reppert develops an *argument from reason* for God's existence based on the reality of reason in human persons. Similar arguments have been developed by C. S. Lewis and Alvin Plantinga. Although the argument takes a number of forms, in all instances, according to Reppert, it attempts to show that the necessary conditions of logical and mathematical reasoning, which undergird the natural sciences as a human activity, require the rejection of all broadly materialist worldviews. Reppert begins by examining the nature of the argument and identifying the central characteristics of a materialist worldview. In so doing, he lays out the general

problem of materialism and how the argument from reason points to a single aspect of that broader problem. Second, he examines the argument's history, including the famous Lewis–Anscombe controversy. In so doing, Reppert indicates how the argument from reason can surmount Anscombe's objections. He also explains the transcendental structure of the argument. Third, he investigates three subarguments: the argument from intentionality, the argument from mental causation, and the argument from the psychological relevance of logical laws, showing how these demonstrate serious and unsolved difficulties for materialism. Finally, Reppert presents some popular objections and shows that these do not refute the argument.

Having laid out two features of anthropology that are recalcitrant facts for naturalists but which provide evidence for theism – consciousness and reason – a third theistic-friendly purported fact about human persons is that they are moral agents with intrinsic value. Thus, we next turn to metaethical issues, as Mark Linville presents a *moral argument* for God's existence. Contemporary philosophers who have defended various versions of the moral argument for theism include Robert Adams, William Alston, Paul Copan, John Hare, and Stephen Evans. Linville argues that naturalists, committed as they are to the blind evolutionary development of our cognitive faculties in response to the pressures to survive, cannot be warranted in their moral convictions, in contrast to theists, who see our moral faculties as under the suzerainty of God. Linville also contends that atheistic views of normative ethics, in contrast to theistic views, cannot adequately ground belief in human dignity. If we trust our moral convictions or believe in personal dignity, we should, then, be theists.

Moral considerations raise naturally the *problem of evil* in the world. In his chapter, Stewart Goetz distinguishes between the idea of a defense and that of a theodicy, and defends an instance of the latter. As a prolegomenon to his theodicy, Goetz examines the purpose or meaning of an individual's life. Although the vast majority of philosophers, including those who write on the problem of evil, have shown little or no interest in this topic for far too long, Goetz believes that an understanding of the purpose for which a person exists provides the central insight for a viable theodicy. This insight is that a person exists for the purpose of experiencing the great good of perfect happiness. Given that perfect happiness is an individual's greatest good, Goetz argues that it supplies the core idea for why God is justified in permitting evil. Main contemporary contributors to a theistic treatment of evil include Alvin Plantinga, William Alston, Richard Swinburne, Marilyn Adams, Peter van Inwagen and Stephen Wykstra, among many others.

One aspect of the problem of evil is God's apparent inactivity in the presence of evil and in the midst of ordinary, daily life. On the other hand, it has been the testimony of millions of people that God Himself has shown up in their lives and that they have both experienced His presence and seen effects in and around their lives that only He could do. Human persons are not only moral agents, they are ineluctably religious. According to Kai-man Kwan, the *argument from religious experience* contends that given the appropriate premises, we can derive from the religious experiences of humankind a significant degree of epistemic justification for the existence of God. Kwan has no intention of arguing here that only one particular theistic tradition (such as Christianity) is correct. He focuses on a subclass of religious experiences, the experiences of God or theistic experience, and argues that theistic experiences provide significant justification for belief in God. Kwan does not claim that his argument is a conclusive argument on its own, but he does think that it is a reasonable argument that can contribute to the cumulative case for the existence of God.

Contemporary defenders of arguments from theistic religious experience include William Alston, Jerome Gellman, William Wainwright, and Keith Yandell.

The summit of natural theology is the famous *ontological argument*, which would infer God's existence starting from the concept of God as the greatest conceivable being. This argument, if successful, will give us God with all His superlative, great-making attributes. Recent defenders of the argument in various forms include Charles Hartshorne, Kurt Gödel, Norman Malcolm, Alvin Plantinga, Clement Dore, Stephen Davis, and Brian Leftow. In his essay, Robert Maydole, one of the most recent philosophers to enter the lists on behalf of the ontological argument, examines classical statements of the argument along with contemporary reformulations. He argues that some versions of the ontological argument are not only sound but also non-question-begging and are not susceptible to the parodies that detractors of the argument frequently offer.

Our final essay moves from generic theism to specifically Christian theism, as Timothy and Lydia McGrew develop in some detail an *argument from miracles*, the miracle in this case being the central Christian miracle of Jesus of Nazareth's resurrection. Scholars who have made significant contributions to an argument of this sort include Wolfhart Pannenberg, N. T. Wright, Gerald O'Collins, William Lane Craig, Stephen Davis, Richard Swinburne, Dale Allison, Gary Habermas, and a host of New Testament historians. McGrew and McGrew's contribution lies in their careful formulation of the argument in terms of Bayes's Theorem, showing how, *pace* David Hume, miracles are positively identifiable as the most probable hypothesis despite the prior improbability of a miracle claim. They argue that in the case of Jesus's putative resurrection, the ratio between the likelihoods of the resurrection hypothesis and its contradictory is such that one ought to conclude that the resurrection hypothesis is the most probable hypothesis on the total evidence.

The foregoing arguments, while not exhausting the range of arguments of contemporary natural theology, do serve as representative of the best work being done in the field today. It is our hope that the present *Companion* will serve as a stimulus to the discussion and further development of these arguments.

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