

# LOVING WISDOM

*Christian Philosophy of Religion*



PAUL COPAN

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*Christ...in whom are hidden all the treasures  
of wisdom and knowledge. (Col. 2:2b-3)*

*To Stuart C. Hackett—my first philosophy professor,  
whose wisdom, intellect, and faithfulness to God  
inspired me and so many others.*

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ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

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Cover art: © The Crosiers

Cover and interior design: Elizabeth Wright

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

07 08 09 10 11 12

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Copan, Paul.

Loving wisdom : Christian philosophy of religion / Paul Copan.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-8272-2139-0

1. Christianity--Philosophy. 2. Theology. I. Title.

BR100.C77 2007

230.01--dc22

2007007713

Printed in the United States of America

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## Preface

The term “popularizer,” philosopher Alvin Plantinga observes, is one of disdain among academics. However, Christian scholars shouldn’t leave their work “buried away in professional journals,”<sup>1</sup> but make their work available to the broader Christian community and help Christians grapple with important questions and concerns: “If [Christian philosophers] devote their best efforts to the topics fashionable in the non-Christian philosophical world, they will neglect a crucial and central part of their task as Christian philosophers.”<sup>2</sup> The *Christian* philosopher’s task should be shaped, not by secular academia’s concerns, but by the priorities of God’s kingdom, all in the context of loving, trusting, and obeying God. This book is an attempt to take such an exhortation seriously.

Chalice Press has kindly invited me to write a user-friendly, Scripture-engaging Christian philosophy of religion book—a kind of launching pad for Christian leaders, students, and teachers in philosophy of religion as they think critically, instruct others, engage with non-Christians, and live their lives in God’s presence. This book reflects themes I have found important and fruitful in my own spiritual and intellectual pilgrimage and in my interactions with those outside the faith in open forums and coffee shops.

My tornado-whipped editor, Trent Butler, told me he wasn’t tied to a particular table of contents, nor was he interested in imitating another philosophy of religion volume. While he was hoping for an introduction that third-year college or seminary students could easily use in the classroom, his dream was for a user-friendly book such that a professor could model the teaching of the book and the student could then use that model as a framework to teach interested church members. “That is, the book and professor would help the student gain both information and teaching skill so that the student would feel confident to become a teacher.” So hopefully both the novice and the initiated will profit.

Christian reflection on the philosophy of religion is deep and wide, so this book covers basic terrain, offering variation as well. I discuss key topics, address objections, note apologetically interesting themes, and offer practical pointers. At the end of the book are study questions for small groups and personal reflection.

The format follows the flow of biblical narrative: *God, creation, fall, redemption*, and *re-creation*, all within a relational Trinitarian framework.<sup>3</sup> Utilizing the backdrop of Scripture and themes in biblical and systematic theology, this book takes shape according to the triune *theodrama*,<sup>4</sup> in which



# Introduction

## Philosophy under the Cross

*“But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (Gal. 6:14a)*

A “theology of the cross” (*theologia crucis*), as Martin Luther called it, is about a suffering God who reveals himself in humility, particularly in Christ. “Theologians of glory,” proudly presenting confident, abstract “proofs,” may be in danger of obscuring the cross (which casts “God’s shadow”) and a God who often veils himself. There is no salvation without humility. Human reasoning that seeks God without the aid of the cross and the Spirit of God will miss the mark.<sup>1</sup> Though Luther—hopefully only in his *pre-mortem* state!—would perhaps consider this book’s philosophical discussion of the Trinity and Incarnation “sophistic,” he rightly points us in a cruciform or crucicentric direction; indeed, the very wisdom of God is found in the cross.

When emphasizing the cross, though, we shouldn’t forget the *entire* Christ-event: his *incarnate life* and *ministry*—indeed, his triumphant, *glorious resurrection* from the dead. The cross though remains a useful symbol to remind wisdom-seekers about humility, prayer, the Spirit’s empowerment, and a life poured out for others.

This isn’t a dispassionately written book. Thankfully, the New Testament authors wrote out of personal devotion and zeal for Christ, who had transformed their lives. Their passion didn’t undermine their objectivity or twist the truth—no more so than did the passion of Auschwitz survivors Elie Wiesel or Viktor Frankl, who wrote with both fervor and penetrating insight about their experience and the human condition. Whether Holocaust survivors or New Testament witnesses, we’re drawn to their writings precisely because they couldn’t stop speaking about what they’d seen and heard. The charge of “bias” is often a truth-avoidance tactic, and the critic is still left holding his own bundle of arbitrary biases that needn’t be taken seriously. No, certain perspectives (“biases”)—even passionate ones—can be accurate, and we can many times recognize those that we should dismiss and others that we should affirm.

Though I write as an evangelical Christian, I hope this book serves not only the broader Christian community, but the inquiring non-Christian mind as well. After all, belief in God isn’t private, inaccessible to public scrutiny. Speaking to King Agrippa, Paul asserts that Jesus’ crucifixion and postmortem appearances—including Paul’s Damascus road experience—

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“were not done in a corner” (Acts 26:26). Yes, the glory of the triune, self-revealing God saturates the creation, is made known through historical events and in Jesus of Nazareth, and is available to all.

Good public reasons and arguments are important, though by themselves they don’t guarantee participation in God’s family. The Spirit, who can *use* evidence, assures us of such realities (Rom. 5:5; 8:15; Gal. 4:6), even if his divine influence and wooing can be stifled and resisted (Acts 7:58). We ultimately *know* the reality of God’s presence and love by his Spirit’s illumination and life-giving power—though we should be prepared to *show* people evidences and give reasons for the truth of the Christian faith.

Views differ on the relationship between Christianity and philosophy—or “faith” and “reason,” and I don’t wish to settle such large disputes here. According to Augustine and Aquinas, “philosophy” is the pursuit of wisdom by “unaided human reason.” I’ll be taking the view of church father Justin Martyr. Having gone from one philosopher to another in search of wisdom, he met an elderly man who told him about the Jesus of the Gospels; this led to Justin’s conversion to Christ and his discovery of true philosophy. Philosophy wasn’t the *means* to finding wisdom but the *goal*. True philosophy encompasses *all* wisdom and includes—indeed finds its climax in—God’s revelation to us in Jesus of Nazareth, Wisdom incarnate—a wisdom that comes not through unaided reason, but by amazing grace.<sup>2</sup>

### **Philosophy and Religion**

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. (Ps. 111:10)*

*In [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Col. 2:3)*

“Philosophy” is difficult to define. The academic, professional discipline involves hard and skillful thinking about ethics, knowledge, life’s meaning, or what’s real (metaphysics). The Greek word *philosophia* literally means “the love of wisdom”—which isn’t a bad place to start.

Scripture takes wisdom to be more than intellectual, rational, and theoretical. It can involve having a Ph.D. or a high IQ, but it doesn’t stop there. Wisdom involves knowledge that’s immensely practical, relational, insightful, and virtuous: it is a God-centered and God-drenched engagement of the world and personal relationships. Wisdom (Latin *sapientia*) is *the skill or craft of living—intellectually, morally, emotionally, spiritually, and creatively—in right relationship to God, human beings, and the world around us*.

True wisdom begins with “the fear of the LORD” (Ps. 111:10; cp. Prov. 1:7; 9:10; 15:33)—a humble *submission to God’s revealed will and purposes for us* (Prov. 15:33; 23:4; cp. Gen. 20:11).<sup>3</sup> Wisdom—living sapientially—centers on being mindful of God, just as he is mindful of us (Ps. 8:4). Wisdom comes through first saying *Yes* to God, by placing our will into his hands, reorienting our lives under God’s direction and rule (God’s “kingdom”).

Jesus the Nazarene is no mere prophet, the Scriptures shout, but is rather God’s own wisdom authoritatively revealed and embodied (Mt. 11:16–19;

cp. Jn. 1:1–18 with Prov. 8:22–31).<sup>4</sup> He epitomizes wisdom in his parables, sayings, and beatitudes—or, when enemies try to stump him, in declarations such as, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” (Mt. 22:21, NIV). He makes this startling claim: “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Mt. 11:27). No wonder Jesus proclaimed himself greater than Solomon the wise (Mt. 12:42). Paul confirms this: all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ (Col. 2:3).

Despite baffling questions, mysteries, and conundrums, we can still embark on the life-long quest for ever-deepening wisdom, using heart and mind for God’s glory and praise. With all of our limitations, wisdom-seekers can’t afford to be anti-intellectual, which would be a rejection of God’s gift to us. As hymnwriter F. R. Havergal wrote, “Take my intellect and use / every power as thou shalt choose.”<sup>5</sup>

Many professional philosophers have offered astute, creative insights for us to think about and live out. Tom Morris, who once taught philosophy, is now engaged in helping businesspersons and CEOs understand the benefits of studying philosophy. Books such as *If Aristotle Ran General Motors*, *True Success*, and even *Philosophy for Dummies* help people apply concepts and insights of great thinkers across the ages in their day-to-day lives and work, resulting in much personal benefit and enrichment. The *discipline* or *profession* of philosophy at institutions of higher learning can offer understanding and sage advice—how to raise children to be virtuous citizens, how to judge between competing scientific hypotheses, how to relate to people, how to run a company. Whether believers or not, we all can make strides in gaining wisdom through God’s gracious general revelation to all.

Biblically speaking, though, the true philosopher—the lover of wisdom—will at heart be a God-seeker (Prov. 8:17), not merely a lover of abstract ideas and arguments. True wisdom can’t be detached from loving and knowing God; it will be *incomplete* if it doesn’t lead to “salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 4:15). Though an atheist’s knowledge may be encyclopedic and believers may benefit from his knowledge, he is detached from his Creator and Redeemer. Plenty of brilliant thinkers are unwise precisely because they’re God-resisters. NYU philosopher Thomas Nagel candidly admits: “I hope there is no God! I don’t want there to be a God; I don’t want a universe to be like that.”<sup>6</sup> He acknowledges a “cosmic authority problem” that governs much of academia:<sup>7</sup> many scholars, whether consciously or unconsciously, suppress God’s self-revelation. Many intelligent—but spiritually unwise—academics pursue a wisdom devoid of God, the wellspring of all created reality. The psalmist gratefully recognized: “I have more insight than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation” (Ps. 119:99). *Wisdom* doesn’t equal *well-educated*.

The quest for wisdom isn’t merely intellectual fact-gathering; it’s also a *virtuous* and *spiritual* endeavor, requiring certain attitudes and character

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qualities. Rightly received, education and scholarship enrich our lives and deepen our appreciation for God and the world he created. But as with wealth, good looks, and “natural” abilities, scholarship and learning may also hinder people from seeking God, because they trust in these gifts rather than the Giver. Without a humble disposition and seeking heart—a willingness to do God’s will (Jn. 7:17)—we’ll miss out on the very thing we were designed for: knowing and loving God, living God-saturated and God-affected lives.

Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard described humans as two-sphered creatures, designed to live in two realms—the *earthly* and *heavenly*. Many, though, are preoccupied with this-worldly concerns, whether crass pleasure-seekers or culturally sophisticated high-brows. Either way, they ignore the relating triune God, the I-You relationship they were intended for. People will devote their entire lives to mountain-climbing, perfecting their tennis serve, or playing video games—without taking half an hour to consider life’s meaning or their relationship to God. However intelligent such people may be, they aren’t wise—philosophers—in the biblical sense of the word.

True philosophy, loving wisdom, must be Godward—or “religious”—to be complete. The Bible speaks only incidentally about “religion” (*threskeia*). It can refer to a (God-centered) *belief-system*: Paul had once lived as a strict Pharisee within his “religion” (Acts 26:5). Unlike the view of the “unbeliever,” “religion” includes an orthodox belief in the true God (e.g., 1 Cor. 14:22–23). True “religion” at its heart means *loving God* and *loving others*. “Pure and undefiled religion [*threskeia*] in the sight of our God and Father,” according to James, involves caring for the helpless, guarding one’s tongue, and maintaining moral integrity (Jas. 1:27–28).

Although the worship and love of God are central to scriptural religion, the contemporary, technical definition of “religion” is more elusive. One philosopher suggests that a religion “proposes a diagnosis of a deep, crippling spiritual disease universal to non-divine sentience and offers a cure. A particular religion is true if its diagnosis is correct and its cure is efficacious.”<sup>8</sup> Of course, for Jains, Confucians, and Buddhists, religion doesn’t necessarily involve belief in a God/deity and Creator. So some define religion more functionally—as a set of beliefs, attitudes, and practices that are centered on a person’s conception of ultimate reality; as such, “religion” could include, say, atheistic humanism.<sup>9</sup> This broad sense implies that *all* people are religious; that is, they have a worldview or belief system around which they orient their lives, whether consciously or not. A *worldview*—which reflects a heart orientation or commitment—serves as a filter or grid by which we interpret the world and human experience. It shapes how we live and direct our lives. This doesn’t mean people can’t change their worldviews, but we should remember that a worldview encompasses more than just the intellect. As an aside, the worldview of

naturalism or atheism is technically “religious”—an interpretive grid as well as a heart commitment; we could therefore distinguish between this and “traditional religion”—Hindu, Muslim, Christian.

(Incidentally, philosophers tend to distinguish between the more general discipline of *philosophy of religion* and the narrower, more specific sub-discipline of *philosophical theology*; the latter offers a philosophical analysis of specific doctrines or practices within a particular religion—in our case, the Trinity, Incarnation, resurrection, or prayer.)

Along these lines, another reasonable suggestion is that religion is “a form of life that seems to those who inhabit it to be comprehensive, incapable of abandonment, and of central importance.”<sup>10</sup> A *form of life*, which is a pattern of activity that appears to its practitioners to have boundaries and particular actions that are bound up with it, has three characteristics:

- *Comprehensive*: It takes into account, and is relevant to, everything—a framework into which all the particularities of life can be placed—from how one dresses to the significance of marriage to moral actions.
- *Incapable of abandonment*: This religious stance/form of life defines the religionist’s identity. A native English speaker, say, though he could learn another language, doesn’t really think of himself as one who could readily abandon his deeply embedded mother tongue.
- *Of central importance*: This form of life is no mere add-on or extra; it addresses issues of paramount importance: *What is real? What is to be valued? What is my purpose?*

So as we do *philosophy of religion*, we seek to approach a comprehensive, centrally important matter with prayerful thoughtfulness, inspired by devotion to God.

### Doing Philosophy as Christians

Philosophy of religion has come to be appreciated in a dramatic new way in the past forty years, as William Wainwright notes:

[T]he current situation is very different. Important philosophers are now prepared to defend arguments for God’s existence. Many argue that traditional concepts of the divine are not only meaningful but are also superior to alternatives. In their opinion, classical theistic metaphysics is still viable.<sup>11</sup>

One key figure, Alvin Plantinga, has led this renaissance, bringing the Christian faith to the broader academic philosophical community—a movement that continues to snowball. Plantinga has given some sage advice to Christian philosophers: Christians should do philosophy with a greater sense of independence, not slavishly following the criteria or demands of secular or non-Christian philosophers, who often operate with different standards and assumptions.<sup>12</sup> Thinking clearly doesn’t involve being

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squeezed into the mold of unbiblical assumptions adopted by non-Christian thinkers, who may deny God's existence, life's purpose and meaning, the afterlife, the appropriateness of mystery, the possibility of miracles, and a host of other fundamental Christian assumptions. Yes, the Christian faith is publicly accessible and open to public scrutiny; it's not as though God has spoken into our ear and no one else can get in on the discussion! While, say, even the doctrine of the Trinity is specially revealed, it too sheds helpful light on important questions—for all to examine. As the theologian Anselm affirmed in his *Proslogion*, ours is a “faith seeking understanding” (*fides quarens intellectum*): “I believe that I may understand [*credo ut intelligam*].”

No one approaches these deep, far-reaching topics as a neutral, detached observer. Spectators need not apply! After all, *God* is far more than the subject of an abstract armchair discussion. As we begin or continue our wisdom-journey with our assumptions, a critical question to ask is: *Which outlook or philosophy of life does the best job of dealing with the range of available evidence and human experience? Or, Is my perspective consistent with my life philosophy's assumptions (e.g., regarding human rights or personal responsibility), or am I borrowing capital from another worldview to keep mine going?* A person's assumptions may twist the evidence or ignore the truth—or they may align quite well with the relevant evidence, which I believe the Christian faith does. We can present our case for the existence and nature of the triune God, offering responses to a wide range of otherwise unanswerable questions.<sup>13</sup> C. S. Lewis put it this way: “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, some Christians speak disparagingly about philosophy, as though it's always done in an anti-Christian manner. They may cite Paul's caution, “Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies” (1 Cor. 8:1), or his warning against “philosophy and empty deception” (Col. 2:8). They may claim to promote a Spirit-given knowledge that seems foolish to the “natural” person (1 Cor. 1–2). While such passages remind us that our thinking shouldn't be detached from God's self-revelation and his Spirit's workings, they hardly undermine the importance of defending our faith in the marketplace of ideas and of engaging in the discipline of philosophy as Christians. Consider the following:

*First, God created the mind, and it is simply non-Christian to be anti-intellectual.* Loving God with all our *mind* (Mt. 22:37) means not justifying sloppy thinking because we “live by faith.” We've been made in the image of a supremely wise Being, and it's dishonoring to God to squander mental gifts. Remember how Stephen's opponents “were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking” (Acts 6:10).

*Second, the Scriptures themselves speak of defending the Christian faith in the marketplace of ideas.* Jesus' half-brother Jude urges his audience to “contend earnestly for the faith” entrusted to believers (v. 3). In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul puts *everything* on the line by saying that if Christ hasn't been raised, Christians are believing a lie and should basically pack up and head to

Cancun or the French Riviera: let's eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die (v. 32). But Paul gives reasons for having confidence that Christ's body was raised: he appeals to a list of eyewitnesses who saw Jesus alive after his death (including over 500 believers, most of whom were still alive), and Paul himself encountered Jesus in a life-altering vision (which was different from Jesus' bodily appearances to his disciples). Jesus repeatedly showed that his physical body was gloriously raised by breaking bread (Lk. 24:30, 35), serving fish to his disciples (Jn. 21:13), and encouraging his followers to handle his flesh-and-bones body (Lk. 24:39; Jn. 20:27; cp. 1 Jn. 1:1). He didn't say, "Just believe," but he graciously gave evidence of this transformed physicality.

Throughout Acts, Luke uses words such as *reason*, (*trying to*) *persuade*, *eyewitness*, *witness*, *defense*. Paul is regularly *reasoning* with non-Christians (Acts 17:2, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8, 9), seeking to *persuade* them (18:4; 19:8; 26:28; 28:23). The proconsul Sergius Paulus, "a man of intelligence" (Acts 13:7), seeing Elymas struck blind by Paul, "believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord" (13:12). At Athens (Acts 17), Paul is even portrayed as a Socrates-like philosopher: both of them "dialogue/discuss" in the *agora* (marketplace); both are said to proclaim "new" ideas and are accused of endorsing "foreign divinities."<sup>15</sup>

Intelligence doesn't oppose faith or trust in God. Christians must be prepared to give a *defense* of their faith, providing *reason* for the hope within (1 Pet. 3:15). This reasoned defense should spring from setting Christ apart as Lord in our hearts, and it should be done with gentleness and respect toward non-Christians. Defending our faith isn't operating by "works" rather than grace; it's a *prayerful* engagement that depends on God's Spirit, who can use reasons and arguments—as well as gospel presentations and personal testimonies of changed lives. Without the Spirit's working, no lives are changed and no minds persuaded.

*Third, we'll likely be more bold and effective representatives of Christ if we're able to respond winsomely to objections and clarify misrepresentations of the Christian faith.* Christians may be reluctant to talk about their faith because they're afraid to be questioned about it; however, they should instead welcome such inquiries and ask their non-Christian friends why *they* believe what they do. Sure, some non-Christians hide behind smokescreens and rationalizations. They might throw out some pretty lame, unimaginative slogans. Others, though, might be open to good reasons that God can use. If we're reasonably prepared to address important questions non-Christians typically ask, we'll likely communicate the good news of the gospel more confidently and effectively. While an effective Christian witness involves an array of factors—a listening ear, a gracious spirit, personal integrity, a loving Christian community—we should still be prepared to offer reasons for why people should prefer the person of Jesus over Muhammad's or Buddha's teachings. Good reasons for believing the gospel are part of its attractiveness.

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Isn't reason limited? Aren't we fallen creatures? Yes and of course. But we are still endowed by God with the capacity to appreciate good reasons for belief. If Paul reasoned and sought to persuade others in the first century, why think that today God can't use good reasons for belief? It makes sense that God, in his multifaceted grace, can use good reasons—as well as loving relationships, dramatic beauty, a deep sense of shame or hopelessness—to awaken people to his spectacular reality.

Furthermore, where would the present church be without historic defenders of the faith—from the apostle Paul, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Augustine, to G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, and Francis Schaeffer? God has blessed his church not simply with remarkable examples of courage, love, and self-sacrifice—like William Wilberforce, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, or Mother Teresa—but also with remarkably gifted minds that have used their intellect for God's glory to clarify, defend, and articulate the faith.

*Fourth, we should consider how we are preparing the next generation of believers to defend and articulate their faith when it's challenged.* Rather than helping their children think through their faith, too many Christian parents tell them, “Don't ask questions. Just believe,” leaving them ill-equipped to give reasons for the Christian hope. In fact, 55 percent of American students who've grown up in Christian homes will end up rejecting their faith by the time they're done with college.<sup>16</sup> I've spoken with many dismayed Christian parents who've told me that their children have given up on the Christian faith at university. I've heard of scornful professors who toss Bibles out of classroom windows or make their freshmen students write a paper in defense of God's non-existence—no questions asked. How encouraging, then, is the news that the Christian faith has been believed and defended by rigorous minds to God's glory, and that heartening answers are available for serious questioners!

*Fifth, engaging false ideas and misunderstandings of the Christian faith can help remove barriers that prevent people from taking the gospel seriously.* In 1913, Princeton Seminary president J. Gresham Machen pointed out that false ideas are the greatest obstacle to the Christian faith. Our fervent preaching may bring in a straggler here and there, while our culture is controlled by ideas—consider *The Da Vinci Code*—that “prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion.”<sup>17</sup> Our failure to respond to caricatures of the gospel creates further barriers; this means non-Christians are even less likely to consider the Christian faith a serious intellectual option.

Doing philosophy of religion as Christians will mean keeping the great commandment—loving God supremely and loving our neighbors as ourselves. Everything hangs on this. If our philosophizing about God fills us with pride and self-sufficiency so that we lose touch with God and have no patience and grace toward others, then we are no longer lovers of wisdom.



# 10

## God—The Best Explanation

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen. 1:1)*

### “Not Enough Evidence”?

John Searle recounts what happened at a Voltaire Society banquet at Oxford, which Bertrand Russell, then in his mid-eighties, attended. Russell was asked what he would say to God if it turned out he existed. Russell replied, “Well, I would go up to Him, and I would say, ‘You didn’t give us enough evidence.’”<sup>1</sup>

In light of God’s universally accessible self-revelation, Scripture asserts that “every mouth”—including Russell’s—will be “closed” and “all the world” held “accountable to God” (Rom. 3:19). Such evidence becomes all the more relevant and powerful in God’s special revelation in Jesus of Nazareth (Rom. 1:16–17).

Moreover, Romans 1–3 indicates that any ignorance God condemns isn’t the *innocent* kind, but the *willful* sort. We may be ignorant of the speed limit, but we’re not off the hook. Why? Because *we’ve still failed in our duty to pay attention to traffic signs*. Similarly, many people fail to attend to God’s initiating grace and his presence, even resisting his revelation in nature, reason, and conscience. Instead of gratefully acknowledging that *everything* they have they’ve *received* (1 Cor. 4:7), they may usurp the credit for their talents, intelligence, good looks, fortunate circumstances, or other such gifts. (By the way, Christians aren’t exempt from such idolatry either!) Perhaps they rationalize their actions and resist their conscience about their wrongdoing and the need for outside assistance. They may be harder on others than on themselves, holding others to a standard they themselves don’t keep. They may smugly say, “Well, I’m not as bad as

Hitler or Stalin”—rather than compare themselves to fine moral exemplars like Jesus or Mother Teresa. They may simply refuse to pay attention to the available clues. The casual shoulder-shrug and cavalier dismissal of “I don’t know if God exists” reflects a willful ignorance.

We’ve looked briefly at certain arguments for God’s nature and existence. Let’s step back now and look at *the broad range of the universe’s features and of human experience* to see why the biblical understanding of God offers the *best explanation* and thus the *more natural context to make sense* of them. Rather than appealing to the necessary conclusions of *deduction* or the probabilities of *induction*, we can use the tools of *abduction*; that is, we can pursue the *best explanation* for the widest range of phenomena—a convergence of divine indicators. God’s existence and nature furnish us with a *more powerful, wide-ranging, less-contrived* (non-ad hoc), and far *more natural or plausible setting* to explain certain important phenomena than the alternatives—rather than naturalism or nontheistic “religious” alternatives like Buddhism, Jainism, Shintoism, and certain versions of Hinduism.

Skeptics may tell us, “Despite its complexities, the universe *could be* the product of mindless, unguided processes. *Even if* the chances are remote—one in billions of billions of billions—so what? We just happened to get lucky; if not, we wouldn’t be here talking about it!” This is a common, but faulty, assumption: *If an explanation is remotely logically possible, then it’s just as reasonable as any other.* In everyday life, however, we typically do—and should—prefer explanations that are *more likely or probable*, not whatever’s merely *logically possible*. Does the skeptic’s outlook do a *better* job of explaining things than the Jewish-Christian one? We’re wiser to accept a more robust, wider-ranging, less-contrived explanation—since it’s more likely to be true—than rely on *it-could-have-happened-this-way* scenarios and other thin reeds.

Alvin Plantinga correctly observes that God’s existence and nature offer “suggestions for answers to a wide range of otherwise intractable questions.”<sup>22</sup> Not only will the biblical God yield the best available explanation given the range of relevant considerations, but many naturalists themselves admit they’re hard-pressed to explain certain fundamental features of the universe and human experience. These tend to be the very features that God’s existence and supreme nature can easily accommodate.

To see this more clearly, below is a chart comparing theism and naturalism—which maintains that (a) nature is all there is (no God, miracles) and (b) science is the best—or only—means of knowing. Charts have their limits, but hopefully these summaries are fair representations. We could also make such comparisons with *other* worldviews, but we’re just picking on naturalism here! For the record, however, Eastern philosophy and Asian religion scholar Ninian Smart noted that in addition to the fact that the “Western [i.e., theistic] concept of the importance of the historical process is largely foreign to these faiths”; he adds that “the notion of a personal

God is altogether less prominent.”<sup>3</sup> The context of God provides a very natural setting and explanation for the phenomena listed below—not so for naturalism *and* other nontheistic views.

God vs. Naturalism		
Phenomena We Recognize/Observe/ Tend to Assume	Theistic Context	Naturalistic Context
<i>(Self-)consciousness</i> exists.	God is <i>supremely self-aware/self-conscious</i> .	The universe was produced by <i>mindless, nonconscious</i> processes.
<i>Personal</i> beings exist.	God is a <i>personal</i> Being.	The universe was produced by <i>impersonal</i> processes.
We believe we make <i>free personal decisions/choices</i> . We assume humans are <i>accountable</i> for their actions.	God is <i>spirit</i> and a <i>free Being</i> , who can freely choose to act (e.g., to create or not).	We have emerged from <i>material, deterministic processes</i> beyond our control.
We <i>trust our senses and rational faculties</i> as generally reliable for producing true beliefs.	A God of <i>truth and rationality</i> exists.	Because of our impulse to survive and reproduce, <i>our beliefs would only help us survive, but a number of these could be completely false</i> .
Human beings have <i>intrinsic value/dignity</i> and <i>rights</i> .	God is the <i>supremely valuable</i> Being.	Human beings were produced by <i>valueless</i> processes.
Objective <i>moral</i> values exist.	God’s character is the source of <i>goodness/moral values</i> .	The universe was produced by <i>nonmoral</i> processes.
The <i>universe began to exist</i> a finite time ago.	A <i>powerful, previously existing</i> God brought the universe into being without any preexisting material. (Here, <i>something</i> comes from <i>something</i> .)	The universe came into existence <i>from nothing by nothing</i> —or was, perhaps, self-caused. (Here, <i>something</i> comes from <i>nothing</i> .)
First <i>life</i> emerged.	God is a <i>living, active Being and the cause of all life</i> .	Life somehow emerged from <i>nonliving matter</i> .
The universe is <i>finely tuned for human life</i> —“the Goldilocks effect”: the universe is “just right” for life.	God is a <i>wise, intelligent Designer</i> .	All the cosmic constants <i>just happened to be right</i> ; given enough time and/or many possible worlds, such a world would eventually emerge.

<b>Beauty exists</b> not only in landscapes and sunsets, but in “elegant” or “beautiful” scientific theories.	God is <b>beautiful</b> (Ps. 27:4) and <b>capable of creating beautiful things</b> according to his pleasure.	Beauty in the natural world is <b>superabundant</b> and in many cases <b>superfluous (often not linked to survival)</b> .
Many virtuous, honest people have claimed to have awesome, life-altering <b>religious experiences</b> , encountering the transcendent (numinous) realm.	God’s <b>presence</b> fills the heavens and the earth (Ps. 19:1; Isa. 6:3). He is <b>not far from</b> any one of us (Acts 17:23).	These are purely <b>psychological</b> experiences, perhaps the result of wish fulfillment or even delusions.
We (tend to) believe that life has <b>purpose</b> and <b>meaning</b> . For most of us, life is worth living.	God has created/ designed us for certain <b>purposes</b> (to love him, others, etc.); when we live them out, our lives find <b>meaning/enrichment</b> .	There is <b>no cosmic purpose</b> , blueprint, or goal for human existence.
<b>Real evils</b> —both moral and natural—occur in the world.	Evil’s definition assumes a <b>design plan</b> (how things <i>ought</i> to be, but are not) or <b>standard of goodness</b> (a corruption or absence of goodness), by which we judge something to be evil. <b>God is a good Designer</b> ; his existence supplies the crucial moral context to make sense of evil.	Atrocities, pain, and suffering <b>just happen</b> . This is just <b>how things are</b> —with no “plan” or standard of goodness to which things <i>ought</i> to conform.

### Getting Help from Egypt and Babylon

*“Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds.” (Acts 7:22)*

*...youths...showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge and who had ability for serving in the king’s court; and he ordered [Ashpenaz] to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. (Dan. 1:4)*

Moses and Daniel with his three friends—Hebrews in foreign lands—benefited from the learning offered by their host countries, Egypt and Babylon. They became better equipped for carrying out God’s purposes for their lives. Likewise, we can benefit from unbelieving scholars in the academy whose insights actually *help reinforce* the Christian message and *enhance* our communication of the gospel. With God’s aid, we can defend belief in God, getting by with a little help from our naturalistic friends.

Now, if God doesn't exist, if nature is all there is, the implications are enormous. Naturalism is "imperialistic," affirms philosopher and naturalist Jaegwon Kim, exacting a "terribly high" price.<sup>4</sup> Harvard biologist E. O. Wilson declares that "all tangible phenomena, from the birth of the stars to the workings of social institutions, are based on material processes that are ultimately reducible, however long and torturous the sequences, to the laws of physics."<sup>5</sup> Naturalism's implications are monumental.

In addition to the usefulness of the chart above, we have another helpful tool as we consider the best explanation for the range of features in the universe and human experience—namely, naturalists who find naturalistic explanations *unnatural*. This doesn't mean Christians have complete, airtight answers and no mystery or puzzles to deal with. However, the biblical God helps us make the best *overall* sense of crucial phenomena (although we can't cover the *all* the phenomena on the chart). Unless otherwise noted, we'll quote *only* naturalistic philosophers and scientists (in italics). As it turns out, they actually help reinforce the need for the biblical God as the better explanation.

### **Consciousness**

Our first of several philosophers of mind, *Ned Block*, confesses that we have no idea how consciousness could have emerged from nonconscious matter: "we have nothing—*zilch*—worthy of being called a research programme.... Researchers are stumped."<sup>6</sup> Berkeley's *John Searle* says this is a "leading problem in the biological sciences."<sup>7</sup> *Jaegwon Kim* notes our "inability" to understand consciousness in an "essentially physical" world.<sup>8</sup> *Colin McGinn* observes that consciousness seems like "a radical novelty in the universe";<sup>9</sup> he wonders how our "technicolour" awareness could "arise from soggy grey matter."<sup>10</sup> *David Papineau* wonders *why* consciousness emerges: "to this question physicalists' 'theories of consciousness' seem to provide no answer."<sup>11</sup>

If, however, we have been made by a supremely self-aware Being, then the existence of consciousness has a plausible context.

### **Free Will, Personal Responsibility, and Truth-seeking**

Despite genetic, family, or cultural influences, we typically take free will and personal responsibility for granted: our choices make a difference, and we're accountable for our actions. Our judicial system assumes that genes and environment don't excuse criminal behavior. But if all we do and believe is determined by genes and culture, why think we're morally responsible for our actions? *Thomas Nagel* sees this: "There is no room for agency in a world of neural impulses, chemical reactions, and bone and muscle movements." Naturalism implies that we're "helpless" and "not responsible" for our actions.<sup>12</sup> Zoologist *Jane Goodall* sees moral responsibility and free will as distinctly human—in contrast to chimps and other animals: "only humans, I believe, are capable of *deliberate* cruelty—acting with the intention of causing pain and suffering."<sup>13</sup>

*John Searle* acknowledges that our intuition that “we could have done something else” is “just a fact of experience.” But rather than taking this intuition seriously, he rejects free will because it allegedly interferes with the “scientific” idea of “the causal order of nature.”<sup>14</sup> Nobel Prize winner *Francis Crick’s* “astonishing hypothesis” is that our joys and sorrows, our sense of identity and free will “are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.”<sup>15</sup> But then *Crick’s own* beliefs “are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.” *Crick’s* beliefs aren’t more rational than anyone else’s; if *Crick* is correct, it’s just *by accident*. No wonder philosopher *Richard Rorty* considers the desire for “Truth” to be utterly “un-Darwinian.”<sup>16</sup> We saw earlier that if we’re just biological organisms, we can hold beliefs that help our species survive—“humans have rights and dignity,” or, “I have certain moral obligations”—but they would be utterly *false*. Even the atheist’s own rejection of God is a by-product of his survival instinct—as is the theist’s belief in God. Indeed, *all* our beliefs are ultimately beyond our rational control, having been “pumped into” us through our genes and environment.

However, if we do have free will, if we are morally responsible for our actions, and if we can freely pursue truth (rather than simply being biologically programmed for survival), these all make excellent sense if we have been made in the image of a free, rational, and truthful Being. If God exists, we have good reason to think we can rise above our genes and our environment; that our choices make a difference; that we can seek the truth and find it—rather than believing that forces beyond our control dictate to our minds.

God’s existence provides a much more suitable context for these features of our existence.

### ***Objective Moral Values and Human Rights***

Like the UN Declaration on Human Rights (1948), the *Humanist Manifesto III* (2003) asserts the “inherent worth and dignity” of humans. The post-WWII Nuremberg trials assumed a moral law above any country’s laws; the line “but I was just following orders” was no excuse. Philosopher *Simon Blackburn* confesses a preference for dignity over humiliation, but finds that nature offers no grounds for affirming human dignity or objective moral values: “Nature has no concern for good or bad, right or wrong. . . . We cannot get behind ethics.”<sup>17</sup> No wonder: if we are the products of mindless and valueless processes, it’s hard to see how value could emerge. *From valuelessness comes valuelessness*. Human rights and dignity or moral duties are difficult to justify if God doesn’t exist.

Of course, many naturalists *reduce* ethics to biological drives and social forces. *Bertrand Russell* asserts that “the whole subject of ethics arises from the pressure of the community on the individual.”<sup>18</sup> *Derk Pereboom* affirms

that “our best scientific theories indeed have the consequence that we are not morally responsible for our actions,” that we’re “more like machines than we ordinarily suppose.”<sup>19</sup> *E. O. Wilson* thinks morality is rooted in “the hypothalamus and the limbic system”; this moral sense is a “device of survival in social organisms.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, *James Rachels* rejects the claim that we live according to some noble moral ideal: our behavior is “comprised of tendencies which natural selection has favoured.”<sup>21</sup> As we just saw, however, why trust *any* of our beliefs since we have no control over what is pumped into us?

If, however, a good God exists in whose image humans have been made, then we have a readily available basis for affirming objective moral values, human dignity and rights, and moral obligations. To quote *J. L. Mackie*: “Moral properties constitute so odd a cluster of properties and relations that they are most unlikely to have arisen in the ordinary course of events without an all-powerful god to create them.”<sup>22</sup>

Objective moral values and human dignity and worth point us to God.

### ***The Origin of the Universe a Finite Time Ago***

The universe began to exist a finite time ago, and in physicist *Stephen Hawking*’s words, “Almost everyone now believes that the universe, and *time itself*, had a beginning at the Big Bang.”<sup>23</sup> Nobel Prize-winning physicist *Steven Weinberg* acknowledges his dislike of this fact: “[The now-rejected] steady state theory [which views the universe as eternally existent] is philosophically the most attractive theory because it *least* resembles the account given in Genesis.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the Big Bang gives us very good reason for thinking that something independent of the universe brought it into existence. Astrophysicists *John Barrow* and *Joseph Silk* point out: “Our new picture is more akin to the traditional metaphysical picture of creation out of nothing, for it predicts a definite beginning to events in time, indeed a definite beginning to time itself.” They ask: “what preceded the event called the ‘big bang?’”: The “answer to our question is simple: nothing.”<sup>25</sup> Agnostic *Anthony Kenny* notes, “A proponent of the big bang theory, at least if he is an atheist, must believe that matter came from nothing and by nothing.”<sup>26</sup>

Does this cosmic “free lunch” make sense? No, our universe couldn’t be uncaused or self-caused. Philosopher *Kai Nielsen* puts it this way: “Suppose you hear a loud bang...and you ask me, ‘What made that bang?’ and I reply, ‘Nothing, it just happened. You would not accept that. In fact you would find my reply quite unintelligible.’”<sup>27</sup> If nothing can begin to exist without a cause when it comes to little bangs, why not the Big Bang?

*So if a powerful God exists, then we have good reason for thinking that the world began to exist by his activity.* Being comes from being, not from nonbeing. Something can’t come from nothing since there’s no *potential* for anything to begin existing.

***The Emergence of First Life***

The emergence of life from nonlife is a huge issue. In 2005, Harvard University launched an initiative to discover how life began; it includes biologists, astronomers, chemists, and scientists from other fields. For the naturalist, this is a difficulty indeed. *Francis Crick* has acknowledged: “The origin of life itself appears...to be almost a miracle, so many are the conditions which would have to be satisfied to get it going.”<sup>28</sup> *Jacques Monod* notes that the origin of self-replicating, information-transferring cells from a “primordial soup” poses “Herculean problems.” This is a “riddle,” and how this came to be “is exceedingly difficult to imagine.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, *how could inert, lifeless matter produce life?*

Despite scientists’ attempts to conjure up life from nonlife, such theories have thus far failed.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, *even if* they could produce life from nonlife by strictly natural processes, this would further support our claim that *it takes a lot of intelligent planning to do so!* The believer has no such difficulties: *If a living and active God exists, then we have a plausible context for the existence of living beings.*

***The Universe’s Delicately Balanced Conditions for Life (and the Existence of Remarkably Complex Organisms)***

If an intelligent God exists, then a delicately balanced life-permitting universe wouldn’t be surprising. We could reasonably expect a universe that involves wise planning. Given naturalism, though, the chances of a life-prohibiting universe are vastly greater than a life-permitting one. The odds are staggering enough that (a) a life-*permitting* universe exists; these are compounded exponentially to account for (b) a life-*producing* universe: just because a universe *permits* life doesn’t guarantee it will *produce* life. The odds become even more remote, as our universe is also (c) a life-*sustaining* one: even if life began by itself, nature’s many harsh forces could have easily snuffed it out.

While life’s emergence and sustenance, despite vast improbabilities, is remotely logically possible, we should consider what’s most *plausible*. No wonder one physicist describes the earth’s history as “a gigantic lottery” involving “millions of fortuitous steps” that “would surely never happen the second time around, even in broad outline.”<sup>31</sup> We’ve noted astrophysicists’ recognition that scores and scores of exact conditions are necessary for life to exist. *Bernard Carr and Martin Rees* speak of nature’s “remarkable coincidences” that “warrant some explanation.”<sup>32</sup> Astronomer *Fred Hoyle* admits the same: “Such properties seem to run through the fabric of the natural world like a thread of happy coincidences. But there are so many odd coincidences essential to life that some explanation seems required to account for them.”<sup>33</sup>



So remarkable is this “integrated complexity” that former atheist philosopher Antony Flew has come to believe that an intelligent God explains this.<sup>34</sup> Physicist *John Wheeler* summarizes his own thinking: “When I first started studying, I saw the world as composed of particles. Looking more deeply I discovered waves. Now after a lifetime of study, it appears that all existence is the expression of information.”<sup>35</sup> Even two outspoken atheists admit the world shows every indication of design and purpose, but they add this qualification: it only *looks* that way. Again, *Richard Dawkins* says biology is “the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose.”<sup>36</sup> *Francis Crick* advises biologists to “constantly keep in mind that what they see was not designed, but rather evolved.”<sup>37</sup>

Despite Dawkins’ claim that Darwin made it possible to be an “intellectually fulfilled atheist,”<sup>38</sup> we’ve seen that Darwinism didn’t do away with design. Darwin’s *Origin of Species* assumes a Creator got the evolutionary ball rolling: “To my mind, it accords better with what we know of the laws impressed on matter by the Creator, that the production and extinction of the past and present inhabitants of the world should have been due to secondary causes.” Again, “There is a grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one....[F]rom so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved.”<sup>39</sup> If anything, Darwin made design appear less immediate. So let’s grant evolution and then ask: “What if God utilized the evolutionary process to bring about his purposes?” In the end, the issue isn’t so much “creation vs. evolution” but “God vs. no God.” If evolution is true, then it’s a great argument for God’s existence!

Contrary to Dawkins, the “evolution-did-it-all” blanket explanation for the existence of various animal and plant species is inadequate. It involves huge assumptions. That is, *before* the evolutionary process can get going, certain crucial conditions must be in place:

- a. the universe *came into existence* (out of nothing)
- b. it is *precisely tuned* for life
- c. it actually *produces* life
- d. life continues to be *sustained* despite harsh conditions.

These items must *first* be in place for evolution to have any chance of success—and they happen to point us in the direction of *God*.

When it comes to organisms, we readily think of the complex human brain or the human body with all of its remarkable inter-working systems—circulatory, muscular, nervous, digestive, reproductive, respiratory, excretory, skeletal, endocrine, lymphatic. We’re not surprised when the psalmist says we’re “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14).

If a remarkably wise God exists, then the delicate balance of the universe and amazing complexity of organisms can be readily anticipated.

### ***Beauty***

As I write this, I'm in eastern Connecticut's "quiet corner," where my siblings and I are celebrating the 100th birthday of "Tante Vody"—my great aunt, Evodia Maximovitsch. My family and I are enchanted by New England's cold streams and lakes, dark hemlocks and dazzling white birches, massive boulders, and spectacular autumn colors. (In addition, its stone walls, winding roads, and town greens have a beauty and charm all their own!) Such impressive natural beauty is in no way linked to survival. So why think this overwhelming beauty should exist given naturalism? Why isn't everything functional, monotonously textured, and a battleship-gray color? And why should (human) creatures exist who can admire and appreciate the world's loveliness and majesty? And why do scientists prefer elegant or beautiful theories, often without observational support? To cite *Paul Draper* more fully here: "Theism is supported by the fact that the universe contains an abundance of beauty." He adds: "A beautiful universe, especially one containing beings that can appreciate that beauty, is clearly more likely on theism than on naturalism and so is evidence favoring theism over naturalism."<sup>40</sup> Naturalism seems to offer little help in resolving the emergence of such beauty.

When it comes to science and mathematics, *Paul Dirac* goes so far as to say: "it is more important to have beauty in one's equations than to have them fit an experiment."<sup>41</sup> *Bertrand Russell* wrote of the "supreme beauty of mathematics...like that of a sculpture"; it is "sublimely pure" and, like poetry, inspires the "true spirit of delight" and "exaltation" within us.<sup>42</sup>

If, however, an imaginative, beautiful God exists, then such magnificent beauty should not surprise us. God provides a suitable context for it.

We could go on to discuss other phenomena in defense of theism's greater explanatory power, which is indeed remarkable. When skeptics dismiss God by appealing to less-plausible, though *logically possible* scenarios as to how consciousness or first life emerged, we can respond, "Yes, that's *possible*, but I'm offering very good—and I think, superior—contextual reasons for taking God seriously." Hopefully these features will suffice to show that the nature and existence of God does exhibit a more natural, suitable context to establish and explain all these features.

# Notes

## Preface

<sup>1</sup>Alvin Plantinga, “Twenty Years Worth of the SCP,” *Faith and Philosophy* 15 (April 1998): 153.

<sup>2</sup>Alvin Plantinga, “Advice to Christian Philosophers,” *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (July 1984): 255.

<sup>3</sup>Biblical scholar John Goldingay asserts, “If one starts from biblical narratives and asks after their theological freight, the vast bulk of their theological implications does not emerge within a trinitarian framework.” From “Biblical Narrative and Systematic Theology,” in *Between Two Horizons*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 131. However, we have triune glimmers in the Old Testament, with subtle, but rich themes of Wisdom, Word, and Spirit, and sufficient indications in the New Testament. This doctrine is a legitimate—and very fruitful—theological inference. Biblical scholar Richard Bauckham comments that the 325 C.E. Council of Nicea’s *homoousion* (Christ’s sharing the same nature as the Father) “functions to ensure that this divine identity is truly the identity of the one and only God. In its own way, it expresses the Christological monotheism of the New Testament.” *God Crucified: Monotheism & Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 78–79.

<sup>4</sup>A term used by Hans Urs von Balthasar and, more recently, Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

## Introduction

<sup>1</sup>Graham Tomlin, *The Power of the Cross: Theology and the Death of Christ in Paul, Luther and Pascal* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1999), 154–65.

<sup>2</sup>See Peter Simpson, “The Christianity of Philosophy,” *First Things* 113 (May 2001): 32–36.

<sup>3</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 65, 101. Abraham assumes worshipers of the true God weren’t in Gerar: “I thought, surely there is no *fear of God* in this place” (Gen. 20:11).

<sup>4</sup>Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994).

<sup>5</sup>“Take My Life,” verse 4, in *Chalice Hymnal* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1995), no. 609.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 130.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>8</sup>Keith Yandell, “How to Sink in Cognitive Quicksand: Nuancing Religious Pluralism,” in *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Michael L. Peterson and Raymond J. VanArragon (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 191.

<sup>9</sup>See James Davison Hunter’s essay, “Religious Freedom and the Challenge of Pluralism,” in *Articles of Faith, Articles of Peace*, ed. James D. Hunter and Os Guinness (Washington: Brookings, 1988).

<sup>10</sup>Paul J. Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 7; see also 2–12.

<sup>11</sup>William Wainwright, *Philosophy of Religion*, 2d ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1999), v.

<sup>12</sup>Alvin Plantinga, “Advice to Christian Philosophers,” *Faith and Philosophy* 15 (April 1998): 253–71.

<sup>13</sup>Alvin Plantinga, “Natural Theology,” in *Companion to Metaphysics*, ed. Jaegwon Kim and Ernest Sosa (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1995), 347. On Christian philosophers whose faith has proved intellectually satisfying, see Kelly James Clark, ed., *Philosophers Who Believe* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995) and Thomas V. Morris, ed., *God and the Philosophers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>14</sup>C. S. Lewis, “Is Theology Poetry?” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 140.

<sup>38</sup>John Rist, *Real Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>39</sup>Paul Draper, “Seeking But Not Believing,” in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 204.

<sup>40</sup>Alvin Plantinga, as quoted in Rupert Shortt, *God’s Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 44.

<sup>41</sup>Uwe Siemon-Netto, “J.S. Bach in Japan,” *First Things* 104 (June/July 2000): 15–17.

<sup>42</sup>Eugene P. Wigner, “The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences.” Found online at <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~matc/MathDrama/reading/Wigner.html>. Accessed 18 Aug. 2006.

<sup>43</sup>Steven Weinberg, *Dreams of a Final Theory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 250.

<sup>44</sup>From Jonathan Edwards’ *Personal Narrative* (c. 1740). PDF available through <http://edwards.yale.edu/>.

<sup>45</sup>Cf. George Appleton, ed., *The Oxford Book of Prayer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>46</sup>Cf. G. W. Hansen, “The Preaching and Defence of Paul,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. H. Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>47</sup>Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (New York: Oxford, 1958). We won’t deal here with sensory or visionary experiences, given their greatly varied nature.

<sup>48</sup>For some qualifying remarks on Otto, see Winfried Corduan, *The Tapestry of Faiths* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002) 204–5.

<sup>49</sup>Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 254. William Alston shows that “mystical perception” is parallel to sense perception in his *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991). While not equivalent, they’re somewhat alike, and the principle of credulity can aptly be applied to both.

<sup>50</sup>See R. Douglas Geivett, “The Evidential Value of Religious Experience,” in *The Rationality of Theism*, ed. Paul Copan and Paul K. Moser (London: Routledge, 2003); Keith Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>51</sup>Also William Wainwright, *Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1999), 120–38. Cf. J. P. Moreland’s nice summary in *Scaling the Secular City* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987). Some people object to religious-experience arguments because they can’t be “cross-checked”—presumably by sense experience or “scientific” criteria. But since *religious experience* provides us with our primary access to *divine* reality, and since God reveals himself when and as he pleases, we shouldn’t expect that there necessarily *has* to be independent justification for religious experience (Wainwright, *Philosophy of Religion*, 132).

<sup>52</sup>From Geivett, “Evidential Value of Religious Experience.”

## Chapter 10: God—The Best Explanation

<sup>1</sup>John R. Searle, *Mind, Language and Society: Philosophy in the Real World* (New York: Basic, 1998), 36.

<sup>2</sup>Alvin Plantinga, “Natural Theology,” in *Companion to Metaphysics*, ed. Jaegwon Kim and Ernest Sosa (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1995), 347.

<sup>3</sup>Ninian Smart, “Religion as a Discipline,” in *Concept and Empathy*, ed. Donald Wiebe (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 161.

<sup>4</sup>Jaegwon Kim, “Mental Causation and Two Conceptions of Mental Properties.” Paper presented at the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Meeting (December 1993), 2–23.

<sup>5</sup>Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 266.

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## Chapter 11: Science, Nature, and the Possibility of Miracles

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