SECTION 1

Arguing the Existence of God

Introduction to Section I

Brint Montgomery

As a simple empirical generalization, people believe in God by means of faith. But this faith can operate in several different ways. Someone who operated by *brute faith* would do so by a pure act of will with no accompanying evidence. But humans do not typically believe things purely at random or with absolutely no background evidence. Granted, one might flip a coin and decide to believe one of two opposing hypotheses based on how the coin lands (i.e., to live as if the case were settled), but the more important the hypotheses, the less attractive such a brute exercise in willing a position becomes. Therefore, in matters of supreme importance, particularly in religion, people advance their conclusions about God based on some degree of rational reflection.

In this section various approaches to the existence of God are explored. Each approach presents a different type of evidence for rational reflection and thus a different means by which one might come to believe (or not) in God.

First, a person might believe in God because of *religious experience*. Terry Fach addresses two sides to this issue: direct religious experience and the experience of good and evil as it relates to our sense of "ought." In the end he finds that the evidential weight of religious experiences and feelings of moral obligation add force to a cumulative case for God's existence.

Second, a person might believe in God based upon the *causal structure* of the universe. Brint Montgomery takes a historical approach and identifies different versions of the cosmological argument that have been put forth with increasing detail by pivotal thinkers in history. He suspects the final success (or failure) of cosmological arguments hinges on which mathematical models are appropriate for an ultimate description of the physical universe. But he worries that such a description might be impossible finally to achieve.

Third, a person might believe in God based upon the *order* noted within the universe. Although various formulations of the teleological argument do not make probable every property that Christians might believe God would possess, Lincoln Stevens thinks such arguments do "go a long distance toward making it probable" that a divine agent exists as the cause of the design in the universe.

Fourth, a person might believe in God based upon what the very *concept* of "God" must mean to any reasoning being employing that term.

Rob Thompson begins his analysis with Anselm, the originator of the ontological argument. Thompson notes that while the ontological argument remains today the easiest to deny, it is the most difficult to refute.

Finally, because each of these classic approaches have survived and evolved through various attempts to show them flawed, as a group they constitute a corpus of justification for maintaining a belief in God. Put another way, even if no single approach to the existence of God is found to be rationally conclusive, the continuing presence of these approaches as a whole makes a *second-order cumulative case* for a belief in God as being reasonable.

Still, someone might worry that too much evidence points the other way: belief in God is ultimately unjustified. This worry leads to the *atheist or nontheist* position. Tony Baker's chapter investigates various atheisms and denials of God's existence, most of which stem from Fredrick Nietzsche and his 19th-century contemporaries. Baker suggests that the decisive moment in the emergence of arguments against God's existence is the point at which faith-narratives give way to the laboratory-like environment of secular science. When God's status is no different than a supporting mathematical hypothesis, it is then no great leap of faith to offer in place of God a series of algebraic substitutions.

Section I, Part I

Experiential Arguments

Terry Fach

This chapter focuses on the role played by human experience in three arguments for the existence of God. The first and most obvious argument is one that appeals directly to so-called *religious experience*. Arguments from religious experience have been the subject of much discussion in recent work in the philosophy of religion, and this argument will be the primary focus in what follows. Second, *the moral argument* proposes that our experience of good and evil, and the sense of "ought" that resonates in the human conscience, supports the truth of God's existence. The third argument is the *cumulative case,* which states that, when all the available evidence is carefully weighed, one can affirm that God's existence is a good explanation for why things are the way we experience them. The evidential weight of religious experiences and feelings of moral obligation add force to a cumulative case for God's existence.

Our aim in what follows is twofold. First, we will uncover the basic structure of these arguments and clarify some of the key concepts they employ. Second, we will evaluate the degree to which the arguments support the rationality of belief in God.

I. The Argument from Religious Experience

Surveys of religious experience show that even though many of these experiences are extraordinary, they are also quite widespread. A number of well-documented accounts attest to the impressive variety and influence of such experiences across many traditions (James 1902; Otto 1923; Zaehner 1957; Stace 1960). Moreover, these experiences play a fundamental role in the life of believers by giving them direction and ultimate meaning. This is especially true in Christianity because of its powerful vision of what the Christian life means.

There is a distinction between *knowing a fact* and *knowing a person,* which closely resembles the distinction between knowing or believing certain things *about* God and *knowing God*. Rather, the Christian life is about entering into a relationship with that to which the Christian tradition points, which may be spoken of as God, the risen living Christ, or the Spirit (1994, 17).

Looking at religious experience from a *philosophical* perspective requires us to ask about the *evidential* value of such experience. Evidential

value means the role of experience in producing or supporting rational religious beliefs. Many feel that arguments from religious experience present more promising options for justifying belief in God than other arguments. But can appeal to religious experience satisfy the demand for empirical, noncircular evidence for the truth of God's existence?

In order to answer this question, we need to be clear about several issues. We need to clarify, for instance, what kind of experience counts as "religious experience." Is religious experience analogous in any way to normal perceptual experience? In what ways could religious experience be said to make belief in God rational? Can one person's religious experience be evidence for another person's belief in God?

What is "religious experience"?

In order to examine more carefully what we mean by religious experience, consider the following first-person report:

> I attended service at a church in Uppsala. . . . During both the Confession of Sin and the Prayer of Thanksgiving that followed Communion, I had a strong consciousness of the Holy Spirit as a person, and an equally strong consciousness of the existence of God, that God was present, that the Holy Spirit was in all those who took part in the service. . . . The only thing of importance was God, and my realization that He looked upon me and let His mercy flood over me, forgiving me for my mistakes and giving me the strength to live a better life (Unger 1976, 114).

This example suggests some basic features of religious experience reports—they are reports of a person's *experiential awareness* of God. This awareness is *direct,* and the awareness is reported to be *of God*.

To narrow our focus, we can begin with the following definition: *a religious experience is one that seems to the subject to be an experience (awareness) of God (either of his God being there, or doing or bringing about something) or some other divine aspect or thing* (cf. Swinburne 1979, 246). There are a number of noteworthy features of this definition and a few terms that need clarification. First, religious experiences must have a certain *structure*. That is, religious experiences must seem to involve an encounter with some external reality that is not to be identified with the subjects themselves. We could say that such experiences have a subject>awareness>object structure to them.

Another feature of religious experience is *the way it seems to the subject*. There are a number of ways that "seems" can be understood. When looking up the railway line, I report that "the tracks seem to converge." This suggests that, in the case in which I am aware of the effect of distance and depth of field on my visual array, what I really mean is "the

tracks merely *appear* to converge but actually do not." This is a *comparative* sense of "seems," in which my use of it suggests that these tracks look the way converging lines or objects normally look. A different meaning of "seems" occurs when I report that "my golf ball seems to be sitting on the edge of the rough, though in this light it may or may not be my ball." This is the *epistemic* sense of "seems." We use this when reporting something we are inclined to *believe* (however weakly) as being the way things really are, regardless of how *in fact* they are.

We can use "seems" in an internal sense to describe a religious experience without committing ourselves to the existence of an external object. An experience that seems to its subject to be an experience of God, when described in this internal way, does not presuppose the question of its truth. As such, it gives believers and sceptics alike an uncontroversial starting point from which to examine the argument that a religious experience lends rational support to a particular belief. Consider this example: "It seems to me that God is directing me to change my career plans." It may be true that few who have similar experiences would describe such experiences in this way. Yet such internal descriptions are helpful when the experiential claim is more controversial, as in this example: "It seemed to me that Jesus' face appeared on the side of the oil tanker." Describing religious experience in this internal way does not entail anything about an external object or state of affairs. It only entails one's own experience about the way things appear to be.

Finally, religious experiences tend to be personal, private affairs. Indeed, some take subjectivity to be the defining feature of religious experience. This subjective feature also goes some way to explaining, for instance, why Brian, when attending chapel, can report, "I sense the presence of the Spirit all around." And yet Susan, Brian's equally attentive pewmate, reports no such awareness of Spirit's presence at the exact time Brian senses this presence. Other religious experiences are not private in just *this* way. For instance, a person might witness a delicate flower in bloom on a still May evening and be "filled with a sense of God's creative power," while another person might witness the same sight and merely be "filled with a sense of nature's beauty and mystery."

One way to sort out the apparent diversity of experience is to divide religious experiences into *those that involve the interpretation of public phenomena religiously and those that do not* (Swinburne, 1979, 249-253). In the list below, the first two types of religious experience involve taking public phenomena religiously, while the last three are instances in which the divine is experienced via something private to the subject.

1. Experiences of ordinary, nonreligious objects that seem to be experiences of supernatural, religious objects.

2. Experiences of unusual events or objects, e.g., miracles.
3. Private experiences describable by normal sensory vocabulary.
4. Private experiences *not* describable by normal sensory vocabulary.
5. Awareness or feelings unaccompanied by any sensory experience.

Types 1 and 2 involve experiences of phenomena that are public in the sense that other persons (who are in sensory perceptual conditions similar to those of the subject) would report seeing the same objects or events. But this sort of religious experience is not without some perplexing features. Consider, for example, cases in which both Brian and Susan witness the same publicly observable object or event and yet Susan interprets what she sees to be something quite different than what Brian reports seeing. Both may be having the same visual sensory experience and yet have different perceptual experiences. "What is seen by one man as simply a wet day," notes Richard Swinburne, "is seen by another as God's reminding us of his bounty in constantly providing us with food by means of his watering plants" (1979, 253).

Despite the absence of public phenomena in religious experiences of type 3, the subject has certain private experiences that are describable by the vocabulary normally used for describing normal sensory experience. This kind of religious experience is typically mediated through visions, voices, or dreams. A good example is Peter's trance-like experience, as described in the Acts of the Apostles (10:9-16), in which Peter saw a vision and heard the Lord's voice.

Type 4 religious experience is most often associated with mysticism. So-called mystical experiences vary widely, and they have been divided into two broad groups according to whether there is an *extrovertive* or an *introvertive* element to them. Extrovertive mystical experiences typically involve a transformation of the senses that causes the subject to see "the inner essence of things, an essence that appears to be alive, beautiful, and the same in all things." These mystical experiences provide a sense that "one sees things as they really are" and a feeling that "what is experienced is divine" (Rowe 1978, 66-68). Their distinguishing characteristic, however, is that the subjects who report them cannot describe them using normal sensory vocabulary.

Type 5 religious experiences are characterized by an awareness or feeling unaccompanied by auditory, visual, or any other standard sorts of sensory experience. Such a description could apply to experiences involving a subject's awareness of being intimately close or in the presence of God. Or such a description could apply to God's doing or bringing something about, for instance, a sense of God "lifting the burden of sin" or urg-

ing one to pursue a particular vocation. Take, as an example, John Wesley's description of his conversion:

> In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

In what follows, our focus will be on religious experiences that are taken by their subjects to be of an independently existing reality that transcends the subject's awareness. While these five types can help us classify reported experiences, we turn next to another question: Could these religious experiences provide some kind of evidence for religious beliefs? If so, is it enough to make belief in God (or some other supernatural reality) rational?

Experientialism

Scrutinizing the epistemic value of religious experience is a fairly recent project. In the case of Christianity, few people disputed the truth of theism (belief in God) until the 17th century. The arguments of philosophers like David Hume and Immanuel Kant in the 18th century were widely thought to have undermined the very possibility of constructing a rational demonstration of religious belief. By the mid-20th century, it seemed improbable that Christian theism could be shown to be more reasonable than not. And, although many regarded religious experience as having important psychosocial functions, religious experience was mainly viewed as a purely subjective phenomenon. Experiential beliefs of the religious kind were taken to be something akin to an expression of feelings rather than meaningful claims about reality that were either true or false. However, over the past few decades many Christian philosophers have boldly argued that people sometimes do have direct experience of God and thereby acquire justified beliefs about God. More precisely, the experience of God plays a role with respect to beliefs about God that is analogous to the role played by sense experience with respect to beliefs about the physical world. We could label this view "Christian experientialism" and include Richard Swinburne, William Alston, and Alvin Plantinga among its proponents.

Let us first consider some general features of experientialism and then look briefly at a prominent version. First, experientialism claims that there is a generic identity of *structure* between sense perception and religious experience. In the case of direct awareness of God, this perception

is direct in the same way as the sense perception of physical objects is direct. By "direct" we mean that an object is perceived immediately, not being mediated through one's perception of some other object. So what establishes religious experience (see 1, 2, and 3 above) as a mode of perception is the feature that something (God) has been *presented* or *given* to the subject's consciousness in the same way as objects in the environment are *presented* to one's consciousness in sense perception.

Second, religious beliefs acquired through religious experience enjoy a high degree of initial credibility or justification. Even though no experience guarantees the existence of its apparent object, beliefs that are formed from such experiences must presumably be justified. My perceptual belief is presumably justified unless there are sufficient reasons to think my belief is false. For example, the flower looks yellow to me; but if I have overwhelmingly strong evidence that these flowers just appear to be yellow when these lights are shining on them, the strong evidence overrides that initial justification. Such a principle seems to apply to all kinds of perceptual beliefs. Or, as Swinburne puts it, "it is a principle of rationality that (in the absence of special considerations) if it seems (epistemically) to a subject that x is present, then probably x is present; what one seems to perceive is probably so" (1979, 254). This "principle of credulity" is the basis for the position that Christian perceptual beliefs are justified and, therefore, rationally acceptable in the absence of defeating reasons. In both the sensory and religious cases, perceptions should be treated as "innocent until proven guilty."

Alvin Plantinga's argument that beliefs about God triggered by religious experiences are "properly basic" qualifies as a version of experientialism (1983). Although not usually considered an argument from religious experience, a rough sketch of his argument will show that it is. Plantinga's general strategy is to show that beliefs formed on the basis of religious experience do not fall victim to evidentialist standards of rationality. According to evidentialist understandings of rationality, it is only rational to hold beliefs for which we have adequate evidence, good reasons, or good arguments. Evidentialism is rooted in the doctrine that to be rational, a belief must be based on other beliefs considered rational, self-evident (e.g., 1+1=2), incorrigible (e.g., "I am in pain"), or evident to the senses (e.g., "I see a tree"). Only these three types of belief qualify as properly basic beliefs. But because belief in God does not qualify as basic according to these criteria, evidentialists reject theism unless a good argument based on rational beliefs can be constructed. Those of the evidentialist persuasion insist that the prospects for such an argument look slim, and Plantinga would not dispute that.

Plantinga argues that classical criteria for properly basic beliefs are

flawed (1983, 55-63). There is no need for panic if experiential beliefs about God do not satisfy them. He suggests that new-and-improved criteria for proper basicality would allow for beliefs about God generated by religious experiences. Interestingly, he does not himself offer these new-and-improved criteria. Instead, he suggests that criteria for proper basicality be developed inductively by looking at a broad range of beliefs that one considers uncontroversially basic or foundational. For theists, properly basic beliefs could include beliefs about God.

Before we consider the merits of this suggestion, we need to clarify a further feature of the experientialist position. After all, how should we understand the notion that experiential beliefs (properly basic) are *directly* justified? First, while experiential beliefs are not based on an inference from other beliefs, neither are they arbitrary. What confers positive epistemic status is a set of *conditions or circumstances that provide an adequate justifying ground* for the belief in question. Thus, in saying that belief in God is properly basic, it does not follow that it is *groundless*. In each case in which a perceptual belief is properly taken as basic, there are circumstances or conditions that serve as the *ground* of justification. Among those circumstances or conditions will be an *experience,* e.g., seeing what seems to be a tree. In addition, there are other relevant conditions that must hold, like the absence of distorting perceptual conditions, the normal operation of my sensory organs, the fact that there is a tree in front of me, and so on. Plantinga's point is simply that a belief is properly basic only when certain conditions hold.

Consider how this would work in the case of Christian experience. The conditions and circumstances that call forth beliefs about God include *experiences* of a certain sort, e.g., a sense of God's presence, a sense that God is speaking to one, or seeing certain kinds of natural (public) phenomena. This typically leads to beliefs like

1. God is speaking to me.
2. God has created all this.
3. God disapproves of what I have done.
4. God forgives me.
5. God is to be thanked and praised.

Just as beliefs like "I see a tree" are properly basic in the right circumstances, so, too, beliefs 1 through 5 could be properly basic *in the right circumstances*. Just as the epistemic propriety of my belief that *I see a tree* does not depend upon the availability of an argument or an inference *from* that experience *to* the belief that is formed, so, too, could a religious experience *directly justify* a belief about God.

The experientialist approach to the rationality of religious perceptual beliefs is open to criticism at a number of points. First, it might be object-

ed that religious experience should not be considered a type of perception. But as already noted above, the structure of both sensory and religious experience share in common that something (an ordinary object or God) presents itself to us in a way that enables us to know it in some way. There are certainly important differences between sensory and religious experience. Sensory perception yields a huge volume of richly textured information about the world, while religious experiences tend to reveal God and God's ways in much less detail. It is not clear, however, that this feature necessarily disqualifies religious experience as a kind of perception.

One of the ways we check the accuracy of ordinary perceptual experiences is by appeal to other perceptual experiences. This way is not open, however, in the case of religious experiences. First, many of our perceptual beliefs enjoy the support of multiple sense modalities; for example, what we think we are seeing might be corroborated by smell and touch. This is unavailable for most kinds of religious experiences. Second, there seems to be more cultural and religious interpretation going on in the case of religious experience. This phenomenon also makes it difficult to confirm the consistency and accuracy of such experiences.

Another issue is the criticism that experientialism is too permissive. Theists may include perceptual beliefs about God in their properly basic belief set, but couldn't someone claim their belief that the Great Pumpkin will return on Halloween to be properly basic for them? Plantinga argues that one of the key justifying conditions for perceptual beliefs about God is simply that God exists and has designed us to experience the divine. "God has so created us that we have a tendency or disposition to see his hand in the world about us," contends Plantinga. "More precisely, there is in us a disposition to believe propositions of the sort *this flower was created by God or this vast and intricate universe was created by God* when we contemplate the flower or behold the starry heavens or the vast reaches of the universe" (1983, 80).

The simple explanation for why belief in the Great Pumpkin is irrational is that there is "no Great Pumpkin and no natural tendency to accept beliefs about the Great Pumpkin" (78). This may well explain why many have experienced God and formed basic theistic beliefs of one sort or another. But if we do have this natural tendency that Plantinga describes, then why are there so many who have not experienced God in the explicit ways that we have considered? And what should we make of religious experiences that elicit incompatible religious beliefs (Audi 1986, 165)? Experientialism may not seem too attractive from a Hebraic-Christian point of view if contradictory or alternative (even bizarre) religious perceptual beliefs can equally claim to be rational in this basic sense. This may show that traditional evidential approaches, such as natural theology,

have an important role in providing warrant for perceptual belief-forming practices in some traditions and not in others. These are issues that deserve further investigation.

II. The Moral Argument

Some philosophers and theologians have argued that certain features of our *moral* experience provide evidence for the truth of theism. Our encounters with good and evil and the apparently universal sense that we "ought" to do some things point, it is alleged, toward an objective source of that experience. The so-called moral argument for theism has been most famously associated with Immanuel Kant (1724—1804) and C. S. Lewis (1898—1963). After presenting an argument along Lewis' lines and various possible objections, we will briefly consider an updated version of Kant's argument that the hypothesis of theism helps to make sense of our moral experiences.

Can we make good sense of our moral language and behaviour without presupposing some kind of objective moral order or "law?" Consider our experience of temptation to do or say what we know we should not. Bill would like to exaggerate the merits of Tom's work record in his reference letter in order to help him get an important job, but he realizes that such deception would be wrong. Janet would like to buy the new Madonna CD, but she acknowledges that it endorses the very lifestyle she finds destructive and irresponsible. Susan owns shares in a multinational drug company, but she starts to feel deeply disturbed about the company's unwillingness to forego profits in order to help end the AIDS epidemic in central Africa.

What these examples suggest is that the experience of "ought" is pervasive. This sense of obligation points to a standard of behavior that we can judge ourselves against. Notice that this standard or "law" is not simply a description of how things are or how people do sometimes behave. It is a prescription for how people ought to behave, even if they often do not. Although such claims are not strictly descriptive, we feel as if the standards these claims presuppose are real. We *do* believe the sexual exploitation of children to be depraved and inexcusable; we *do* view the atrocities associated with ethnic cleansing as heinous and cruel. In other words, there is, it seems, an objective moral order in the universe that exists independently of what I or anyone else may believe or practice. That a certain kind of action is wrong is a truth we discover, not one we invent.

Today the idea of an objective moral order is doubted by many. A typical objection is that moral beliefs are the product of one's culture. Moral "truth" is a socially constructed reality, contend some, and morality has no basis in objective fact. This view seems to explain why different

cultures differ in what they regard as right and wrong. But such a position introduces some truly puzzling results. If cultural relativism is true, how does one explain the many points of similarity in moral beliefs? There is good reason to believe that these similarities far outweigh the dissimilarities. In addition, many alleged differences in moral beliefs are really just differences in *empirical* beliefs. The Inuit of Canada's Far North, for example, once practised euthanasia by abandoning dying elders on an ice floe. Their actions were based on the (empirical) belief that such a practice promoted the best long-term welfare of the community, which is presumably the goal of all communities. What appeared to be moral relativity is simply a different evaluation of the results of their practice.

If there is no objective moral standard, it seems impossible to criticize the moral behaviour and beliefs of others. Some past cultures have endorsed slavery and ritual human sacrifice, but few would condone these practices today. Yet if the complete relativity of moral standards is accepted, what each person thinks is right *is* right. But by this individualistic standard we would have to conclude that the beliefs of Hitler and Stalin are morally equivalent to Martin Luther King Jr.'s and Mother Teresa's.

Another problem with complete moral relativism is that it seems to rule out moral progress. The moment we are critical of some part of culture, we seem to be admitting that there is some kind of higher standard than culture itself. Interestingly, we tend to see this more clearly when scrutinizing cultures other than our own. It seems much easier, for example, to criticize the practice of genital mutilation of young girls in some African cultures. But many are morally blind to the destructive influence of advertising on teenage girls in North American society. If moral relativism is promoted in the name of *tolerance,* this implies some kind of objective moral valuation. It implies that tolerance has higher moral value than intolerance. A radical version of this view appears to suffer from incoherence, because, if relativism is correct, one should be tolerant of those who are intolerant.

One weakness in the moral argument as advanced so far is that it does not decisively locate the objective ground of morality in a transcendent mind or being. The possibility exists that the rightness and wrongness of actions could simply be basic to the cosmos, e.g., causing pain to the innocent is wrong simply as a matter of fact. Or perhaps one could build a system of ethics on a reasonable principle of fairness, or on a principle of rationality, or as a kind of social agreement or contract. However, if theism could be shown to be rational on other grounds, theism would provide a much richer metaphysical account as to why there is an objective moral law in the cosmos. Charles Taliaferro proposes exactly this:

> Imagine the argument for broad theism based on religious ex-

> perience and the cosmological argument has some force, as does the teleological argument, and, as a result, one has some reason to believe there is at least one good, purposive force, responsible for the nature and constitution of the cosmos. Theism would then be a rich theory for it could also account for the facts of morality as well. Its fruitfulness lies in its broad-ranging explanatory power. This form of argument, then, would not use morality or objective values as a solitary fact upon which to build a huge metaphysic. It would instead advance something like the following as a description of what theism can explain: The existence of a contingent, ordered cosmos in which life evolves and there is sentience and consciousness, intelligent activity, morality and objective values, and widespread reports of the experience of a divine reality (Taliaferro 1998, 371).

One might ask, however, whether a nontheistic, naturalistic framework gives a more plausible explanation for the objectivity of the moral order. One prominent nontheistic naturalistic explanation for the pervasive use of moral terms and categories is offered by evolutionary biology, or "sociobiology." After all, it may be possible to explain by evolutionary processes why humans *believe* (mistakenly) there is an objective moral law and also explain why they *feel* the way they do about morality. But such arguments, say their critics, fail to account for the sense that there is more to the moral order than *merely* feelings and beliefs. Beliefs about our moral obligations are different than the obligations themselves, and evolutionary accounts provide no explanation for the existence of the latter. Sociobiology, in nontheistic naturalism, seems to end up explaining morality *away*. It is saying, in effect, that our moral judgments are useful but, ultimately, biologically grounded illusions. This view breaks down in the confrontation with horrific evils like sadistic child abuse, ritual murders, and programs of ethnic cleansing. In practice, despite our theoretical inclinations, we are hard pressed to deny that values lie at the heart of reality.

Let us now return to the earlier suggestion that a theistic framework might explain the existence of an objective moral order better than nontheistic naturalism. Herein lies a version of the moral argument that looks most promising. Kant argues that unless reality is itself committed to morality in some deep way (such that a God exists who can, and will, make happiness balance out with virtue), the moral enterprise would make no sense. In the nontheistic, naturalistic world of social agreement, where ethical action is understood as exclusively acting in my own self-interest, the call to live ethically and the instinct for self-preservation can quickly fall apart. For instance, being ethical and looking out for one's own best interests may not always be compatible. Why would anyone act purely out of respect for what is ethical, especially in cases in which the

right thing to do is to sacrifice one's own life? For Kant, we can make sense of moral duty only by supposing that an all-powerful divine being will ensure that virtue and reward will be harmoniously balanced—if not in this life, then in the next. George Mavrodes takes a similar approach in arguing that if a nontheistic, naturalist worldview is accepted, moral obligations will seem strange (1986). The nontheistic naturalist, who sees moral values as emerging from morally neutral evolutionary processes, might reply that if this seems strange, then so be it. This naturalist may simply deny the need to offer a comprehensive account of the cosmos. But if theism is coherent and is more probable than not, it may be the best explanation for the wide range of phenomena we experience, including the experience of a moral "ought."

III. CUMULATIVE CASE ARGUMENT

Even if religious experience and/or moral arguments do not by themselves provide strong support for the rationality of theism, perhaps they can provide some evidence as part of a cumulative case argument for God's existence. The basic idea behind such an argument is that a case for theism can be made by patiently accumulating various pieces of evidence that, when weighed together, tip the scales in favor of belief in God. At one time, this approach was considered suspect—a kind of last-ditch effort to salvage something from a series of inconclusive arguments. As Antony Flew opined, "If one leaky bucket will not hold water, that is no reason to think ten can" (1966, 62). However, recent work in philosophical theology shows cumulative case arguments to be worth serious consideration. It may in fact be possible to arrange the ten leaky buckets inside each other in such a way that the holes do not overlap!

Cumulative case arguments can and do differ with respect to their premises, their structure, and their conclusions (Abraham 1987). This is quite obvious, for instance, when one compares the cumulative case arguments of Richard Swinburne (1979) and Basil Mitchell (1973). While Swinburne focuses on the truth of a single proposition ("God exists"), Mitchell seeks to establish a case for the rationality of belief in traditional Christian theism, understood as what the ordinary educated person understands by Christianity. A more obvious difference concerns how the various subarguments are weighed in terms of their overall evidential value. Swinburne sees his cumulative case as an inductive argument, where the full argument's evidential weight is quantifiable by probability theory (Bayes' theorem) in order to substantiate his claim that "theism is more probable than not" (1979, 291). Mitchell's argument is also broadly inductive in character, but the weighing of evidence purposely involves a radical dependence on personal judgment. By emphasizing personal judg-

ment, Mitchell is acknowledging that any attempt to balance the probabilities and considerations by an explicitly formal argument would be hopelessly inadequate for capturing the effect of these arguments on the mind.

Let's take a closer look at Swinburne's cumulative argument as laid out in his book *The Existence of God*. Swinburne's thesis is simply this: belief in God is an explanatory hypothesis that is more probable than not. It is impossible in the scope of this essay to do justice to the subtlety and rigor of his argument, but a brief summary of the argument's strategy can bring out its key features.

There is a range of phenomena in the world that is puzzling and mysterious. Humans typically develop good explanations or hypotheses to account for it. Presumably, some explanations are more probably true than others. But on what basis could we determine which are more probable? Swinburne proposes the criteria of (1) *prior probability* and (2) *explanatory power*. The former involves an evaluation of the hypothesis in terms of its simplicity, scope, and fit with background knowledge. The explanatory power of a hypothesis is its power to predict the phenomena that we do in fact observe. Although we may not normally think of the belief that God exists as an explanatory hypothesis, there is a strong case for its prior probability. According to Swinburne, the key feature of theism as explanatory hypothesis is its *simplicity*. "Theism postulates a God with capacities that are as great as they logically can be," he argues. "In postulating a person with infinite capacity, the theist is postulating a person with the simplest kind of capacity possible" (1979, 94)

Our experience of the world, however, is of a wide range of remarkable and sometimes puzzling phenomena that seems far from simple. The existence of such phenomena constitutes the premises of the cumulative case argument. In each case, puzzling phenomena are to be expected more if there is a God than if there is not. Swinburne summarizes the data as follows: "The existence of the universe, its conformity to order, the existence of animals and men, men having great opportunities for co-operation in acquiring knowledge and moulding the universe, the pattern of history and the existence of some evidence of miracles, and finally the occurrence of religious experiences, are all such as we have reason to expect if there is a God, and less reason to expect otherwise" (277).

It should be noted that religious experience plays a decisive role in the cumulative case argument Swinburne presents. While religious experience has evidential value in its own right, it can only show that the existence of God is more probable than not if the prior probability of God's existence is very low. The central argument of *The Existence of God* is that the prior probability of theism is not very low (though it is not very high

either). Religious experience provides evidence that tips the balance in the cumulative case and makes belief in God more probable than not.

In evaluating the success of cumulative case arguments, one important issue concerns the way in which the evidence is gathered and weighed. In Mitchell's version, the appeal to "personal judgment" to weigh the accumulated evidence as a whole seems to fit the common experience of many Christian believers. But if this kind of judgment involves the capacity to weigh evidence without using some kind of objectively specified rule or standard, what would prevent any manner of nonrational factors (emotions, bias, wishful thinking) from influencing the outcome? Perhaps such informal personal judgment can be refined through training—perhaps the religious community could inculcate appropriate intellectual, moral, and spiritual values. But in weighing the evidence for a whole belief system, one would be appealing to personal judgment to support the very belief system that helped to create it—an obviously circular appeal (Abraham 1985, ch. 9).

Swinburne's version of the argument is much more careful about how evidence is recognized and weighed, but it seems to break down in other ways. First, his account of the reasonableness of belief in God seems out of touch with the kind of religious belief usually associated with Christian devotion. Simply put, most Christians do not think of their belief in God as "more probable than not!" Yet from a broadly religious perspective, such a formal account of theism's explanatory power seems necessary. Another problem concerns the alleged simplicity of the hypothesis of theism (i.e., in positing God as perfectly good, all-knowing and all-powerful). If God is the Creator of all phenomena, then why does God allow evil? In the eyes of many, the horrors of undeserved suffering in the world cry out for explanation, and theism appears vulnerable here.

CONCLUSION

The experiential arguments for the existence of God vary. This essay has addressed arguments derived from religious and moral experience. It also explored briefly a cumulative argument that adopts aspects of religious and moral arguments when suggesting that belief in God's existence is more plausible than belief that He does not exist.

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