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question to which Wolterstorff devotes a chapter but that many readers will think merits much further discussion: that of whether care-agapism is as demanding or distinctive as many take the ethic of the gospel to be. Questions about the distinctiveness of Christian ethics have been the subject of lively debate among religious ethicists and moral theologians for many years, and *Justice in Love* is a very original contribution to those discussions.⁴ This book is vintage Wolterstorff. It is clear and imaginative, as well as devout, learned and humane. It deserves the wide attention it is sure to receive.

Natural Signs and Knowledge of God: A New Look at Theistic Arguments, by C. Stephen Evans. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. x + 207 pages. \$85.00 (hardback).

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In this book, C. Stephen Evans develops a fascinating new approach to understanding theistic arguments – he argues that some of our experiences and some events in the world can be understood as natural signs for God’s existence and that some of the classic theistic arguments try to argue for God’s existence on the basis of these natural signs. A natural sign that *p*, as Evans understands it, can provide direct *prima facie* justification for believing *p*, and even knowledge that *p*. So, in essence, some theistic arguments try to argue that a particular sign genuinely indicates God’s existence. He believes that theistic arguments fail as proofs, although they can be powerful and convincing to many, and the signs on which they are based can offer *prima facie* justification for belief in God. Evans thus steers between two dominant traditions in religious epistemology: evidentialism and Reformed epistemology. On the one hand, Evans agrees with the Reformed epistemologist that theistic belief can be non-inferentially justified because he thinks natural theistic signs can directly justify, but on the other hand he agrees with the evidentialist that natural theology is valuable because it articulates the evidential force of these natural signs, and can formulate compelling arguments for some people. Evans argues that there are several philosophical and theological advantages to this way of understanding theistic arguments. In what follows, I briefly summarize Evans’s view and then develop a challenge for the view. However, my challenge is offered in a spirit of respect; Evans has developed a very interesting position on the theistic arguments that deserves thorough discussion. I hope that my challenge contributes to such a discussion.

⁴For just one example, see *Readings in Moral Theology, volume 2: The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics*, ed. Charles Curran and Richard McCormick, SJ. (Paulist Press, 1980).

It does not take an expert in philosophy of religion to notice that natural theology (1) produces many arguments for God's existence that clearly fail and others that are doubted by many, and (2) nevertheless, philosophers keep developing and defending these arguments, apparently motivated by a sense that there's something compelling about them. In addition, as Evans documents well, several philosophers – Hume and Kant amongst them – think that natural theology fails to produce persuasive arguments, and yet still feel pulled in some way by the arguments. Evans believes that these observations are explained well by the idea that the theistic arguments focus on natural signs for God's existence, and try to argue for God's existence on the basis of those signs. Evans develops his notion of a natural sign from Reid's use of natural signs in explaining perceptual knowledge. Reid regards my visual experience of my hand as a natural sign for the existence of my hand. My experience is a natural sign in that a) it is caused by my hand, and b) I am constituted in such a way that I automatically, non-inferentially, believe that I have a hand upon having the experience. Although Evans does not say this explicitly, presumably I must have some sort of standing disposition to believe that I have a hand upon having the right sort of experience and becoming aware of the experience in the right way; it isn't enough if I happen occasionally to believe *p* upon noticing sign *x* even if *x* is in fact caused by the fact that *p*. On Reid's view, my experience gives me direct, non-inferential awareness of my hand and knowledge that I have a hand. Both sensations and physical states can be natural signs. Facial expressions are examples of the latter. Smiles are natural signs of happiness, frowns of anger, etc. Although many natural signs are hard to resist – it is hard for me not to believe that I have a hand when I focus on my experience of my hand—some natural signs are resistible, such as facial expressions. On a given occasion I may not believe that Joe is happy based on his smile if I suspect that Joe is trying to put on a good face at the party. Some natural signs are “original,” or built into us naturally, such as the sensations involved in our perception of external objects, others are “acquired” by experience and reflection, such as when we learn to associate the smell of smoke with fire. The smell of smoke is not an original natural sign of fire because we are not naturally disposed to believe there is a fire upon smelling smoke, but smelling smoke can be an acquired natural sign. Once it becomes an acquired natural sign, we don't need to infer “there is fire” from “I smell smoke,” we just automatically believe that there is a fire upon smelling smoke. The psychological force of a natural sign can be strengthened, altered, or suppressed by one's personal experiences, social influences, and background beliefs.

So, certain mental and physical states of the world may well be natural signs of God's existence, according to Evans. But, what would these natural signs be like? Evans makes an interesting move here by asking what kind of knowledge we would expect a God of the Jewish/Christian/

Muslim sort to make available to humans. This way of building constraints upon a viable religious epistemology by thinking through the implications of the concept of God has the potential for yielding important insights in religious epistemology. Paul Moser has recently used this method in developing a religious epistemology in *The Elusive God* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); Evans does well to follow him, and he plausibly argues that this method supports his natural signs view of natural theology. On the one hand, he argues that we would expect God to make knowledge of his existence widely available to humans and easy to gain. Because God loves us and wants a relationship with us, he would make it easy to know that he exists. However, on the other hand, God would ensure that such knowledge is easy to resist, because he would want his creatures to freely enter into a loving relationship with him, and this would be very difficult for many if it were utterly obvious that an all-powerful, all-knowing, judging God exists. One would be foolish not to go along with such a being's plans whether or not one loved God. Evans labels these two claims the Wide Accessibility Principle, and the Easy Resistibility Principle, respectively. He considers Moser's recent arguments that natural theology is idolatrous and plausibly responds that natural theology could be useful for "making belief in God a 'live option'" for many humans, even if it doesn't yield knowledge of God's desires and purposes (11). A natural sign of God's existence that is resistible would satisfy the above principles well, and given these principles, it would follow that any attempt to argue for God's existence on the basis of these principles would not find universal acceptance, but that many people would still find something forceful in these arguments.

The heart of Evans's book (chapters 3–5) is devoted to illustrating how natural theology uses natural signs in cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments for the existence of God. For each of these kinds of arguments, Evans provides a basic survey of the varieties of ways the argument has been developed, pointing out the premises and inferences that many find questionable. He then argues that there is a natural sign of God's existence at the heart of each of these arguments. The cosmological argument family rests on an experience of "cosmic wonder" in which we grasp that the universe is contingent and wonder about why it exists at all. It is the wonder we express when we ask the question, "why is there something rather than nothing?" The teleological argument family rests on beneficial order in the world – the way organisms are ordered to help them to flourish, such as the intricacy of the human eye. After briefly defending a Robert Adams-like Divine Command Theory on which moral obligations are generated by God's commands, but "only the commands of a good and loving God would constitute moral obligations" (137), Evans argues that two natural signs lie behind moral arguments: our experience of being morally responsible for what we have done, and "our perception of human beings as having a special value and dignity" (138).

If God were to exist, our sense of moral responsibility would somehow be built into us by God, who would want to give us some awareness of his commands. Our sense of the dignity of our fellow humans would be a kind of awareness of the image of God that God stamped into each human upon creation.

Each of the natural signs can ground basic justification and knowledge that God exists. However, they don't necessarily tell us much about what God is like. Evans argues that the moral natural signs are more informative of God's nature than the teleological natural sign, which is in turn more informative than the cosmological natural sign. The justification or knowledge provided by such signs can be defeated by contrary evidence such as the problems of evil and hiddenness. Evans briefly yet insightfully discusses that latter problem in chapter 6. Evans concludes by arguing that whether one accepts an internalist or externalist account of justification, there are good reasons for thinking the natural signs he has described provide *prima facie* justification for believing that God exists. He notes that the natural signs can function as a solid first stage of a two-stage apologetic.

I conclude with a challenge. Evans notes that there are "significant disanalogies between theistic natural signs and Reidian natural signs. Reidian natural signs seem to be virtually universal in their operation, . . . some . . . are irresistible, though others can be modified . . . theistic natural signs seem far less universal and far less powerful." This seems to present some grounds for doubting that theistic natural signs are genuine natural signs; if not that, then at least reason for thinking that the justification they provide is considerably lower in quality than other natural signs. Further facts about basic theistic belief present a further challenge: humans often make judgments about what God is telling them, or that God judges so-and-so, or that God is angry with our nation, or that God wanted me to get a parking spot, and the like. We have good reason to believe that a lot of these beliefs are unjustified and false. But it is very natural to have beliefs like this, and many may result from natural processes operating in our mind, as suggested by some theories in the cognitive science of religion.¹ If one large set of natural theistic beliefs are clearly false and unjustified, and it can be shown that there are reasons for thinking that the other theistic beliefs are produced by similar mechanisms as these (as some cognitive science theories suggest), then we seem to have some legitimate doubts about whether Evans's theistic natural signs provide much or any *prima facie* justification. I do not think this is a knock-down objection to Evans's position; I can think of some possible replies. But I think it is a challenge worth considering in assessing Evans's fascinating, original, and stimulating views about theistic arguments.

¹See Justin Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira, 2004), Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), and Jeffrey Schloss and Michael Murray (eds.), *The Believing Primate* (New York: Oxford, 2010), especially the essays by Johnson and Bering and Bubulia.