

sad feature of this father and daughter is that they might have made very good friends. He wishes to be in acknowledged contact with another, and, thinking he could not have it in the Garden, was willing to give up his own existence in its pursuit; whereas she, preferring the solitary existence he needed to escape, wants nothing of such interactions, even though she desperately seems to need the kind of interpersonal relations which would allow her to be loved. (Fortunately, philosophers of religion have begun to explore more carefully the relevance of such interpersonal aspects, particularly their epistemological relevance: see especially Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* [Oxford University Press, 2010], esp. chaps. 3–4; and Matthew Benton, “God and Interpersonal Knowledge,” *Res Philosophica* 95 [2018]: 421–447.)

Hudson’s masterful portrayal of these characters manages to blend the deeply spiritual and personal needs we all have with the ways in which our intellectual reflections can sometimes exacerbate our already fraught condition. His book also reminds us that we can learn from one another, and even from fictional characters like Tesque and Naphil, if we would just enter honestly into such deeply personal discussions. While those can be harder to do with real people, the lessons learned from this engaging book can help even philosophers do them better.

*Maximal God: A New Defence of Perfect Being Theism*, by Yujin Nagasawa. Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. viii + 225. \$61.00 (hardcover).

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For nearly a thousand years, St. Anselm’s ontological argument has exhibited a curious necromantic cycle. Generations of critics declare the argument dead, only to see the thing reanimated by the cunning incantations of a Descartes, a Gödel, or a Plantinga. It must be frustrating.

In this compact and ambitious book, Nagasawa sets out to vindicate the ontological argument and the perfect being theology it recommends. Nagasawa also aims to refute atheological arguments from evil—and other atheological arguments besides. I’m afraid, then, that St. Anselm’s critics are in for some more frustration. So too are some theists, I suspect—for Nagasawa suggests that their tradition is mistaken in insisting on the thesis that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent.

Nagasawa has published extensively on perfect being theology and related matters; his views there are already well known to metaphysicians and philosophers of religion. And those views haven’t changed much, so



far as I can tell. In substance and in style—the prose is direct and unadorned throughout—this book contains few surprises. Still, it is good to see Nagasawa’s particular spin on perfect being metaphysics systematically integrated, updated here or there, and ultimately deployed in the service of a novel and positive case for the ontological argument.

The book divides into thirds. In the first, Nagasawa develops perfect being theism, according to which there is a God who is the greatest metaphysically possible being. In the second, Nagasawa argues that standard atheological arguments may be refuted by replacing the view that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent with a version of perfect being theism. In the third, Nagasawa defends various formulations of the ontological argument and offers a new case for the possibility premise in the modal ontological argument.

Thus, the book in broad outline. Let’s slow down and observe in more detail. In what follows, I’ll discuss three novel and particularly interesting moves Nagasawa makes—one from each third of the book.

Perfect being theism fits nicely with a great chain of being—a ranking by greatness of all things big and small, with God at the top (50–52). But affirming that chain isn’t easy. It seems to require that everything be commensurable with everything else when it comes to greatness, an implication that has seemed implausible to many. Which is greater, the critics ask—a lampshade or a rainbow? How about an aardvark or an escalator? And there are harder cases too: how about a mathematical genius who’s bad at music or a musical genius who is bad at math? (73)

Nagasawa replies that these puzzling pairs are either instances of *equal* greatness or that they indeed involve one member of the pair being greater than the other—perhaps in ways that are difficult to calculate or understand (75–76). So Nagasawa does defend this *linear* model of greatness. But he also supplies an intriguing alternative—a *radial* model. On the radial view, God’s greatness does not consist in resting at the top of one chain of all beings. Rather, God’s greatness consists in resting at the top of every local chain of non-divine beings, of which chains there may be many (62).

It is not enough to say that, on perfect being theism, God is great—whether by being at the top of the one great chain of being or by being at the top of a hoard of local chains. One wants to know the criteria according to which God enjoys those elevated positions (63). Nagasawa has a good deal to say here and uses diagrams to some effect; of particular value are the distinctions he draws between various possible relations of relative greatness (59–60) and the interactions between great-making properties, especially those that come in degrees (65–70). The position on which Nagasawa lands—the *maximal God* view—has it that God tops off the relevant chains by having the maximal consistent set of knowledge, power, and benevolence (92). Crucially, this view does not unquestionably entail that God is omniscient, omnipotent, or omnibenevolent (93).

Theists have widely maintained that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. A standard atheological program, accordingly, takes this shape: show that those omni-properties are incoherent or incompatible with some known fact (82–88) and conclude on that basis that there is no God. Atheists have argued, for example, that omnipotence is incoherent and so God, conceived as a being that is omnipotent, could not exist. And they've argued, furthermore, that the various omni-properties are together incompatible with various imperfections of the actual world—evil, suffering, divine hiddenness, and so on. And so God, conceived as a being possessed of all the omni-properties, does not exist.

Dozens of atheological arguments take this broad form. They purport to target theism, but in fact take aim at omni-properties. Nagasawa has an efficient and unified reply—a refutation, he calls it—to all those arguments at once. Nagasawa claims that not one of these arguments undermines perfect being theism. They may or may not undermine the view that there is an omniscient, omnipotent, or omnibenevolent God. But there is “no obvious reason to accept” that a maximally great being must have those omni-properties, and so the atheological arguments, even if sound, do not tell against perfect being theism (90–91). Nagasawa does not, to be clear, reject the claims that God is omniscient, omnipotent, or omnibenevolent; he claims instead that “this is an open question, on which the cogency of perfect being theism does not hinge” (93).

Nagasawa's refutation may not be as exciting as it initially appears. It leaves untouched evidential formulations of the atheological argument from evil (86n10)—arguably the most potent of all atheological arguments. And in a way, Nagasawa's refutation retreads familiar territory. It would surprise few (certainly not Professor Mackie) to learn that theism may be preserved by giving up on the omni-properties (117). Nagasawa is sensitive to this concern, and is careful to note several times over that he does *not advocate* the thesis that God is not omniscient, omnipotent, or omnibenevolent (118). Rather, he holds that theists may regard that thesis as an open option.

I wonder, though, just how open this option is. Take omniscience. More than a few theistic traditions insist that God is omniscient. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, teaches as a matter of *de fide* dogma that God's knowledge is infinite and comprehensive. Could a faithful Catholic believer maintain that God's omniscience is an open question, even though the Church teaches with the highest degree of certainty that God knows everything there is to know? I don't think so. And it's not just Catholics or Christians who face this bind. The Qur'an, too, appears to teach that Allah is omnipotent. Could a devout Muslim maintain that it is an open question whether Allah is omnipotent, even though the Qur'an appears to plainly teach as much? This is far from obvious. Theists from some Vedic traditions, finally, have commitments here too—the *Gītā* appears to teach that Lord Kṛiṣṇa is omnipotent. Could a dutiful student of that

text follow Nagasawa and say that the degree of power enjoyed by Lord Kṛiṣṇa was an open question or somehow unsettled? Again, this is hard to see.

Perhaps the kind of traditionally rooted theist I've discussed is not Nagasawa's audience. Could his program appeal to a more rootless or purely philosophical theist? I'm not so sure. The God of the Philosophers has long been thought to play a variety of theoretical roles. God, we're told, is the explanation for why there is anything at all, the cause of the universe's beginning to exist, the ground of being, the source of moral obligation, goodness itself, and so on. It is unclear, to be sure, whether a being of any kind can fulfill these roles. But it seems to me that Nagasawa's refutation makes things even worse. For it is even more unclear whether those roles can be filled by a being that is not, after all, omniscient, omnipotent, or omnibenevolent (or if that being's omni-property status is an open question).

I tentatively conclude that Nagasawa's refutation—exciting though it may seem—comes at a price for a wide range of theists.

The ontological argument comes in various formulations and flavors. So too the objections. Nagasawa ably treats a host of these objections in the final section. His treatment here is state-of-the-art and often, to my mind, convincing. As it turns out, just about every objection requires substantive metaphysical or epistemic assumptions—so refuting the argument is just as hard as advancing it (152). This is not to say, though, that the argument succeeds (180).

But Nagasawa does think one version indeed succeeds—the *modal* ontological argument. Nagasawa models his formulation after Plantinga's (183–184; 204–205). Plantinga distinguishes *maximal excellence* (being omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent in a world) from *maximal greatness* (being maximally excellent in every possible world). Maximal greatness is possibly instantiated, Plantinga's argument says, and so by some widely accepted modal theorems, maximal excellence is in fact instantiated.

Nagasawa likewise distinguishes *real maximal excellence* (having the maximal consistent set of knowledge, power, and benevolence in a world) from *maximal greatness* (being really maximally excellent in every possible world). Real maximal greatness is possibly instantiated, Nagasawa's argument says, and so by the same widely accepted modal theorems, real maximal excellence is in fact instantiated (205).

What's to say about these arguments? It all comes down to the possibility premise. Nagasawa offers a brief and friendly survey of five extant arguments for that key claim (186–202). This is useful, if only to correct the common but dubious claim that the possibility premise begs the question. There are, in fact, *arguments* for that premise, and critics of the modal ontological argument would do well to engage them directly. But Nagasawa does not rely on extant arguments—none are compelling, he says—to

establish the key possibility claim (186). He instead offers his own case for the premise. It appears in the penultimate page of the main text:

The maximal God thesis explicates the perfect being thesis by saying that God is the being that has the maximal consistent set of knowledge, power, and benevolence . . . we can automatically derive that it is possible that God exists because here God is understood as the being that has the maximal consistent set of knowledge, power, and benevolence. In other words, the maximal concept of God is *by definition* internally coherent. . . . This guarantees the possibility of the existence of God. That is, the possibility of God's existence comes for free given the maximal God thesis." (204, emphasis original)

A neat trick, to be sure. But does it succeed? For two reasons, I'm not sanguine.

First, note the slide from *consistency* to *possibility*. The claim here appears to be that, if it is *consistent* that some properties be jointly exemplified then it is therefore *possible*. But there are familiar reasons to question any straightforward inference along these lines. Some sentences have a model (and thus satisfy formal definitions of consistency) but nonetheless express propositions that cannot be true—think here of "Yujin is a prime number." Maybe I'm being pedantic. Maybe "consistent" just means "possible." Then at least we'd have a *valid* inference—but hardly a convincing one.

Second, note the definite description ("the maximal . . ."). This appears to require that there be just *one* such maximal consistent set. Is there just one such set, though? Is there exactly one combination of knowledge, power, and benevolence—a combination falling short of full omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence—greater than any other? Nagasawa claims that the burden here lies with the critics (106). So here's a case. It seems to me that a being with {knowledge<sub>4.9</sub>, power<sub>5</sub>, and benevolence<sub>5</sub>} may well be *tied* for greatness with one who enjoys {knowledge<sub>5</sub>, power<sub>4.9</sub>, and benevolence<sub>5</sub>}—much like a musical genius who's not so good at math may well tie for greatness with a math genius who is not so good at music. I have no conclusive argument for my judgment about the case. But in its light, Nagasawa's uniqueness assumption isn't *obvious*—certainly not obvious enough to warrant claims to a "free" or "automatic" guarantee of God's possible existence. This is precisely where one would hope for argument. Nagasawa, alas, does not oblige.

This is, again, an ambitious book. Will Nagasawa's arguments significantly improve the reception and reputation of the ontological argument? Somehow I doubt it. But if you've ever found yourself intrigued and annoyed by that argument, you'll find this book a good read. Thanks to this book and the literature it will spawn, the ontological argument will no doubt continue in its curious cycle. I can't help but think that St. Anselm would be proud.

*The Hiddenness of God*, by Michael C. Rea. Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xii + 198. \$30.00 (hardcover).

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*The Hiddenness of God*, an expanded version of Michael Rea's 2017 Gifford Lectures, is an intellectually rigorous and pastorally perceptive book. The methodology that Rea employs makes it an exemplary work of confessional philosophy of religion. First, his approach is interdisciplinary. He engages thoughtfully not only with contemporary and classical philosophy, but also with the work of theologians and biblical scholars without sacrificing any philosophical rigor or speaking condescendingly of work in other disciplines. Second, rather than setting aside "existential" questions to treat divine hiddenness primarily as a logical problem of reconciling faith in a loving God with the reality of human experience, Rea offers an insightful philosophical and theological defense of a practical and pastoral vision of the love of God for those whose ability to trust God has been deeply marred by God's apparent absence. Given that philosophers and other intellectually savvy people are among those who feel the weight of divine hiddenness and who seek answers that satisfy both the intellectual challenge and their emotional and spiritual struggle, Rea does a great service to the community of faith. Indeed, even at points where the argument does not fully persuade (which I shall identify below), one gets the sense that Rea has put his finger on the important issues. This is a book that I would recommend to my fellow philosophers and to an intellectually curious friend in the throes of anguish over their sense of God's absence, and there is not much higher praise that I could offer a work on this topic.

As Rea sees it, the problem of divine hiddenness, in all of its various forms, results from violated expectations (25). We suppose we know something about how a loving God would behave towards God's creation, and these expectations often go unfulfilled in experience. Our varying assumptions about a loving God's accessibility to us give rise to number of distinct forms of the problem of divine hiddenness. Rea focuses the present work on two: one *doxastic* and one *experiential*. The doxastic problem includes the inconclusive evidence about God's existence and the (related) presence of reasonable and non-resistant non-belief in God (the existence of which Rea does not himself acknowledge but includes for the sake of argument). The experiential problem is the fact that many who long for a sense of God's loving presence never have this desire fulfilled, and some who seek God are so traumatized by their experience that they may lose the capacity to relate to God in ways that we usually think of as positive.





In light of such realities, we may conclude that there is no God, that God is not loving to all humans, or that our initial expectations about the behavior of a loving God were misguided. Although Rea himself does not put it in precisely this way, I take his solution to be a combination of the latter two. God is not loving, if the term "loving" here refers univocally to our human concept of love, and our expectations about how a divine being would demonstrate love towards finite beings like us are inappropriate. In chapter 3, Rea argues that, despite being largely neglected by analytic philosophers of religion, divine transcendence is among the attributes that both perfect being theology and the Christian tradition ascribe to God, and that this attribute should be taken seriously in our reasoning about the problem of divine hiddenness. In chapter 4, Rea argues for a "mid-range" characterization of transcendence. On one hand, he argues that pan-symbolism (the thesis that "(i) all true theological discourse is metaphorical, and (ii) no theological claim is literally true" [43]) is false. On the other hand, neither is it true that "many of God's intrinsic attributes can, even apart from divine revelation, be deeply understood and characterized in literal, univocal terms and be made the literal semantic content of human words and concepts" (49). The appropriate understanding lies somewhere in between. Rea characterizes mid-range transcendence in the following way:

(DT) Divine transcendence is whatever intrinsic attribute of God explains the fact that *intrinsic substantive predications of God* or of the divine nature that express *non-revealed concepts* are, at best, analogical (51).

If DT is true, then, apart from revelation, we have reason to believe that God is loving, at best, only in an analogical sense. But the descriptions of the love that proponents of the problem of divine hiddenness, like J. L. Schellenberg, offer assume that God's love is just like, or at least very similar to, ideal human love. Thus, the expectations of God's availability to us, which are necessary for the success of the argument from hiddenness, are inappropriate. As Rea puts it, "[I]n light of the fact that divine love is importantly *different from* human love . . . arguments like Schellenberg's require for their rational believability a certain kind of defense of their theological premises that Schellenberg has not yet produced" (57).

In chapter 5, Rea temporarily sets aside DT to argue that even if God is at most "lightly transcendent" (63), we should not conceive of divine love as an idealization of (the best forms of) human love as it is often assumed to be. According to Rea, to have an attribute in an *ideal* way involves possessing it in a way such that all limitations on that attribute are removed. That is, "[a] person who loves an individual or group of individuals in an ideal way would be unlimited in her desire for union with her beloved, unlimited in her desire for the good of her beloved, or both" (69). This is, quite obviously, not the way that God *does* or *should* love human beings. We have no reason to think that humans are the right sorts of beings to

tolerate unlimited union with God (the witness of scripture tells us that no one can see God and live). Furthermore, the God of the Christian tradition is a *person*. This means that God may well have personal interests and desires that have nothing to do with humans and their good. We have no reason to think that God's own personal interests might not sometimes come into conflict with the good of some or all humans. Further, it is possible that God sometimes sacrifices the good of humans for those other interests, just as our own partners, parents, and friends sometimes prioritize their own interests above ours. Both points suggest that the expectations about God's love that give rise to the problem of divine hiddenness are inappropriate. Rea's solution to the problem of divine hiddenness in chapters 3 and 4 bears a strong resemblance to the skeptical theist response to the problem of evil—our inability to think of a good reason for a loving God to be (apparently) absent to some people doesn't give us any reason to doubt that God in fact has one.

Rea devotes the final four chapters of the book to demonstrating that, despite our violated expectations, and despite the fact that transcendent divine love might not be as much like human love as we assume, it is still *apt* to describe God as loving towards all humans. In chapters 6 and 7, he develops a theory of religious experience according to which it results, not from direct causal contact with a supernatural stimulus (i.e., God or other supernatural reality), but from "cognitively impacted" experience of the natural world (where "cognitively impacted" means that our cognition either "affects the character or content of the experience itself" or "our spontaneous response to the experience" [105]). The upshot of the theory is that low-level religious experiences are much more widely accessible than often assumed and are not the result of either God's whim or God's response to human efforts.

The final two chapters attempt to sketch how we might understand a hidden God as showing love to those with deeply conflicted relationships with God—relationships marred by unfulfilled expectations, experiences of religious trauma, or the complete lack of the concept of God. According to Rea, God shows love to the first two categories of people by authorizing lament and protest against God and to the latter because "simply trying to participate in a relationship with God by itself suffices for participation in a relationship with God" (162). That is, literally everyone, from the saint who enjoys mystical experiences of the divine, to those who suffer from the effects of religious trauma, to those who lack a concept of God, can participate in a positively meaningful relationship with God just by trying. Furthermore, Rea follows Marilyn McCord Adams in arguing that the crucifixion provides a means by which horrendous sufferings such as those associated with religious trauma can ultimately be defeated.

There is much to appreciate in this book, but insofar as I have anti-theodic leanings (and a related tendency to reject attempts to offer a solution to the problem of divine hiddenness), I'm tempted to gesture broadly at the entire project, objecting to its very existence. Instead, I will proceed



more constructively by raising a worry about the project of chapter 5 and then reflecting on its implications for the rest of the book.

While I think the discussion of divine personhood in chapter 5 contributes positively to the overall conversation, I'm skeptical about its success as an argument that even those who reject DT in favor of "light transcendence" lack justification for the expectations on divine love that motivate the hiddenness problem. Insofar as Rea's characterization of ideal love (as I described it above) is what intellectuals and lay people *mean* when they talk about God's supreme or ideal love for humanity, I think he is correct. God clearly does not and should not have an *unlimited* desire for our good or desire *unlimited* union with us. But I suspect that what many *actually* mean (or at least what they *should* mean) when they talk about God's "ideal" love is something more akin to the Aristotelian notion of virtue. On this way of construing the common view, if God loves humans perfectly or ideally, then God desires union with us and desires our good in the *appropriate* way, to the *appropriate* degree, and in the *appropriate* sense. "Ideal," then, is used (perhaps misguidedly) to indicate that God's love is not marred by the sins and vices that distort fallen human love. If we accept DT, then I think we have to follow Rea in acknowledging that we have little-to-no understanding (apart from revelation) of what it looks like for a transcendent divine being to love humans in an appropriate way, to an appropriate degree, in an appropriate sense. If DT is true, the problem of divine hiddenness does not defeat belief in God's existence or in God's love (where "love" is used analogically). However, Rea states that this chapter operates on the assumption that God is at most "lightly transcendent." That is, discourse about God's nature and God's intrinsic properties can be literally and univocally true. On this assumption, while divine love might not be exactly the same as human love, the concept "loving" can be univocally applied to God and the truth conditions for the proposition "God loves all humans" should be roughly continuous with the truth conditions for propositions about human love. It seems to me exceedingly reasonable, if not rationally required, to think that God's pursuing God's own personal interests at the expense of meeting the most basic spiritual needs of the human beings God has created would be very strong evidence that the propositions "God loves all human beings" is not literally true.

One might respond in the following way: although it sometimes hurts our feelings when our partners, parents, or friends prioritize their own interests over our own (as Rea himself points out), in moments of cool reflection most of us acknowledge that it is appropriate, even good, for them to do so. Could we think something similar is true with respect to God? Obviously we could. The question is to what degree a lover can neglect the interests of the beloved in favor of other interests and still count as a lover in a literal, univocal sense. Consider the following example. If, upon reflection, a potential parent recognizes that the pursuit of their own goods or some other greater goods would render it impossible for them to

meet the most basic and important relational and emotional needs of a potential child (and that there is no one else who might satisfy those needs in the parent's absence), then it seems that the only way to avoid the charge of being an *unloving* parent is for the potential parent to either sacrifice (some of) their own interests or other goods for the sake of the child or to refrain from bearing a child to begin with. Indeed, it is not uncommon for children whose parents have neglected their most basic emotional needs and physical well-being in order to pursue some other great good (e.g., serving and living among the homeless in an impoverished area, seeking peace in a war zone, etc.) to criticize these parents for their failure with respect to parental love. Their criticism, of course, is not that their parent's love should have been unlimited, or even that the parent shouldn't have sacrificed *some* of child's good to pursue other goods. The criticism is that the parent failed to meet some minimum threshold of loving concern for the wellbeing of their child. Allowing the child to express their anger, to love their parent as far as they understand them, or even defeating the suffering of childhood by somehow incorporating that suffering into a positively meaningful relationship with them in adulthood does not change this fundamental failure *as a parent*. Similarly, if God is not transcendent in a sufficiently strong sense, and if we lack reason to think that human goods are somehow served by divine hiddenness (as Rea suggests they need not be), then I think it stretches the human concept of love beyond recognition to ascribe it to a God who knowingly brings humans into existence whose most basic spiritual goods, needs, and desires God intends to sacrifice for some other, possibly greater, goods. The problem is not the existence of limits on divine love, but a failure to meet some minimum requirement. "God is loving towards victims of religious trauma" appears to be literally false, regardless of what protest God authorizes and even if God ultimately defeats the suffering inflicted by God's apparent absence to them.

Obviously, Rea himself *does* endorse DT, DT is in fact central to the argument of the book, and the rest of the book is devoted to defusing the force of just such negatively-valenced analogies as I offer here. They do so sensitively and poignantly. Whether the work of those chapters is sufficient to assuage the worries I raise here will depend on the degree to which the reader is willing to stretch the human conception of love in analogous and metaphorical usage. It is open for a reader to acknowledge that if DT is true, then divine hiddenness does not defeat belief in God's existence or belief in God's *transcendent* goodness, but to nonetheless maintain that to say that such a God is *loving*, even analogically or metaphorically, dangerously distorts our important human conception of love (especially since religious individuals are so prone to take God's love as an example on which to model their own love). Perhaps it is better to say that God is *shloving* toward us, where *shloving* refers to whatever transcendent attribute is analogous to human love. Perhaps, as Rea shows through the last four chapters, God's *shlove* is not nothing. Perhaps it is more than finite, fallen

humans deserve. Perhaps we can raise no legitimate complaints against God for not loving us. Still, *shlove* isn't what many hoped for (especially those who have been deeply harmed as a result of seeking God), and to our human eyes it may pale in the light of the *love* we sometimes receive from the finite, fallen humans.

*The Christian Idea of God: A Philosophical Foundation for Faith*, by Keith Ward. Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. 229. \$32.99 (paperback).

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*The Christian Idea of God* is the third installment of Keith Ward's systematic Christian philosophical theology. However, the book is self-contained and meant to stand alone as an exposition and defense of "personal idealism," for the purpose of providing a solid philosophical foundation for Christian belief. In Ward's usage, "idealism" refers to the perspective that "matter cannot exist without mind and depends upon mind for its existence" (1). And while Ward never unpacks this dependency relation in detail, it is clear that the form of idealism that Ward defends allows for the existence of material objects, so long as they are sustained by mind in some way, in contrast to a thoroughgoing immaterialism of the kind that is often attributed to Bishop Berkeley. Roughly stated, personal idealism is the view that there is one personal supreme mind—one that knows, thinks, feels, and intends—on which everything else in the world depends. By design, the offered cumulative case for philosophical idealism does not rise to the level of argumentative rigor typified by journals of analytic philosophy. Instead, the aim is to present a broad framework with wide explanatory scope and practical import. The result is a highly readable exploration of the contours of a comprehensive worldview, which provides a natural home for the Christian faith.

The book contains three parts. In the first part of the book, Ward contends that conscious experience is the best starting point for human knowledge. And when a human scrutinizes her conscious experience, she discovers that sense perceptions, thoughts, and feelings are different in kind than that which is spatially located and publicly observable, and that these mental states are immaterial and possessed by a unitary subject who persists across time and performs intentional actions. Here it seems that Ward affirms some form of substance dualism regarding humans, where the mental and physical are distinct yet tightly integrated, but Ward is not as forthcoming with the details as one would like and expect.



Examining the nature of human conscious experience more fully, Ward contends that the hypothesis that a Supreme Mind exists makes sense of key features of human experience. To make his case, Ward draws a distinction between an *inferential hypothesis* and an *interpretative hypothesis*. The former “is one that explains some observed phenomenon by postulating an unperceived, or even unperceivable, entity or state” (51). An example of such a hypothesis is that the universe began with a “Big Bang.” This widely held hypothesis cannot be perceived by humans, but is inferred from observations, such as the cosmic microwave background and the red shift of expanding star systems. By contrast, an interpretative hypothesis “is one that interprets some experienced reality in terms of concepts that do not derive simply from the observations in themselves” but “introduces concepts that enable perceived data to be interpreted in a particular way” (51). An example of this kind of hypothesis can be found in Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant postulates categories of thought, such as concepts of causality and substance, as necessary conditions for the possibility of human knowledge of objects in the external world. Such categories of thought are not derived by first noticing a range of sense perceptions and then postulating a hypothesis to explain this range of perceptions. Rather, such categories are used as necessary preconditions for interpreting perceptions of the world—or so says Kant. While one might justly complain that the nature and relevance of the distinction between these two kinds of hypotheses are not given the care they merit, Ward postulates the existence of a Supreme Mind as an interpretative hypothesis. He argues that a Supreme Mind provides a plausible interpretative hypothesis that explains the intelligibility of the universe, the objectivity of beauty and moral goodness, and the mysterious but persistent sense that a personal presence pervades our world. The argument for this conclusion comes quick, various complexities are brushed aside, and competing hypotheses are given little attention. Still, for those who take on board many of Ward’s assumptions, the argument does come with a good measure of intuitive force.

The second part of the book further examines the idea of a Supreme Mind as the foundation of the universe. Ward argues that the existence of a Supreme Mind naturally explains why the cosmos generates complex semantic information of the kind that is found in human minds, and, in addition, the Supreme Mind grounds many, if not the full range of, modal truths. That the Supreme Mind grounds necessary truths reveals that it must exist necessarily, since only a necessary being has the resources for explaining why necessary states of affairs are the case. Furthermore, the Supreme Mind creates so that it might realize values outside of itself, but also so that it might progressively “unfold” its “own nature, as a truly creative, dynamic, and relational reality” (137). Here Ward sees a connection between the Supreme Mind and the God of Christian Scripture who is especially identified with self-giving love. Such a God perhaps “has to

create some universe of freely creative and interacting minds if God is to express the divine nature as love" (135).

Throughout the second section of the book (and elsewhere for that matter), Ward speaks of God, or the Supreme Mind, as a kind of "self-unfolding" Spirit that realizes itself progressively by "expressing" itself in and through a developing creation. Unfortunately, it is not clear to what Ward's conception of God amounts, as key concepts are left unexplained. The language of a *self-unfolding* God who is expressed *in* an evolving creation suggests a kind of process panentheistic perspective. However, Ward seems equally willing to embrace traditional attributes of God that do not normally accompany that perspective, such as incredible power, if not omnipotence. In the absence of a clear articulation of what God is envisioned to be like, the reader is left to guess about the details of the book's central explanatory hypothesis.

Having presented a philosophical argument for a Creator, Ward, in the book's third section, turns to theological matters found in Christian revelation. The topics treated include the final judgment, the world to come, and the interrelation between reason and revelation, among others. Ward presents a compelling case for the idea that God must hold humans accountable for their sins, and so must punish those who refuse to align themselves with God's ways of love. However, a perfectly loving God would be a God who is eternally inclined toward forgiveness and reconciliation. Consequently, any punishment inflicted by God would be remedial, not vindictive and retributive, which makes it possible that universal human salvation will eventually transpire in the life hereafter.

Interestingly, Ward's conception of the life to come differs markedly from that which has been popularized by the likes of N. T. Wright and J. Richard Middleton. Whereas the latter authors stress a continuity between this life and the life to come in that God will heal and restore this creation, Ward, relying on St. Paul, stresses the otherworldly nature of the redeemed state. Without denying the physicality of the heavenly state altogether, Ward imagines that the new bodies that redeemed humans will inherit will be dramatically different than the physical objects we currently bump into on a daily basis. One is left with the impression that heaven will be a mostly spiritual reality, where the limitations of physicality are left behind.

The final chapter of the book is entitled "Reason and Revelation." There Ward offers an experiential and gradualist understanding of revelation. Revelation is experiential in that God, the Supreme Mind on which all of reality depends, can be encountered through the manifold values had by creation and through an awareness that there is a personality, or at least some majestic presence, that encompasses the cosmos. And while Christians believe that God's revelation culminates in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ (which is not in itself any kind of experience), the New Testament writings are based upon unique experiences of God in Christ. Revelation is gradualist in the sense that God patiently works

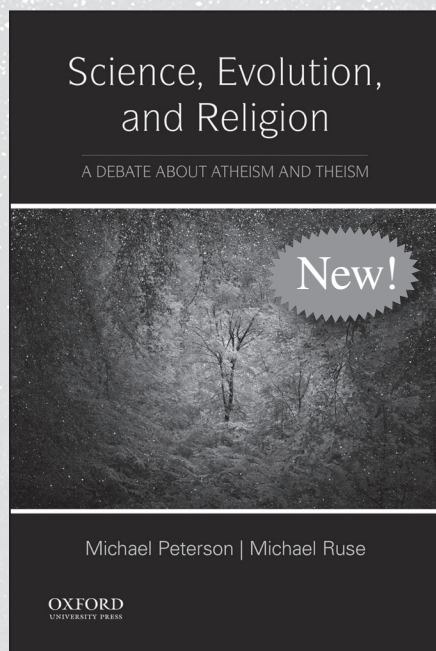
with humans to deepen their perceptions and thoughts over time, rather than “simply ignoring them or replacing them with miraculous divine knowledge” (217). Given this divine way of dealing with creatures, “we might expect that there would be a number of different philosophical and evaluative viewpoints among early humans and that they would develop in differing ways in different cultures and histories” (217). This developmental understanding of revelation thereby enables us to affirm aspects of revelation in more than one religion or philosophical system, and it explains why Christian Scripture contains images of God that are suboptimal and inaccurate and why the Church has failed to recognize important moral truths in her history.

Ward is clear that he does not believe that personal idealism, as expressed in his preferred manner, is taught or entailed by Christian Scripture. Nevertheless, Ward believes that personal idealism is consistent with Scripture and that it renders it natural to expect that God would reveal Godself in some form. Ward thus concludes the book by saying that “personal idealism provides a sound rational and reflective basis” for the Christian faith, and that in this way “reason and faith embrace and enfold each other” (221).

As intimated, those looking for penetrating analyses and rigorous defenses of key concepts will be disappointed by Ward’s book. Indeed, one of the weakest aspects of *The Christian Idea of God* is that it is unclear as to what, precisely, personal idealism is and how it contrasts with competing conceptions of God. Nevertheless, the book lays out a comprehensive worldview in an engaging, winsome, and concise fashion, and Ward presents several interlocking reasons to believe it true, or at least reasonable. Besides that, the book is sprinkled with creative proposals for integrating the deliverances of the natural sciences into Ward’s personal idealism as well as insights into how the Christian faith might be placed into dialogue with alternative religious outlooks. For such reasons, I recommend the book to those who are interested in obtaining a systematic perspective of the fundamental structure of reality and its relation to the Christian faith.



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