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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
ATHEISM

In *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, eighteen of the world's leading scholars present original essays on various aspects of atheism: its history, both ancient and modern, defense, and implications. The topic is examined in terms of its implications for a wide range of disciplines, including philosophy, religion, feminism, postmodernism, sociology, and psychology. In its defense, both classical and contemporary theistic arguments are criticized, and the argument from evil and impossibility arguments, along with a non-religious basis for morality, are defended. These essays give a broad understanding of atheism and a lucid introduction to this controversial topic.

Michael Martin is Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at Boston University. He is the author of more than 150 articles and reviews as well as several books, including *Atheism, Morality and Meaning*; *The Impossibility of God* (with Ricki Monnier) and *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification*.

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William Lane Craig, 1993) and *Ethical and Religious Thought in Analytic Philosophy of Language* (1997).

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PREFACE

It has been a distinct honor to edit *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*. To help bring to fruition a volume of original essays published by one of world's great university presses on one of the world's most controversial topics was an unforgettable and thrilling experience. I am grateful to Andy Beck, my editor at Cambridge University Press, who offered me the job as editor and who was patient and willing to answer my questions. I am deeply beholden to the seventeen other contributors to this volume whose essays provide novel insights to various aspects of atheism. It was a pleasure to work with them.

My wife, Jane Roland Martin, provided warm encouragement and wise advice. In addition, many nonbelieving friends and colleagues provided their support and help. In particular, I would like to thank my friend and fellow collaborator on other books on atheism, Dr. Ricki Monnier, whose encyclopedic knowledge on things atheistic was an enormous help and inspiration. I am also grateful to Dr. Tyler Wunder for his comments on chapter 6 and Dr. Wiebke Denecke for her comments on chapter 13.

GLOSSARY

For further definitions of the terms found in the volume, see Robert Audi (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), and Bill Cooke (ed.), *Dictionary of Atheism, Skepticism, and Humanism* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2005).

- a posteriori argument:** an argument based on experience. *See also* teleological argument
- a priori argument:** an argument not based on experience. *See also* impossibility argument; ontological argument
- Anselmian conception of God:** the view attributed to St. Anselm that God is a being such that no greater being can be conceived
- anthropomorphism:** the ascription of human traits to God
- apostasy:** disaffection, defection, alienation, disengagement, or disaffiliation from a religious group
- argument from design.** *See* teleological argument
- argument from evil:** an argument that purports to show that the existence of evil is either incompatible with the existence of God or makes God's existence improbable. *See also* problem of evil
- argument from indexicals:** a type of impossibility argument that maintains that, although allegedly all-knowing, God cannot have certain knowledge expressed in indexicals. *See also* indexical
- argument from miracles:** an argument that purports to show that the existence of God is the most plausible explanation of miracles. *See also* miracle
- argument from religious experience:** an argument that purports to show that the existence of God or other supernatural beings provides the best explanation of religious experience. *See also* mystical experience; religious experience
- autonomy of ethics:** the view that ethics is not based on theology. *Cf.* divine command theory. *See also* ethical naturalism
- Big Bang cosmology:** a theory that holds that the universe originated approximately 15 billion years ago from the violent explosion of a very small agglomeration of matter of extremely high density and temperature. *See also* Kalam cosmological argument for atheism; Kalam cosmological argument for God

- cancellation agnosticism:** the view that the arguments for and against belief in God are equally strong and cancel each other out. *Cf.* skeptical agnosticism
- clairvoyance:** the power to see objects or events that cannot be perceived by the senses. *See also* paranormal phenomena
- cosmological argument:** an argument that seeks to give a causal explanation of why some universe exists
- deism:** the view that God created the world and then had no further interaction with it; also, a view of God based on reason and not revelation. *Cf.* pantheism; theism
- devas:** the finite and impermanent gods described by some Eastern religions
- divine command theory:** the theory that ethical propositions are based on what God commands. *Cf.* autonomy of ethics; ethical naturalism. *See also* voluntarism
- eliminative materialism:** the view that despite appearances, there are no mental entities or processes. *Cf.* reductive materialism
- empiricism:** the theory that all knowledge is based on experience. *Cf.* rationalism
- epicureanism:** a leading Hellenistic philosophical school that advocated an atomistic metaphysics and a hedonistic ethics
- epistemological naturalism:** the thesis that the supernatural lies beyond the scope of what we can know, hence theology is rejected as a source of knowledge
- epistemology:** the theory of knowledge
- ethical naturalism:** the theory that the ethical properties of situations depend on the nature of those situations. *Cf.* divine command theory. *See also* autonomy of ethics
- Euthyphro problem:** a dilemma posed in the Platonic dialogue *The Euthyphro* and used as a critique of religiously based ethics. *See also* autonomy of ethics; divine command theory; voluntarism
- fine-tuning argument:** a teleological argument based on the alleged improbability that the fundamental physical constants in the universe are compatible with life. *See also* teleological argument
- free-will defense:** the response to the argument from evil that evil is the result of free will and cannot be blamed on God. *See also* argument from evil; theodicy
- impossibility argument:** an a priori argument against the existence of God that purports to show that the concept of God is inconsistent. *See also* argument from indexicals; paradox of the stone
- indexical:** a type of expression whose meaning varies with the context; e.g., "I," "here," "now." *See also* argument from indexicals
- intelligent design theory:** a theory that does not reject Darwin's theory completely but maintains that evolution needs to be explained in terms of the working out of some intelligent design
- Kalam cosmological argument for atheism:** an argument that purports to show that according to the latest scientific cosmology, the origin of

- the universe is incompatible with the existence of God. *Cf.* Kalam cosmological argument for god
- Kalam cosmological argument for God:** an argument that maintains that the most plausible explanation for the universe coming into being is that God brought it into existence. *Cf.* Leibniz cosmological argument
- knowledge by acquaintance:** knowledge based on direct experience. *Cf.* propositional knowledge
- Leibniz cosmological argument:** an argument attributed to Leibniz that the whole series of contingent beings that make up the universe requires an external cause that is not contingent but necessary and that this cause is God
- logical positivism:** a philosophical movement in Anglo-American philosophy in the 1930s and '40s advocating the rejection of metaphysics because it is unverifiable and hence meaningless. Both belief in God and disbelief in God are thought to be meaningless. *See also* metaphysics; negative atheism
- metaphysics:** the philosophical investigation of the nature, composition, and structure of ultimate reality
- miracle:** an event that is not explainable by laws of nature known or unknown. *See also* argument from miracles
- modus ponens:** the argument form: If A, then B; A therefore B
- modus tollens:** the argument form: If A, then B; not-B therefore not-A
- mystical experience:** religious experience that transcends ordinary sense perception and purports to be a direct experience of ultimate reality
- naturalism:** the view that everything that exists is composed of natural entities and processes that can in principle be studied by science
- naturalized epistemology:** an approach that views human beings as natural entities and uses the methods of science to study epistemological processes; sometimes considered a branch of cognitive science
- negative atheism:** absence of belief in any god or gods. More narrowly conceived, it is the absence of belief in the theistic God. *Cf.* positive atheism. *See also* logical positivism
- neo-Darwinian theory:** a synthesis of Darwin's theory and genetic theory
- Occam's razor:** a methodological principle advocating simplicity in theory construction
- omnibenevolence:** the property attributed to God of being all good
- omnipotence:** the property attributed to God of being all powerful
- omniscience:** the property attributed to God of being all knowing
- ontological argument:** an a priori argument that maintains that God's existence is true by definition
- ontology.** *See* metaphysics
- out-of-body experiences:** the experience of floating free of one's body; used by believers as evidence of an immaterial soul
- pantheism:** the view that God is identical with nature. *Cf.* deism; theism

- paradox of the stone:** if God can make a stone that he cannot lift, he is not all-powerful; but if he cannot make such a stone, he is also not all-powerful. *See also* impossibility argument
- paranormal phenomena:** phenomena such as ESP, clairvoyance, and psychokinesis that at the present time are unexplainable in terms of science
- physicalism:** the claim that minds are not distinct from matter and hence cannot exist apart from it. *See also* reductive materialism; supervenience theory
- polytheism:** the view that there are many gods
- positive atheism:** disbelief in any God or gods. More narrowly conceived, it is disbelief in the theistic God. *Cf.* negative atheism
- postmodernism:** a complex set of reactions to modern philosophy and its assumption that typically opposes foundationalism, fixed binary categories that describe rigorously separable regions, and essentialism and affirms a radical and irreducible pluralism
- problem of evil:** the problem of why there appears to be gratuitous evil although God is all-powerful and all-good. *See also* argument from evil
- procedural knowledge:** knowing how to do something. *Cf.* knowledge by acquaintance; propositional knowledge
- propositional knowledge:** factual knowledge that something is, was, or will be the case. *Cf.* knowledge by acquaintance; procedural knowledge
- psychokinesis:** the ability to affect physical objects without physical contact by using powers of the mind
- rationalism:** the theory that reason is the primary source of knowledge. *Cf.* empiricism
- reductive materialism:** the theory that mental states and processes are identical with brain states and processes. *Cf.* eliminative materialism; supervenience theory
- religious experience:** a wide variety of experiences, such as hearing voices and having visions, of supernatural beings such as God, angels, and Satan
- skeptical agnosticism:** the rejection of both belief and disbelief in God because there are no good arguments for or against such belief. *Cf.* cancellation agnosticism
- Sophists:** a group of itinerant teachers of rhetoric and philosophy in ancient Greece
- supervenience theory:** the theory that when a certain physical state obtains, so does a certain mental state. *Cf.* eliminative materialism; reductive materialism
- teleological argument:** an argument for the existence of God based on the apparent design and order in the universe. Also called the argument from design. *See also* fine-tuning argument. *Cf.* cosmological argument

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- theism:** belief in an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, personal God who created the universe, takes an active interest in the world, and has given a special revelation to humans. *Cf.* deism
- theodicy:** a theory attempting to explain the problem of evil and answer the argument from evil. *See also* argument from evil; free-will defense
- verificationism:** the theory that the meaning of a statement consists in its method(s) of verification; usually associated with logical positivism
- voluntarism:** the view that something's being good depends on God's will. *See also* Euthyphro problem