

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70710-7 - God and the Reach of Reason: C. S. Lewis, David Hume, and
Bertrand Russell

Erik J. Wielenberg

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

GOD AND THE REACH OF REASON

C. S. Lewis is one of the most beloved Christian apologists of the twentieth century; David Hume and Bertrand Russell are among Christianity's most important critics. This book puts these three intellectual giants in conversation with one another to shed light on some of life's most difficult yet important questions. It examines their views on a variety of topics, including the existence of God, suffering, morality, reason, joy, miracles, and faith. Along with irreconcilable differences and points of tension, some surprising areas of agreement emerge. Today, amid the often shrill and vapid exchanges between "new atheists" and twenty-first-century believers, curious readers will find penetrating insights in the reasoned dialogue of these three great thinkers.

Erik J. Wielenberg teaches in the Philosophy Department at DePauw University. He is the author of *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe* (2005) published by Cambridge University Press.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70710-7 - God and the Reach of Reason: C. S. Lewis, David Hume, and
Bertrand Russell

Erik J. Wielenberg

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

GOD AND THE REACH OF REASON

C. S. Lewis, David Hume, and Bertrand Russell

ERIK J. WIELENBERG

DePauw University



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70710-7 - God and the Reach of Reason: C. S. Lewis, David Hume, and
Bertrand Russell

Erik J. Wielenberg

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521880862

© Erik J. Wielenberg 2008

The Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The epigraph is from “On Obstinacy in Belief” by C. S. Lewis, which first appeared in the Autumn 1955 issue of *The Sewanee Review* and is used by permission of *The Sewanee Review*.

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2008

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Wielenberg, Erik J. (Erik Joseph), 1972–

God and the reach of reason : C. S. Lewis, David Hume, and Bertrand Russell / Erik J. Wielenberg.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-88086-2 (hardback) – ISBN 978-0-521-70710-7 (pbk.)

1. Philosophical theology. 2. Lewis, C. S. (Clive Staples), 1898–1963.

3. Hume, David. 4. Russell, Bertrand, 1872–1970. I. Title.

BT40.W53 2007

210.92'241 – dc22 2007010036

ISBN 978-0-521-88086-2 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-70710-7 paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70710-7 - God and the Reach of Reason: C. S. Lewis, David Hume, and
Bertrand Russell

Erik J. Wielenberg

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

For Jake and Henry

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70710-7 - God and the Reach of Reason: C. S. Lewis, David Hume, and
Bertrand Russell

Erik J. Wielenberg

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

[T]here is evidence both for and against the Christian proposition which fully rational minds, working honestly, can assess differently.

– C. S. Lewis (1955)

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70710-7 - God and the Reach of Reason: C. S. Lewis, David Hume, and
Bertrand Russell

Erik J. Wielenberg

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page ix</i>
Introduction	1
1. The Love of God and the Suffering of Humanity	7
1.1 The Problem	7
1.2 Hume's Presentation of the Problem	8
1.3 Lewis's Attempt to Solve the Problem	16
1.4 The Case of Ivan Ilyich	35
1.5 The Incompleteness of Lewis's Solution	40
1.6 Conclusion	52
2. Beyond Nature	56
2.1 Introduction	56
2.2 The Moral Argument	59
2.3 The Argument from Reason	93
2.4 The Argument from Desire	108
2.5 Conclusion	119
3. Miracles	121
3.1 Introduction	121
3.2 Debating Miracles in the Eighteenth Century	122
3.3 A Preliminary Skirmish	124
3.4 Hume's Main Assault	126
3.5 Lewis's Counterattack	134
3.6 The Fitness of the Incarnation	143

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70710-7 - God and the Reach of Reason: C. S. Lewis, David Hume, and
Bertrand Russell

Erik J. Wielenberg

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Contents*

3.7 Lewis's Mitigated Victory and the Trilemma	146
3.8 Conclusion	152
4. Faith, Design, and True Religion	153
4.1 Introduction	153
4.2 Faith	153
4.3 Design	169
4.4 True Religion	187
<i>Notes</i>	203
<i>References</i>	233
<i>Index</i>	241

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70710-7 - God and the Reach of Reason: C. S. Lewis, David Hume, and
Bertrand Russell

Erik J. Wielenberg

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have acquired many debts of gratitude in writing this book and thinking about the issues discussed here. The seeds of the book were planted as I prepared to teach a first-year seminar at DePauw University in the fall of 2002. That seminar sought to introduce students to philosophy through the works of C. S. Lewis, and I selected Hume and Russell as the major figures to set in opposition to Lewis. I am grateful to the students in that course, as well as to those who took a modified version of the same course in the fall of 2004. Preliminary versions of some of the ideas in this book were presented at a Faculty Research Colloquium at DePauw on November 22, 2002, under the title “C. S. Lewis vs. the Atheists”; I am grateful to the audience for the feedback I received on that occasion. Other material was presented at a meeting of the Bertrand Russell Society at the Central APA meeting in Chicago on April 27, 2006, under the title “Bertrand Russell and C. S. Lewis: Two Peas in a Pod?” I thank the audience on that occasion for their helpful comments. The production of the initial draft of the book was done with the help of a pre-tenure leave from DePauw in the spring of 2005, and revision of the manuscript was supported by a DePauw Summer Stipend during the summer of 2006.

Many people read some or all of the various earlier versions of the book and provided helpful comments and criticism. Two anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press produced extensive and helpful reports; the final version of the book is significantly improved because of these excellent reports. One of these initially anonymous

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70710-7 - God and the Reach of Reason: C. S. Lewis, David Hume, and
Bertrand Russell

Erik J. Wielenberg

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

readers has subsequently been revealed to be Victor Reppert; the other remains anonymous (to me). Andy Beck, my editor at Cambridge, was extremely supportive of the project and nudged things in the right direction at crucial junctures. Daniel Story read a complete early version of the manuscript as part of an independent study course on the works of C. S. Lewis during the fall of 2005. I am also grateful to Girard Brenneman, Richard Cameron, Trent Dougherty, Jennifer Everett, Billy Lauinger, Luke Maring, Mark Murphy, James Olsen, Alexander Pruss, Karen Stohr, and William Vallicella for their comments on various parts of the manuscript. Steve Lovell was kind enough to share with me his dissertation on the philosophical works of C. S. Lewis; the debt I owe to Lovell will be obvious to the reader of my own efforts to grapple with Lewis's ideas. I am confident that nearly everyone mentioned in this paragraph disagrees with some of the material in the book; unsurprisingly, I owe the greatest debts to my most challenging critics.

DePauw University constitutes a stimulating and supportive environment in which I am free to pursue my research interests, wherever they may take me. I am grateful to my colleagues in the Philosophy Department and to the students who have taken my courses for being a big part of this environment. I am also grateful to the faculty in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst from 1994 to 2000, particularly my dissertation director, Fred Feldman, for the excellent training in philosophy they provided.

Finally, I thank my mother, Peggy Wielenberg, and my wife, Margaret, for various kinds of support too numerous to describe. Without their support, none of this would have been possible. As always, responsibility for the errors that this work assuredly contains resides ultimately with me.

Greencastle, Indiana

January 2007