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Logic and Theism

Arguments For and Against Beliefs in God

This is a wide-ranging book about arguments for and against belief in God. Arguments for the existence of God analyzed in the first six chapters include ontological arguments from Anselm through Gödel, the cosmological arguments of Aquinas and Leibniz, and arguments from evidence for design and miracles. Following these chapters are two chapters considering arguments against that existence. The last chapter examines Pascalian arguments for and against belief regardless of existence. There are discussions of Cantorian problems for omniscience, of challenges to divine omnipotence, and of the compatibility of everlasting complete knowledge of the world with free will. For readers with a technical background in logic there are appendices that present formal proofs in a system for quantified modal logic, a theory of possible worlds, notes on Cantorian set theory, and remarks concerning nonstandard hyperreal numbers.

This book will be a valuable resource for philosophers of religion and theologians and will interest logicians and mathematicians as well.

Jordan Howard Sobel is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Toronto.

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Arguments For and Against Beliefs in God

JORDAN HOWARD SOBEL
University of Toronto

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for my parents

Gertrude Barmash and George Sobel

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There is No God

'There is no God,' the wicked saith,

'And truly it's a blessing,
For what he might have done with us
It's better only guessing.'

'There is no God,'a youngster thinks,
'Or really, if there may be,
He surely didn't mean a man
Always to be a baby.'

'There is no God, or if there is,'
The tradesman thinks, 'twere funny
If he should take it ill in me
To make a little money.'

'Whether there be,' the rich man says,
'It matters very little,
For I and mine, thank somebody,
Are not in want of victual.'

Some others, also to themselves,
Who scarce so much as doubt it,
Think there is none, when they are well,
And do not think about it.

But country folks who live beneath
The shadow of the steeple;
The parson and the parson's wife,
And mostly married people;

Youths green and happy in first love,
So thankful for illusion;
And men caught out in what the world
Calls guilt, in first confusion;

And almost everyone when age
Disease, or sorrows strike him,
Inclines to think there is a God,
Or something very like him.

Anthur Hugh Clough

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Dover Beach

The sea is calm to-night
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; – on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanched land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled,
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Matthew Arnold

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Preface

This book is about beliefs in the existence of God in two senses. It is about beliefs in God in the sense of their objects, the propositions believed. And it is about beliefs in God in the sense of states of minds. Classical arguments and evidence for and against propositions affirming God's existence are studied, as well as Pascalian practical arguments for and against cultivating states of belief in God.

Questions of truth, and of belief, concerning God's existence come after questions regarding what would be God's nature. Discussions of arguments in this book are predicated on several conceptions often combined, and sometimes moderated, of what God would be like. Chapter I, " 'GOD' and 'god', and God," goes into these conceptions. Its business is to establish the broad perspective from which issues concerning God's existence, and what would be This One's nature, are taken.

Then come chapters about theoretical arguments for beliefs in God. Chapters II through IV are about demonstrative arguments that would establish God's existence without the aid of contingent assumptions or premises – the classical ontological arguments of René Descartes, St. Anselm, and Baruch Spinoza (Chapter II); the modal ontological argument of Charles Hartshorne and Alvin Plantinga (Chapter III); and Kurt Gödel's ontological proof (Chapter IV). Chapters V and VI examine connected ordinary deductive arguments that make use of contingent premises: Thomas Aquinas' argument for a first cause, an argument of David Hume's character Demea, Samuel Clarke, and especially Gottfried Leibniz for ultimate reasons. Chapter VII reviews and extends David Hume's masterful study of arguments from design, which arguments purport not to deduce God's existence, but only to make a case for it, that is, to marshal evidence that, while not strictly entailing the hypothesis of a designing God's existence, make it probable. Chapter VIII interprets and discusses Hume's critique of testimonial evidence for miracles, and through them for particular gods.

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Next come chapters on what would be salient parts of God's nature. Chapter IX attends to challenges to omnipotence considered alone and in combination with other possible divine attributes. Chapter X takes up challenges to omniscience considered alone. Going with these chapters is a substantial appendix to Chapter XII that studies the issue of divine omniscience and freedom of choice.

There are then chapters on theoretical arguments against the existence of God. Chapter XI attends briefly to demonstrative arguments that would, if successful, establish that neither God nor 'anything very like him' *could* exist. It attends at greater length to 'the empirical problem of evil' and to arguments that would establish that 'on the evidence of evil' there is probably no god. Chapter XII is about the problem of evil in its classical form: Examined are deductive arguments in a series that starts with 'Epicurus' old problem,' arguments that would if successful establish that the existence of a perfect god is logically incompatible with the existence of evil, or, if not with that, then with this world's not being a best possible world, or, if not with that, then with this world's not being a best possible world that a perfect god could have actualized for sure, or, if not that . . .

Chapter XIII is about beliefs in God as states of mind. It studies practical arguments for cultivating beliefs in God, arguments that work with values for and probabilities of possible consequences of theistic beliefs, and of steps taken to acquire them. (Not conjured for comment are 'anti-Pascalian' practical arguments for avoiding theistic beliefs and eliminating them, because of consequences of having, and of acquiring, them.)

The logic and mathematics used are explained as required. Notations of elementary predicate logic come into discussions of René Descartes's ontological argument, as well as of St. Anselm's, and of Thomas Aquinas's first cause argument (Chapters II and V). It helps to bring out certain amphibolies or structural ambiguities of English sentences that feature words of quantity such as 'a' and 'something.' Russell's theory of descriptions is used to sort out more elusive amphibolies of relevance to Spinoza's ontological argument (Chapter II). Modal logic figures in discussions of Hartshorne's and Plantinga's and Gödel's ontological arguments (Chapters III and IV), of cosmological arguments (Chapter VI), of omnipotence (Chapter IX), of arguments for evil and objections to them (Chapter XII), and of omniscience and freedom (Chapter XII, Appendix). A natural deduction system for first-order quantified modal logic is explained in an appendix for Chapter III and used to confirm several informal arguments of that chapter. That system is extended in an appendix for Chapter IV to accommodate articulations of Gödel's reasoning in his ontological proof, and to confirm other informal arguments of the chapter. Bayesian confirmation theory is explained for discussions of the evidence of design for a designer, of the evidence for miracles of testimony to miracles, and of the evidence of evil against a perfect god (Chapters VII, VIII, and XI). Chapter XIII includes a series of exercises in Bayesian rational choice

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theory. Particular attention is paid to the play in these Pascalian arguments of infinities, both standard Cantorian cardinal infinities and nonstandard Robinsonian hyperreal 'infinimals.' Hyperreal infinitesimals enter explications floated of Hume's ideas of 'degrees of proof' and of 'highest certainties' (Chapter VIII).

With four exceptions chapters of this book do not include previously published material. The exceptions are "Mr. Spinoza, Meet Mr. Russell" which is Part Three of "Classical Ontological Arguments" (Chapter II), Gödel's *Ontologischer Beweis*" (Chapter IV), "Clouds of Witnesses" (Chapter VIII) and "Pascalian Wagers" (Chapter XIII). The first of these revises and substantially expands a paper that appeared in *Logica* (1999). The second substantially revises a contribution to *On Being and Saying: Essays for Richard Cartwright* (1987). The third merges and substantially expands revisions of two papers that appeared in *The Philosophical Quarterly* (1987, 1991). The fourth revises and expands somewhat a paper that appeared in *Synthesé* (1996).

Most chapters began either as material for the philosophy of religion section of introductions to philosophy taught at the University of California at Los Angeles in the 1960s and subsequently here at the University of Toronto, or as material for advanced undergraduate courses and graduate seminars conducted there and at Uppsala University. Exceptions are "Gödel's Ontological Proof" and the chapter, "Clouds of Witnesses" which began in comments I made on a paper by David Owen presented at the meeting of the Canadian Philosophical Association in 1984. Chapters V and VI were re-written for Burman Lectures delivered at the University of Umeå in May of 1998. That work took place during my tenure as Research Fellow at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences in Uppsala, for the supportive and stimulating conditions of which I am very grateful.

Debts are noted in these chapters to several colleagues, students, readers, and auditors for valuable criticisms and suggestions. I owe most to Willa Fowler Freeman Sobel, for her help through the years with this work and for much else.

REGARDING TECHNICAL MATERIAL

All formal derivations and models are relegated to appendices. Some technical material within chapters can be skipped over without loss of continuity.

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