

On the nature and existence of God

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RICHARD M. GALE



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*For the three wonderful wild ones
Andy, Larry, and Julia*

Contents



<i>Preface to this edition by</i> PAUL K. MOSER	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
Introduction	1
Atheological arguments	11
1 Atheology and the nature of God	13
2 The creation–immutability argument	31
3 The omniscience–immutability argument	47
4 The deductive argument from evil	82
5 The argument from world-relative actuality	152
Theological arguments	171
6 Ontological arguments	173
7 Cosmological arguments	204
8 Religious-experience arguments	244
9 Pragmatic arguments	295
<i>Index</i>	333

Preface to this edition

PAUL K. MOSER



Richard Gale wrote this book to clarify and assess various influential arguments against and for God's existence. The book's positive role is to contribute to "a more adequate conception of God – a God that will prove a worthy object of worship and obedience, even if the case for believing in his existence is shaky" (p. 3). Accordingly, the book examines some atheological arguments, such as the deductive argument from evil and arguments from divine immutability against divine omniscience and creation. These arguments call for "a more adequate conception of God's nature" than that offered by traditional theism.

The book's negative role is to identify the inadequacy of some influential arguments for God's existence, or at least arguments for justifying belief that God exists. These arguments include ontological arguments, cosmological arguments, pragmatic arguments, and arguments from religious experience. None of these arguments fares well, according to Gale, but he avowedly ignores "inductive arguments based on design, beauty, and lawlike regularity and simplicity for the existence of God, as well as those based on evil to show the improbability of his existence" (p. 1). So, he reports: "Since I completely eschewed inductive arguments, no definite conclusion can be drawn regarding the rationality of faith." Instead, he identifies some blind alleys in the rational pursuit of the issue of God's existence.

Gale seems content with the absence of a rational justification for belief that God exists. He reports being inspired by "Hume's Philo," adding that it is "the sceptical Philo whose spirit imbues my book" (p. 2). Still, Gale acknowledges the influence of Kierkegaard (no skeptic about God's existence). He suggests that the absence of a rational justification for belief that God exists "would be welcomed by a wide range of Kierkegaardian types who completely eschew any attempt to give an 'objective' justification of faith." He adds: "I resonate to their view of faith as a subjective passion that outstrips our reason" (p. 387).

Perhaps the problem is not with faith in God, but is with a desired "objective justification of faith." Gale opposes a case for justification of faith on the basis of religious experiences, on the ground that such

experiences are not “cognitive,” that is, “alone would not constitute a basis for our gaining knowledge of some objective reality” (p. 287). He proposes that a cognitive experience cannot be person-relative in evidence it supplies, but must be evidence even for people who have not had this experience or an experience of its kind. Perhaps this is too strong. It seems, for instance, that the pain in my mouth is evidence for me regarding my having a toothache, but it need not be similar evidence for you, particularly if you have no experience of this kind. So, many epistemologists now accept the person-relativity of some evidence.

Debates about the nature and existence of God will endure, but we do well to identify blind alleys. Gale’s book serves well here, regardless of how one ends up regarding a justification of faith.

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