GOD *AND* EVIDENCE

Problems for Theistic Philosophers

ROB LOVERING

BLOOMSBURY

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1

Introduction

Introduction

For nearly two millennia, theistic philosophers have had to contend with problems raised against their theistic beliefs. Typically raised by nontheistic (atheistic and agnostic) philosophers, these problems have ranged from critiques of theistic philosophers' arguments for God's existence to arguments for the nonexistence of God.

In this book, I present a new set of problems for theistic philosophers' theistic beliefs. The problems pertain specifically to three types of theistic philosopher, to be referred to here as "theistic inferentialists," "theistic noninferentialists," and "theistic fideists" (to be defined shortly). Each type of theistic philosopher faces a problem unique to his or her type, and they all share two problems, or so I shall argue. In some cases, the problems raised here take us down an entirely new discursive path; in others, they take us down a new discursive path branching off from an old one. In every case, however, they are paths that take us further and further away from theism.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide you with the backdrop against which the rest of the book is to be understood and evaluated. Specifically, in this chapter, I address a number of important concepts and distinctions as well as briefly present the problems to be raised against the theistic beliefs of these three types of theistic philosopher. I begin, however, with an observation about the current philosophical debate over theism.

Theism: A philosophical Alamo

It is not uncommon for the debate between theistic philosophers and their nontheistic counterparts to be described in terms of a battle. Augustine of Hippo, for example, describes it as a battle between the *civitas Dei* (the city of God) and the *civitas mundi* (the city of the world).[1] I, too, am inclined to describe the debate between theistic philosophers and their nontheistic counterparts in terms of a battle—for it reminds me of a particular historical battle, the Battle of the Alamo.

As many of us learned in grade school, there was a significant disparity of numbers between the defenders of the Alamo and their adversaries, the former being outnumbered

[1] Augustine of Hippo (1994), *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods. New York, NY: The Modern Library.

by the latter roughly 5,500 to 260. In this respect, the Battle of the Alamo reminds me of the battle between theistic philosophers and their nontheistic counterparts. You see, according to a recent survey of 931 philosophy faculty members, 15 percent accept or lean toward theism, 73 percent accept or lean toward atheism, and the rest accept or lean toward the "other" category (of which, some undoubtedly accept or lean toward agnosticism).[2] Since accepting or leaning toward atheism or "other" involves not accepting or leaning toward theism, an overwhelming 85 percent of these philosophy faculty members do not accept or lean toward theism. These statistics suggest that, in the world of professional philosophy, theistic philosophers occupy a role similar to that of the defenders of the Alamo, one in which they are significantly outnumbered by their adversaries, but steadfast in their convictions nonetheless. (This is not to suggest, of course, that theistic philosophers are the "good guys" and nontheistic philosophers are the "bad guys," or vice versa. The metaphor only goes so far.)

With the preceding in mind, a question naturally arises—whence the great statistical disparity between theistic and nontheistic philosophers? Theistic, atheistic, and agnostic philosophers must have their reasons for being theistic, atheistic, and agnostic philosophers (respectively). But, what are they? More specifically, what *kinds* of reasons are they? Are they evidential reasons—reasons that indicate the truth of their theistic, atheistic, and agnostic beliefs? Are they nonevidential reasons—reasons that induce their theistic, atheistic, and agnostic beliefs, but do not thereby indicate the truth of them? Are they both? There is virtually no doubt that the reasons they have for being theistic, atheistic, and agnostic philosophers are both evidential and nonevidential in nature. That this is the case for theistic philosophers in particular—the focus of this book—may be defended briefly as follows.

Regarding evidential reasons, some theistic philosophers are known for the evidential reasons they have provided for believing that God exists. From Thomas Aquinas and his "five ways" of proving God's existence to William Paley and his version of the teleological argument, to William Lane Craig and his version of the Kalām cosmological argument, to Richard Swinburne and his version of the argument from religious experience—these and other theistic philosophers are known for the evidential reasons they have provided for believing that God exists. And there is no doubt that these evidential reasons are among the reasons these and other theistic philosophers have for believing that God exists.

As for nonevidential reasons, some theistic philosophers are known for the nonevidential reasons they have provided for believing that God exists. From Blaise Pascal and his divine wager to Søren Kierkegaard and his leap of faith, to William James and his will to believe, to John Bishop and his supra-evidential fideism—these and other theistic philosophers are known for the nonevidential reasons they have provided for believing that God exists. And, as with the preceding evidential reasons, there is no doubt that these nonevidential reasons are among the reasons these and other theistic philosophers have for believing that God exists.

[2] http://philpapers.org/surveys/results.pl?affil=Target+faculty&areas0=0&areas_max=1&grain=coarse.

Much more will be said about the theistic philosophers' evidential and nonevidential reasons for believing that God exists in the chapters to come. For now, suffice it to say that the reasons theistic philosophers have for belief in God's existence fall into the following categories—evidential and nonevidential. Together, these reasons constitute the ammunition with which theistic philosophers have defended and continue to defend what appears to be a philosophical version of the Alamo—theism.

With these two categories in mind, another categorical division may be made, one pertaining to theistic philosophers themselves. Though each theistic philosopher to be addressed here believes that God exists, not all believe that discoverable probabilifying evidence of God's existence exists, be it inferential or noninferential evidence (to be explained shortly). In short, some of them believe that discoverable probabilifying evidence of God's existence exists, while others do not. Accordingly, these theistic philosophers may be divided into three categories, the first two of which include belief in discoverable probabilifying evidence of God's existence and the third of which does not:

1. Theistic inferentialists—philosophers who believe that (a) God exists, (b) there is inferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence, and (c) this evidence is discoverable not simply in principle, but in practice.
2. Theistic noninferentialists—philosophers who believe that (a) God exists, (b) there is noninferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence, and (c) this evidence is discoverable not simply in principle, but in practice.
3. Theistic fideists—philosophers who believe that (a) God exists, (b) there is no discoverable probabilifying evidence of God's existence, but (c) it is acceptable—morally, if not otherwise—to have faith that God exists.

The first two types of theistic philosopher are not to be understood as being mutually exclusive—one can be at once a theistic inferentialist and a theistic noninferentialist. However, the first two types of theistic philosopher, on the one hand, and the third type of theistic philosopher, on the other, *are* to be understood as being mutually exclusive—one cannot be a theistic inferentialist and/or theistic noninferentialist and, at the same time, a theistic fideist.

More will be said about each of these types of theistic philosopher in a moment. But before doing so, we must first analyze some of the preceding definitions' key concepts as well as a few others.

Key concepts

There are a number of key concepts, including:

- theism (along with its counterparts—atheism and agnosticism)
- theistic philosopher (along with its counterparts—atheistic philosopher and agnostic philosopher), and

- evidence (along with its various types—inferential, noninferential, public, private, probabilifying, and discoverable)

Each will be analyzed in turn.

Beginning with theism, it may be understood in either a broad or narrow sense.[3] For present purposes, by the broad sense of "theism," I mean the view that a god of one sort or another exists; while by the narrow sense of "theism," I mean the view that a particular god exists, namely, an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good, sovereign being who created the universe—in a word, "God." (Many other properties have been attributed to God, of course, but the preceding will suffice for now.)[4] God, according to the narrow sense of theism, is the greatest actual being, if not the greatest possible being, the only source of hesitation being whether a greatest possible being is indeed possible.[5]

Which sense of theism is at work in the survey mentioned above is not clear, for the survey does not indicate what exactly it means by "theism." As a result, some of the philosophers who accept or lean toward theism may do so only in the broad sense. (Those who accept or lean toward theism in the narrow sense do so in the broad sense as well, of course, since narrow theism implies broad theism.) That said, given that all of the theistic philosophers to be addressed in this book embrace theism in the narrow sense, theism will be understood hereafter in the narrow sense.

By "theistic philosopher," then, I mean a philosopher who believes that God exists. One can be a theistic philosopher without being formally trained in philosophy, let alone being a professional philosopher, such as a philosophy faculty member. That said, when I refer to theistic philosophers, I mean to refer specifically to those philosophers who are or were professional philosophers or who have or had enough philosophical training to be one. Examples of theistic philosophers abound—Augustine of Hippo, Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, William Paley, Blaise Pascal, Søren Kierkegaard, Alvin Plantinga, William Alston, Robin Collins, William Lane Craig, Stephen T. Davis, C. Stephen Layman, Marilyn McCord Adams, Nicolas Wolterstorff, and Linda Zagzebski, among others.

As with theism and theistic philosophers, there are broad and narrow senses of atheism and atheistic philosophers as well as agnosticism and agnostic philosophers. As with theism, each will be understood here in the narrow sense. Accordingly, by "atheism," I mean the view that God does not exist; and by "atheistic philosopher," I mean a philosopher who believes that God does not exist. By "agnosticism," I mean the view neither that God exists nor that God does not exist—in other words, the suspension of belief with regard to God's existence. And, by "agnostic philosopher," I

[3] The language of "broad" and "narrow" is borrowed from William Rowe. See William Rowe (2007), *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, 4th edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 16.

[4] Other properties attributed to God include eternal, omnipresent, nonphysical, necessarily existing, simple, immutable, impassable, etc. See Nicholas Everitt (2010), "The Divine Attributes," *Philosophy Compass* 5: 78.

[5] Just as a greatest possible natural number is not possible, so a greatest possible being may not be possible.

mean a philosopher who neither believes that God exists nor believes that God does not exist.

Also, just as one can be a theistic philosopher without being a professional philosopher, so can one be an atheistic or agnostic philosopher without being a professional philosopher. That said, when I refer to atheistic and agnostic philosophers, I mean to refer specifically to those philosophers who are or were professional philosophers or who have or had enough philosophical training to be one. Examples of atheistic and agnostic philosophers abound as well—Baron d'Holbach, David Hume, Friedrich Nietzsche, Bertrand Russell, J. L. Mackie, Michael Tooley, William Rowe, Michael Martin, Philip Kitcher, Nicholas Everitt, J. L. Schellenberg, Daniel Dennett, Paul Draper, Graham Oppy, Richard Gale, and A. C. Grayling, among others.

By "evidence," I mean epistemic reasons—reasons that indicate the truth of beliefs. For example, if existence is a perfection (as some theistic philosophers maintain) and if God possesses all the perfections, then that existence is a perfection is an epistemic reason for believing that God exists—it indicates the truth of the belief that God exists. Epistemic reasons stand in contrast with nonepistemic reasons—reasons that induce beliefs, but do not thereby indicate their truth. An example of a nonepistemic reason for believing that God exists is a beneficial reason, a reason characterized by the benefits of so believing. Perhaps needless to say, that it is beneficial in one way or another to believe that God exists is not, in and of itself, an indication that the belief is true.[6]

Another thing to note about evidence—as it will be understood here, anyway—is that it may be public or private in nature. By "public" evidence of God's existence, I mean evidence that is objective and thereby "open to the awareness and inspection to anyone who is interested enough to consider" it, as Stephen Davis puts it.[7] In other words, public evidence is evidence that it is, in principle, possible for anyone to evaluate. Examples of public evidence of God's existence include philosophical arguments, scientific data, and testimony. By "private" evidence of God's existence, however, I mean evidence that is subjective and thereby open "only to the awareness and scrutiny of the given individual to whom [it is] private, and [is] not necessarily convincing to anyone else."[8] An individual-specific religious experience wherein God presents himself to the individual is an instance of private evidence of God's existence.[9]

[6] To be sure, true beliefs may confer benefits on those who assent to them, though arguably not in every case (e.g., it is not clear how assenting to the true belief "The number of biological organisms on Earth at this moment is odd or even" would be beneficial). But that it is beneficial to believe something is not, in and of itself, a reason to think that the belief itself is true. The relation between true beliefs and beneficial beliefs, then, is asymmetrical—true beliefs may as such confer benefits, but beneficial beliefs do not as such confer truth.

[7] Stephen T. Davis (1978), *Faith, Skepticism, and Evidence.* Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 26.

[8] Ibid., 28.

[9] It should be noted that not all philosophers agree that private evidence of this sort is possible. For example, Richard Swinburne thinks that it is, while Nicholas Everitt thinks that it is not. See Richard Swinburne (1979), *The Existence of God.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 248; and Nicholas Everitt (2009), *The Non-existence of God.* London: Routledge, 161ff.

As for "inferential" and "noninferential" evidence of God's existence (sometimes referred to as propositional and nonpropositional evidence), John Bishop captures the distinction well when he writes:

> A proposition's truth is inferentially evident when its truth is correctly inferable . . . from other propositions whose truth is accepted; a proposition's truth is non-inferentially (basically) evident when its truth is acceptable . . . without being derived by inference from other evidentially established truths.[10]

Consider, on the one hand, the classical arguments for God's existence—the ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments. Each of these arguments consists of an attempt to establish the truth of the proposition "God exists" by inferring it from other propositions that are accepted as true. Accordingly, each of these arguments involves inferential evidence. Consider, on the other hand, the argument from religious experience. This argument consists of an attempt to establish the truth of the proposition "God exists" not by inferring it from other evidentially established truths, but on the basis of direct perception or awareness of God. Accordingly, the argument from religious experience involves noninferential evidence.

Though public and private evidence, on the one hand, and inferential and noninferential evidence, on the other, are conceptually distinct, they nevertheless overlap in certain ways. One way in which they overlap is that inferential and noninferential evidence can be both public and private in nature. Each of the classical arguments for God's existence, for example, involves inferential, public evidence. A veridical appearance of God to a group of people is noninferential, public evidence. A suffering individual's plea to God that he (God) relieve his pain, immediately followed by the alleviation of said pain is inferential, private evidence. And, an individual-specific religious experience wherein God presents himself to the individual is noninferential, private evidence.

Having addressed the concept of evidence and, with it, the public/private and inferential/noninferential distinctions, let us turn to probabilifying evidence. Evidence comes in degrees of strength, of course, ranging from the very weak to the very strong. We acknowledge this, Nicholas Everitt submits, by our use of locutions of the following forms:

a. A proves B beyond all doubt.
b. A is overwhelming evidence for B.
c. A is very strong evidence for B.
d. A is strong evidence for B.
e. A makes B more likely than not.
f. A is good evidence of B.
g. A is fairly good evidence of B.
h. A makes B a real possibility.

[10] John Bishop (2007), *Believing by Faith: An Essay in the Epistemology and Ethics of Religious Belief.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 23.

i. A suggests that B is possible.
j. A is some evidence of B.
k. A is weak evidence of B.
l. A marginally increases the likelihood that B is possible.[11]

For present purposes, by "probabilifying" evidence, I mean evidence captured by (a)–(e)—it is evidence that, minimally, makes the truth of a belief more likely than not and, maximally, proves the truth of a belief beyond all doubt. Clearly, evidence for the belief that God exists is not always probabilifying. An unexplained, seemingly supernatural event may be evidence of the existence of God, but it is not probabilifying evidence—it does not, in and of itself, render the belief that God exists more likely than not to be true, much less prove the belief that God exists beyond all doubt. Probabilifying evidence for the belief that God exists does just that—at a minimum, it renders the belief that God exists more likely than not to be true.

(One might reasonably wonder what *makes* probabilifying evidence probabilifying. This is a very important and very difficult question to answer. Fortunately (for my sake), this question need not be answered here, since I am critiquing each type of theistic philosopher on his or her own terms. And, for present purposes, it suffices to know that theistic inferentialists and theistic noninferentialists believe that there is probabilifying evidence of God's existence, and that theistic fideists do not.)

With regard to probabilifying evidence being "discoverable"—not simply in principle, but in practice—perhaps the best way to convey what I mean by this is to contrast it with some alternatives. First, one might believe that evidence of God's existence exists, but that it is in *principle* impossible to discover. J. L. Schellenberg refers to this as "undiscoverable evidence."[12] Undiscoverable evidence is evidence that we are incapable of recognizing "because it is *in principle* impossible for beings like us ever—in any time—to assimilate this information."[13] To motivate the idea of undiscoverable evidence, Schellenberg continues,

> Here we have to imagine that all the intellectual evolution we are capable of has taken place, and think about what might still lie outside our grasp when that has occurred. Would there be anything at all? The truth of an affirmative answer can surely not be ruled out. It is hard to believe that humans, being finite, will ever be capable of knowing everything there is to be known; no matter how far they develop, there must always remain the disturbing possibility of "that which cannot be understood." Accordingly, we must also take note of how there may be undiscoverable evidence with a bearing on beliefs of interest to us.[14]

An analogy may be useful here. Consider intelligent extraterrestrials who have intellectually evolved as much as they are capable of evolving but, nevertheless, lack the

[11] Everitt, *The Non-existence of God*, 13.
[12] J. L. Schellenberg (2007), *The Wisdom to Doubt: A Justification of Religious Skepticism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 24ff.
[13] Ibid., 18.
[14] Ibid., 24–5.

capacity to grasp the concept of perfection. For such extraterrestrials, evidence in the form of the concept of perfection is undiscoverable evidence.

Second, one might believe that evidence of God's existence exists, that the evidence is in principle possible to discover, but that it is in *practice* improbable, if not impossible, to discover. Evidence of this sort may fall into one of two categories—what Schellenberg refers to as "inaccessible evidence" and "undiscovered evidence."[15] Inaccessible evidence is "evidence one is capable of seeing, but it goes unrecognized because it is not part of one's own evidence: here unavoidable features of human intellectual life contingently prevent one from undertaking the investigation that would have led to an encounter with the evidence in question had one undertaken it."[16] Unlike with undiscoverable evidence, one is capable of recognizing inaccessible evidence; it is simply that one does not recognize it since, through no fault of one's own, it happens to fall outside one's range of apprehension. Consider, again, the aforementioned extraterrestrials. Suppose (contrary to the preceding example) that these extraterrestrials have intellectually evolved in such a way that they have the capacity to grasp the concept of perfection. Suppose also that, through no fault of their own, the concept of perfection falls outside their range of apprehension. For such extraterrestrials, evidence in the form of the concept of perfection is inaccessible evidence.

Undiscovered evidence, however, is "evidence we fail to see because we are not capable of seeing it in our time, in a manner deriving from limited development within what is possible in evolutionary terms (unevolved concepts or dispositions, primitive intellectual environment or resources, etc.)."[17] To use the example of the extraterrestrials once more, suppose they are intellectually evolving in such a way that they currently lack the capacity to grasp the concept of perfection, but their descendants will not only acquire that capacity, but also grasp the concept of perfection. For such extraterrestrials, evidence in the form of the concept of perfection is undiscovered evidence.

Theistic inferentialists and theistic noninferentialists, on the one hand, reject the view that all evidence of God's existence is undiscoverable—that all evidence of God's existence is, in principle, impossible to discover. They also reject the view that all evidence of God's existence is inaccessible or undiscovered—that all evidence of God's existence is in practice improbable, if not impossible, to discover. (They accept, however, that *some* evidence of God's existence may be inaccessible or undiscovered or undiscoverable.) Theistic fideists, on the other hand, hold that all evidence of God's existence is inaccessible or undiscovered or undiscoverable—that all evidence of God's existence is, in practice if not in principle, impossible to discover.

[15] Ibid., 21–4. Schellenberg also proposes the categories of "overlooked evidence" and "neglected evidence." It should be acknowledged that one could believe that evidence of God's existence exists, that the evidence is in principle possible to discover, but that it is in practice improbable, if not impossible, to discover due to overlooking or neglecting the evidence.

[16] Ibid., 18.

[17] Ibid., 18.

Theistic inferentialists, theistic noninferentialists, and theistic fideists

With the preceding concepts and distinctions in mind, let us take a closer look at each of the three types of theistic philosopher to be examined here. Perhaps the best way to conceptually motivate each of these types of theistic philosopher is by way of example. In the following, I will provide brief examples of each of them. Specifically, for each example of theistic philosopher to be considered below, I will present a condensed version of his argument for believing in God's existence. These arguments will also serve as touchstones for the rest of the book.

Theistic inferentialists

We begin with theistic inferentialists—philosophers who believe that (a) God exists, (b) there is inferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence, and (c) this evidence is discoverable not simply in principle, but in practice. Though the list of theistic inferentialists is quite long, we will consider just three here—William Paley, William Lane Craig, and Robin Collins.

Consider, first, William Paley and his version of the teleological argument. Paley observes that many natural parts of the universe (such as human eyes) resemble machines (such as telescopes) in that both human eyes and telescopes are what William Rowe calls "teleological systems"—systems of parts in which the parts are so arranged that, under proper conditions, they work together to serve certain purposes.[18] As Paley puts it,

> there is precisely the same proof that the eye was made for vision, as there is that the telescope was made for assisting it. They were made upon the same principles; both being adjusted to the laws by which the transmission and reflection of rays of light are regulated. I speak not of the origin of the laws themselves; but such laws being fixed, the construction, in both cases, is adapted to them . . . What could a mathematical instrument-maker have done more, to show his knowledge of his principle, his application of that knowledge, his suiting of his means to his end; I will not say to display the compass or excellence of his skill and art . . . but to testify counsel, choice, consideration, purpose?[19]

From this, Paley infers that it is likely that God exists. His argument may be summarized as follows:

> P1: Machines (such as telescopes) are produced by intelligent design.
> P2: Many natural parts of the universe (such as human eyes) resemble machines.

[18] Rowe, 57.

[19] William Paley (2009), "The Argument to Design," In Steven M. Cahn (ed.), *Exploring Philosophy of Religion: An Introductory Anthology.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 77.

C1: Probably, many natural parts of the universe are also produced by intelligent design.
P3: Probably, God is the designer of these many natural parts of the universe.
C2: Probably, God exists.[20]

Since Paley believes there is inferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence in the form of the teleological argument, he is thereby a theistic inferentialist.

Consider, next, William Lane Craig and his version of the Kalām cosmological argument. Craig argues that since everything that begins to exist has a cause, and since the universe began to exist, it is likely that God exists. That everything that begins to exist *does* have a cause strikes Craig as relatively uncontroversial. Indeed, it is "based on the intuition that something cannot come out of nothing. Hence, any argument for the principle is apt to be less obvious than the principle itself."[21] With this in mind, Craig continues,

> With regard to the universe, if originally there were absolutely nothing—no God, no space, no time—then how could the universe possibly come to exist? The truth of the principle *ex nihilo*, *nihil fit* (out of nothing, nothing comes) is so obvious that I think we are justified in forgoing an elaborate defense of the [claim "everything that begins to exist has a cause"].[22]

Craig's argument may be summarized as follows:

P1: Everything that begins to exist has a cause.
P2: The universe began to exist.
C1: The universe has a cause.
P3: Probably, God is the cause of the universe.
C2: Probably, God exists.[23]

Since Craig believes there is inferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence in the form of the Kalām cosmological argument, he is thereby a theistic inferentialist.

Finally, consider Robin Collins and his version of the teleological argument. Collins argues for the existence of God on the basis of the fine-tuning of the universe. In short, were the universe not finely tuned in the way that it is, life on earth would be impossible. And, that the universe is so finely tuned is not unlikely under theism, but is unlikely under atheism.[24] Regarding the claim that a finely tuned universe is not unlikely under theism, he argues, "Since God is an all good being, and it is good for

[20] This is a modified version of an argument found in Rowe, 55.
[21] William Lane Craig (2010), "The Kalām Cosmological Argument," In Michael Peterson, et al. *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, 4th edition. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 203.
[22] Ibid., 203.
[23] This is a modified version of an argument found in William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (2008), "The Kalām Cosmological Argument," In Louis P. Pojman and Michael Rea (eds), *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, 5th edition. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 36.
[24] Specifically, under the atheistic single-universe hypothesis, which states that there is only one universe and it is ultimately unexplainable.

intelligent, conscious beings to exist, it is not surprising or improbable that God would create a world that could support intelligent life."[25]

As for the claim that a finely tuned universe is unlikely under atheism, Collins defends it by way of analogy. He asks us to consider a mission to Mars wherein a domed structure is discovered. With a temperature of around 70 degrees, a humidity of 50 percent, an oxygen recycling system, an energy gathering system, etc., this domed structure is set up just right for life to exist. "What conclusion would we draw from finding this structure?" Collins asks. "Would we draw the conclusion that it just happened to form by chance? Certainly not."[26] After all, he asserts, that such a structure could be formed by chance is extremely unlikely. And so it is, Collins contends, with the finely tuned universe we find ourselves inhabiting. Collins' fine-tuning argument for God's existence may be summarized as follows:

P1: The universe is finely tuned.
P2: The existence of the fine-tuning is not improbable under theism.
P3: The existence of the fine-tuning is very improbable under atheism.
C: Probably, God exists.[27]

Since Collins believes there is inferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence in the form of the teleological argument, he is thereby a theistic inferentialist.

Theistic noninferentialists

Let us now consider examples of theistic noninferentialists—philosophers who believe that (a) God exists, (b) there is noninferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence, and (c) this evidence is discoverable not simply in principle, but in practice.

As indicated above, experiences can serve as direct, noninferential evidence of the existence of things. As such, religious experiences—such as experiences of God—can serve as noninferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence. Everitt effectively summarizes this view when he writes,

> Proponents of the view that religious experience can significantly raise the probability that God exists . . . often insist that the appeal to religious experience is not simply one more *argument* or *piece of reasoning* for the existence of God . . . Rather, they insist, it is not an *argument* at all . . . The point they are making is that experience gives a *direct* way of knowing about things, as distinct from the indirect, inferential way provided by having to reason our way to knowledge of them.[28]

[25] Robin Collins, "A Scientific Argument for the Existence of God," In *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, 78.
[26] Ibid., 74.
[27] This is a modified version of an argument found in Collins, "A Scientific Argument for the Existence of God," 77.
[28] Everitt, *The Non-existence of God*, 150–1. It should be noted that some philosophers argue that religious experiences might be instances of *inferential*—rather than *noninferential*—evidence of God's existence. See Michael Martin (1990), *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 156ff.

Each of the three theistic noninferentialists to be considered here—William Alston, Richard Swinburne, and Alvin Plantinga—appeals to experiences of one sort or another as noninferential evidence of God's existence.

William Alston argues there is noninferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence in the form of experiences of God. His argument involves comparing experiences of God to ordinary perception. Ordinary sensory perception—what Alston refers to as our "perceptual practice" (or, *PP*)—involves three elements—a perceiver, a perceived object, and an experience of the perceived object.[29] The perception of a typewriter, for example, involves a perceiver (the one perceiving the typewriter), a perceived object (the typewriter), and the experience of the perceived object (the awareness the perceiver has of the typewriter). And, barring reasons for thinking that the perception is hallucinatory or otherwise delusory (i.e., barring defeaters), the perception serves as noninferential probabilifying evidence of the typewriter's existence. As Alston writes,

> If I am justified, just by virtue of having the visual experiences I am now having, in taking what I am experiencing to be a typewriter situated directly in front of me, then the belief that there is a typewriter directly in front of me is directly justified by that experience.[30]

Similarly, experiences of God—of which Alston writes in terms of "Christian epistemic practice" (or, *CP*)—involve a perceiver (the one perceiving God), a perceived object (God), and the experience of the perceived object (the awareness the perceiver has of God). And, barring defeaters, the perception serves as noninferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence. As Alston puts it,

> When . . . someone takes himself to be experiencing the presence of God, he thinks that his experience justifies him in supposing that God is what he is experiencing. Thus, he supposes himself to be directly justified by his experience in believing God to be present to him.[31]

He concludes that "*CP* has basically the same epistemic status as *PP* and that no one who subscribes to the latter is in any position to cavil at the former."[32] Alston's argument may be summarized as follows:

> P1: It epistemically seems to subjects of experiences of God that God is present.
> P2: If it epistemically seems to subjects of experiences of God that God is present, then probably God is present, unless there are defeaters.
> C: Probably God is present, unless there are defeaters.[33]

[29] See Michael Peterson, et al. (2009), *Reason & Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 4th edition. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 33.
[30] William Alston, "Religious Experience and Religious Belief," In *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, 137.
[31] Ibid., 137.
[32] Ibid., 142.
[33] This is a modified version of an argument found in Richard M. Gale (2007), *On the Philosophy of Religion.* Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 58–9.

Since Alston believes there is noninferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence in the form of experiences of God, he is thereby a theistic noninferentialist.

Like Alston, Richard Swinburne argues that there is noninferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence in the form of experiences of God. Swinburne begins with the claim that "An apparent experience . . . is a real experience . . . if it is caused by that of which it purports to be an experience."[34] With this in mind, he continues:

> Now it is evident that, rightly or wrongly, it has seemed (in the epistemic sense) to millions and millions of humans that at any rate once or twice in their lives they have been aware of God and his guidance . . . They may be mistaken, but that is the way it has seemed to them. Now it is a basic principle of rationality, which I call the principle of credulity, that we ought to believe that things are as they seem to be (in the epistemic sense) unless and until we have evidence that we are mistaken . . . Someone who seems to have an experience of God should believe that he does, unless evidence can be produced that he is mistaken.[35]

Swinburne's argument may be summarized as follows:

P1: We ought to believe that things are as they seem to be unless and until we have evidence that we are mistaken.
P2: It seems to some people that they are having an experience of God.
C: These people ought to believe that things are as they seem to be—that they *are* having an experience of God—unless and until they have evidence that they are mistaken.

Since Swinburne believes there is noninferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence in the form of experiences of God, he is thereby a theistic noninferentialist.

Finally, consider Alvin Plantinga. According to Plantinga, the belief that God exists is properly basic. A properly basic belief is a belief one is justified in holding whose justification is not a function of inferential reasoning. Examples of properly basic beliefs include the beliefs that $2 + 2 = 4$, that the external world exists, that other people are not actually robots, that one is being appeared to in a particular way, and that one's memories tend to be reliable. According to Plantinga, each of these beliefs is *basic* in that none is inferred from other beliefs. And each is *properly* basic in that each is a belief one is justified in holding whose justification is not a function of inferential reasoning.

And so it is, Plantinga argues, with respect to the belief that God exists. The belief that God exists is basic in that it is not (at least, need not be) inferred from other beliefs. And, it is properly basic in that it is a belief one is justified in holding whose justification is not a function of inferential reasoning. According to Plantinga, each one of us has been created by God in such a way that we are disposed to believe that God exists, and this disposition may be triggered by a wide variety of circumstances,

[34] Richard Swinburne (1996), *Is There A God?* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 131.
[35] Swinburne, *Is There A God?*, 131–3.

such as upon beholding the stars above or the beauty of a flower. And, when a person's disposition to believe that God exists is triggered by such circumstances,

> [i]t isn't that such a person is justified or rational in so believing by virtue of having an implicit argument—some version of the teleological argument, say. No; he doesn't need any argument for justification or rationality. His belief need not be based on any other propositions at all; under these conditions he is perfectly rational in accepting belief in God in the utter absence of any argument, deductive or inductive. Indeed, a person in these conditions . . . *knows* that God exists, has knowledge of God's existence, apart from any argument at all.[36]

Before summarizing Plantinga's argument, it should be noted here that some philosophers have mistakenly taken these comments to mean that, as properly basic, belief in God's existence is not based on evidence. As one philosopher writes, "With respect to belief in God, Plantinga contends that one does not need arguments *or evidence* for that belief to be rational."[37] But this is a misreading of Plantinga. What Plantinga argues is that, as properly basic, belief in God's existence is not based on *inferential* evidence; he does *not* argue that properly basic belief in God's existence is not based on any evidence whatsoever. As he states in another work:

> In my opening statement, I argued that the proper position here, for the theist, is that belief in God *is* noninferentially justified—i.e., that there is *powerful non-propositional evidence* or grounds for the existence of God. The sensible thing for a theist to think is that there is what Aquinas calls a natural knowledge of God, or something like what John Calvin called a "*Sensus divinitatis*." This would be a cognitive faculty or process, built into us by God, that delivers beliefs about God under a wide variety of circumstances . . . *So of course I believe that there is positive evidence—non-propositional evidence—for the existence of God*, just as there is for external objects, and the past.[38]

Plantinga holds, then, that properly basic belief in God's existence serves as noninferential evidence of God's existence. His argument may be summarized as follows:

> P1: If the belief that God exists is properly basic, then there is noninferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence.

[36] Alvin Plantinga, "Belief Without Argument," In *Exploring Philosophy of Religion: An Introductory Anthology*, 220.

[37] Kelly James Clark (1997), "Introduction," In *Philosophers Who Believe: The Spiritual Journeys of 11 Leading Thinkers*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 14, emphasis mine. Ironically, Plantinga makes this rather clear in the very volume in which these comments are made. In his defense of belief in God being properly basic, Plantinga writes, "my main aim was to argue that it is perfectly rational to take belief in God as basic—to accept it, that is, without accepting it on the basis of argument or *evidence from other propositions one believes*" (Alvin Plantinga, "A Christian Life Partly Lived," In *Philosophers Who Believe*, 74, emphasis mine).

[38] Alvin Plantinga and Michael Tooley (2008), *Knowledge of God*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 164–5, emphasis mine. As Richard Gale writes, despite his critique of the need for inferential evidence of God existence, "Plantinga is no fideist" (Gale, 118).

P2: The belief that God exists is properly basic.
C: There is noninferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence.[39]

Since Plantinga believes there is noninferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence in the form of properly basic belief in his existence, he is thereby a theistic noninferentialist.

(As stated above, one can be at once a theistic inferentialist and a theistic noninferentialist. Swinburne and Plantinga are examples of such philosophers. Swinburne thinks that there is inferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence in the form of the teleological and cosmological arguments, among others.[40] And Plantinga thinks that "there are a large number (at least a couple of dozen) good arguments for the existence of God."[41])

Theistic fideists

Finally, let us consider examples of theistic fideists, philosophers who believe that (a) God exists, (b) there is no discoverable probabilifying evidence of God's existence, but (c) it is acceptable—morally, if not otherwise—to have faith that God exists. We'll consider three here—Blaise Pascal, Søren Kierkegaard, and John Bishop.

Pascal argues that, since God has neither parts nor limits, he is infinitely incomprehensible to us. As a result, reason cannot decide whether or not God exists. With this in mind, he writes,

> Who will then blame the Christians for being unable to provide a rational basis for their belief, they who profess a religion for which they cannot provide a rational basis? They declare that it is a folly . . . in laying it before the world: and then you complain that they do not prove it! If they did prove it, they would not be keeping their word.[42]

Nevertheless, Pascal contends, we are forced to wager one way or the other on God's existence—refusing to wager is not an option since it amounts to wagering that God does not exist. Given this, we should wager that God exists, since wagering that God exists is better than wagering that he does not exist. For, by wagering that God exists, we have everything to gain and nothing to lose; while by wagering that God does not exist, we have nothing to gain and everything to lose. As he puts it,

> Let us weigh up the gain and the loss by calling heads that God exists. Let us assess the two cases: if you win, you win everything; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager that he exists then, without hesitating![43]

[39] This is a modified version of an argument found in Plantinga, "Belief Without Argument," 218–27.
[40] See Swinburne's *The Existence of God* and *Is There A God?*.
[41] Alvin Plantinga (2000), *Warranted Christian Belief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 170. One such argument is his version of the ontological argument (see Alvin Plantinga (1991), *God, Freedom, and Evil*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Co., 85ff).
[42] Blaise Pascal, "The Wager," in *Exploring Philosophy of Religion*, 191.
[43] Ibid., 192.

And, if we should wager that God exists, then it is morally acceptable to believe that God exists independent of probabilifying evidence—at least, such is what is implied. After all, if believing that God exists independent of probabilifying evidence is (seriously) immoral, then it may be that, all things considered, we should *not* believe that God exists independent of probabilifying evidence. Pascal's argument for the moral acceptability of having faith that God exists may be summarized as follows:

P1: There is no discoverable probabilifying evidence of God's existence.
C1: If we are to believe that God exists, we must do so independent of probabilifying evidence—that is, we must have faith that God exists.
P2: We *are* to believe that God exists, since we have everything to gain and nothing to lose.
C2: We must have faith that God exists.
P3: If we must have faith that God exists, then having faith that God exists is morally acceptable.
C3: Having faith that God exists is morally acceptable.

Since Pascal believes there is no discoverable probabilifying evidence of God's existence, but that, nevertheless, it is morally acceptable to have faith that God exists, he is thereby a theistic fideist.

As for Kierkegaard, he claims that "every moment is wasted in which [one] does not have God."[44] However, Kierkegaard also argues that we do not have probabilifying evidence of God's existence because it is simply not available and, perhaps more importantly, because if it were available, we could not have that which is essential when it comes to believing that God exists—faith. As he puts it,

> Without risk there is no faith. Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty. If I am capable of grasping God objectively, I do not believe, but precisely because I cannot do this I must believe. If I wish to preserve myself in faith I must constantly be intent upon holding fast the objective uncertainty, so as to remain out upon the deep, over seventy thousand fathoms of water, still preserving my faith.[45]

According to Kierkegaard, then, if we must "have" God—believe that he exists, among other things—but cannot have him on the basis of probabilifying evidence, it is morally acceptable to have him independent of probabilifying evidence (at least, as with Pascal's wager, such is implied). Kierkegaard's argument for the moral acceptability of having faith that God exists may be summarized as follows:

P1: There is no discoverable probabilifying evidence of God's existence.
C1: If we are to believe that God exists, we must do so independent of probabilifying evidence—that is, we must have faith that God exists.

[44] Søren Kierkegaard (1941), *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David E. Swenson and Walter Lowrie. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 178–9.
[45] Ibid., 182.

P2: We *are* to believe that God exists, since every moment is wasted in which we do not have God.
C2: We must have faith that God exists.
P3: If we must have faith that God exists, then having faith that God exists is morally acceptable.
C3: Having faith that God exists is morally acceptable.

Since Kierkegaard believes there is no discoverable probabilifying evidence of God's existence but that, nevertheless, it is morally acceptable to have faith that God exists, he is thereby a theistic fideist.

Finally, consider John Bishop. Bishop offers a William James-inspired defense of what he refers to as "supra-evidential fideism."[46] Bishop embraces what he calls the "thesis of evidential ambiguity," which accepts that "the question of God's existence is left open—perhaps even necessarily, because our overall evidence is equally viably interpreted either from a theistic or an atheistic perspective."[47] Given the thesis of evidential ambiguity, the question arises whether it is morally permissible to have faith that God exists. Bishop believes that it can be, based on what he calls the "J+" thesis (read as *Jamesian-plus* thesis):

> (J+) Where *p* is a faith-proposition of the kind exemplified by the propositions taken to be true in the context of theistic faith, it is morally permissible for people to take *p* to be true with full weight in their practical reasoning while correctly judging that it is not the case that *p*'s truth is adequately supported by their total available evidence, if and only if:
>
> a. the question whether *p* presents itself to them as a genuine option; and
> b. the question whether *p* is essentially evidentially undecidable; and
> c. their nonevidential motivation for taking *p* to be true is of a morally acceptable type; and
> d. *p*'s being true conforms with correct morality.[48]

With the J+ thesis in mind, Bishop's argument for the moral permissibility of having faith that God exists may be summarized as follows:

P1: There is no discoverable probabilifying evidence of God's existence.
C1: If we are to believe that God exists, we must do so independent of probabilifying evidence—that is, we must have faith that God exists.
P2: Having faith that God exists is morally acceptable so long as doing so accords with the J+ thesis.

[46] Bishop, 25.
[47] Ibid., 1.
[48] Ibid., 165. A "genuine option" is a decision that is living, forced, and momentous. A "living" option is one in which the two competing hypotheses are real possibilities for the person deciding between them. A "forced" option is one in which the two competing hypotheses collectively constitute all the available possibilities—no third hypothesis is possible. And a "momentous" option is one which is unique, significant, and irreversible.

P3: In some cases, having faith that God exists accords with the J + thesis.
C2: In such cases, having faith that God exists is morally acceptable.

Since Bishop believes there is no discoverable probabilifying evidence of God's existence, but that, nevertheless, it is morally acceptable to have faith that God exists, he is thereby a theistic fideist.

Problems for theistic philosophers

Having presented in more detail each of the three types of theistic philosopher to be examined here, I am now in a position to introduce the problems they face, each of which will be discussed more thoroughly in the chapters to come.

The word "problem" has at least two different senses. One sense of "problem" is "a question to be considered, solved, or answered," while another is "a misgiving, objection, or complaint."[49] The problems for theistic philosophers to be discussed in the subsequent chapters are initially understood as problems in the first sense—as questions to be considered. Upon critical reflection, however, they come to be understood as problems in the second sense—as objections.

Let us begin with the problem theistic inferentialists face. Theistic inferentialists have skeptical counterparts, of course—nontheistic philosophers. The very existence of nontheistic philosophers makes it clear that theistic inferentialists have failed to make the inferential evidential case for theism to them. And *that* they have failed to do so is a problem, one that will be referred to as the "problem of the theistic inferentialists." The problem is this—if there is discoverable inferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence, why have theistic inferentialists failed to make the inferential evidential case for theism to nontheistic philosophers? (Miserably, I might add, if the survey is any indication.) There are a number of possible solutions to this. But, as I argue in Chapter 2, of the most plausible possible solutions, each is either inadequate or incompatible with theistic inferentialists' defining beliefs. Thus, the problem *of* the theistic inferentialists is a problem *for* theistic inferentialists.

Theistic noninferentialists face a problem that is similar to, but distinct from, the problem theistic inferentialists face—one that will be referred to as the "problem of the hiddenness of God." (Though I raise the problem of the hiddenness of God here with respect to noninferential evidence, it can be and has been raised with respect to inferential evidence as well.)[50] The problem is this—if there is discoverable noninferential probabilifying evidence of God's existence, why is this evidence so scarcely apprehended, if it is apprehended at all? It is as if God is hiding from most of

[49] http://www.thefreedictionary.com/problem.
[50] See J. L. Schellenberg (1993), *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

us, if he even exists. There are a number of possible solutions to this problem, one of the most popular being that God's hiddenness is necessary if we are to have morally significant freedom and, with it, the ability to develop morally significant characters. In Chapter 3, I address this solution, arguing that it not only fails to adequately solve the problem of the hiddenness of God, it gives us reason to believe that God does not exist.

The problem theistic fideists face, one that will be referred to as the "problem of faith," is as follows—if there is no discoverable probabilifying evidence of God's existence, why think that it is morally acceptable to have faith that he exists? After all, that there is no discoverable probabilifying evidence of God's existence does not immediately *entail* that having faith that God exists is morally acceptable. Moreover, having faith that a belief is true may result in endangering, harming, and/or violating the rights of others. In this vein, I argue in Chapter 4 that there is at least one condition under which it is *prima facie* wrong to have faith that God exists—when one's belief that God exists will affect others and one has not attempted to believe that God exists on the basis of sufficient evidence.

Each type of theistic philosopher faces a particular problem, then, or so I shall argue. I shall also argue that all three types of theistic philosopher share two problems, what will be referred to as the "problem of skeptical theism" and the "problem of divine omniscience." Let us consider each of these problems in turn.

All three types of theistic philosopher assume that we can know what God would do (either in particular cases or in general, directly or indirectly). Theistic inferentialists and theistic noninferentialists, for example, assume we can know that God would allow for there to be discoverable inferential and noninferential probabilifying evidence of his existence (respectively). Theistic fideists, on the other hand, assume that we can know that God would *not* allow for there to be discoverable probabilifying evidence of his existence, that God would be pleased with our wagering on his existence (Pascal), that God would allow us to "have" him (Kierkegaard), and so on. Yet, not all theistic philosophers assume that we can know what God would do. Certain theistic philosophers, to be referred to here as "skeptical theistic philosophers," doubt that we can know what God would do, at least in some cases. So, a fundamental question arises—*can* we know what God would do? This will be referred to as the "problem of skeptical theism." And, in Chapter 5, I argue that, of the possible answers to this question, each produces a problem for all three types of theistic philosopher.

A second problem that all three types of theistic philosopher share is the belief that God—as essentially omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good—is a logically possible being. Many philosophers have attempted to demonstrate that this is false, usually by way of arguing that it is logically impossible for something to be essentially omniscient and/or essentially omnipotent and/or essentially perfectly good. In Chapter 6, I follow this strategy, arguing that it is logically impossible for God to be essentially omniscient. This will be referred to as the "problem of divine omniscience."

Conclusion

The battle over what I have suggested is a philosophical version of the Alamo—theism—has been and continues to be fought with ammunition both evidential and nonevidential in nature. The defenders of theism may be divided into three categories—theistic inferentialists, theistic noninferentialists, and theistic fideists. Each of these theistic philosophers faces a problem unique to his or her type, and they all share two problems. And, though these problems might not be entirely insurmountable, they give us additional reason to think that—like the defenders of the Alamo before them—theistic philosophers may be in the last throes of their defense.