

God: the Next Version

Mark F. Sharlow

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1. Forget Everything You Know about God

What did they tell you about God?

Did they tell you that God is the creator? Did they tell you that God is the explanation for the whole universe and everything in it?

Did they tell you that God is supernatural—beyond the natural world, like a great big ghost?

Did they say that if you don't believe the universe is the creation of an intelligent being, then you can't believe in God?

Did they tell you that if you believe in science, then you can't believe in God?

Did they tell you that God is a person? Did they tell you that God is one person, or several persons? Or did they tell you that God is impersonal—maybe something like a force or spirit that exists throughout nature?

Did they tell you that God works miracles?

Did they tell you that God is real—or did they tell you that God is only imaginary?

Did they tell you that God is an illusion of the human mind? If so, what did they tell you about that illusion?

Did they tell you that belief in God is just wishful thinking—a comforting belief with no

basis in fact?

Did they tell you that people believe in God only because parents, teachers and clergy drill the belief into them as children? Or that people believe in God only because people are insecure—or in denial—or just plain stupid?

Did they tell you that science has disproven God? Did they tell you that belief in God is a useless idea, now that the human race has science to explain everything?

Did they tell you that belief in God causes hatred and wars? Or did they tell you that believing in God makes people better?

Or did they tell you that God is the only reality, containing the whole universe as a part?

People have said all these things—and much more—about God. The argument between believers and unbelievers just rolls on and on, with no end in sight. Believers keep on believing in God, and keep feeling that it's important to believe in God. Atheists keep on insisting that belief in God is wrong. There are smart people on each side—but their smartness doesn't help them agree on anything, and doesn't make them nice to each other.

Each side in the God debate thinks it has the truth. Some people on each side feel that those on the other side are a bunch of fire-breathing idiots. Some get persuaded by the other side, and switch over. But many others do not change over, and continue to think as they always have thought.

So what's the answer? Is there a God, or isn't there? Can we ever know?

In this book, I'm going to introduce you to a different way of thinking about God. Most believers and unbelievers haven't heard of this other way. This different way of thinking

isn't just some new argument for or against God. Instead, it goes behind and beyond the usual debate over God, to show what the debate really is about. (Hint: The question of the existence of God isn't really about a supernatural creator at all—and wishful thinking and illusion are not all that keeps belief in God going!)

The view of God that I will present here is not a new religious faith. Instead, it's an exploration—an attempt to open up new and better ways of thinking about God. This different view of God isn't completely new. It builds on the work of some noted philosophers. I'll mention these thinkers in the book and especially in the notes at the end.

By the time you finish this book, you might discover that the God vs. no-God debate is not what you thought it was. Atheists and believers alike may find my conclusions uncomfortable, or even shocking. But given the sorry state of religious thought today, it is important to explore new ideas about God.

Forget everything you know about God. Let's get started.

2. What “God” Really Means

There are many arguments for and against the existence of God. When I read these arguments, I often feel that the writers have different ideas about what the word “God” really means. If we want to debate God’s existence responsibly, we should at least know something about what we mean by “God.”

Who, or what, is God?

When believers or unbelievers use the word “God,” what kind of being do they have in mind?

One way to answer these questions is to say that God is the creator of the universe. The idea of a creator is one of the ideas that passes through our minds when we think of God. Most religions that believe in God also teach that God is the creator. The idea of God as creator also is important to atheists, who often try to disprove God by arguing that no one created the universe.

However, the idea of a creator is not the whole story about God. Believers do not just think of God as creator or cause of the universe. They also think of God as a *supremely good* being—a being who is good, and who is good to a greater degree than any other being.

Philosophers already have studied this idea of God. In fact, this idea is important in Western theology. I’ll mention some of the earlier philosophers’ work in the notes at the end of this book [1]. For now, I just want to talk about what this idea means for religious belief in general.

Most believers might never use the expression “supremely good being.” However, when you examine the beliefs that many believers hold, you can tell that the believers think of God that way. Believers often think God is the standard of goodness. They think anything that agrees with the will of God is good, and anything that conflicts with the will of God is bad. Believers in God typically think that God is not only good, but *all-good*. Often they feel that God is forgiving, and that God loves everyone. They feel that we should love God—and that we could not help loving God if we truly knew God.

Most believers might never hear about the definition of “supremely good being,” but they believe in such a being nonetheless.

By “goodness” I do not mean moral behavior—though believers usually think that God wants what is morally right. Instead, “goodness” means having qualities that are valuable and admirable when we find them in any being. Love, mercy and wisdom are examples of these qualities. If God is supremely good, then God has these qualities to the best degree currently attainable.

If there were a supremely good being, what would he, she or it be like?

Let’s find out.

First, let’s use the abbreviation “SGB” for “supremely good being,” so we don’t have to say “supremely good being” over and over again.

An SGB would have all the qualities that are valuable and admirable when they occur in any being. For example, an SGB would be loving, merciful, and wise. What is more, an SGB would be more loving, merciful and wise *than any other being*. Many beings in the universe have good qualities like love, mercy and wisdom—but an SGB would have these qualities to the maximum degree.

An SGB is very different from the God of the religious fanatics who believe in a mean and cruel deity. Anyone who does evil in the name of religion is far from understanding the SGB idea of God. However, this idea of a *supremely good being* is very close to what ordinary, good-hearted believers mean when they say “God.” An SGB would be the “gold standard” for goodness, and would be worthy of our unreserved love.

It’s interesting to notice that there can be at most one SGB in the universe [2]. If there were two SGBs, each of them would be good to a greater degree than the other, which doesn’t make sense.

Someone might try to argue that the idea of an SGB is pointless because there’s no such thing as “good” in reality. According to this argument, our human conceptions of what is good are simply products of our biological evolution, so they are illusions. (One sometimes hears skeptics say things like this.) However, this argument is wrong. The biological background of humans might give us certain feelings about what is good—but there’s nothing wrong with that! This wouldn’t imply that the good is unreal. Our biological evolution also gives us eyes—but no one would say that the objects we see are unreal, just because our ability to see them is a product of evolution!

If evolution gave us a sense of values, that wouldn’t mean that values are unreal. (If the skeptics really believed there are no real values, then they wouldn’t have any reason to be skeptics—because skepticism also would be of no value!)

Different people have different ideas about the good, but this does not imply that there is no real goodness. Different people’s eyes see different views—but by reasoning and comparison, they often can decide what’s really there.

The word “good” is tricky. Careless use of that word can get you tangled up in some howling mistakes. It’s important to remember that “good,” when applied to God, does not just mean “morally good.” Real goodness includes a wide range of worthwhile

qualities, including such things as beauty and wisdom. Also, “good” need not refer to the many petty, small kinds of “goodness” that people often consider important—like behaving yourself in public (something that the great social reformers did not always do). Some of what people call “morality” is just social convention having little to do with real goodness. (The same can be said for beauty; the people society regards as “ugly” often are the most beautiful when seen clearly.) Finally, “good” does not imply a judgmental attitude, or a ranking of one human being above another. To say that God is good to the highest degree is not to say that we can rank humans according to how good they are. (The “I’m better than you” disputes that happen among status-conscious people have absolutely nothing to do with real goodness.)

So far, we have found two possible ideas of God: the idea of a creator, and the idea of a supremely good being. Which one do we really mean when we say “God”? Creator, or SGB?

One possibility is that God is both. This would fit well with what most religions teach. But does God *have* to be both? Does a being have to be both creator of the universe *and* supremely good to qualify as God? Or could God be one and not the other—and still be God? Is one of these two ideas of God more important than the other?

To find out the answer to this question, try the following experiment. The experiment gives you two scenarios (called A and B) to imagine. Imagine each one of them, and think about the questions that go with it.

Scenario A:

Suppose that a conscious being created the universe. Suppose that this being was not very good, but was evil, mean, and foolish instead.

Would you want to call that being God?

Or would it be more correct to say that someone besides God created the universe?

For Scenario A, the most reasonable-sounding answer is the second one. An evil fool would not really be God. Why call a being “God” when that being is something you cannot admire—something you cannot even dream of worshipping?

Scenario B:

Suppose there is a being who wants the best for everyone. Suppose that this being loves everyone, is kind, and is merciful. Suppose that this being has these qualities in the highest degree, making it more loving, kind, and merciful than any other being in the universe. Suppose also that this being is conscious, intelligent, and wise—at least as much so as all other beings combined.

Suppose, further, that this being is supremely *beautiful*—at least in a mental and spiritual way. This means that if you could mentally grasp what that being really is like, you would be overwhelmed and floored by the beauty of the experience. This being is *more beautiful than anything else*.

Do you think you could love this being? Would you be able to worship this being? Would you say this being is “divine”? Would you be willing to call this being “God”? Could this being be anything else *but* God?

In Scenario B, the most sensible answer to the question is “yes.” It would make sense to call this being God. This would be a unique, perfect being—a being worthy of unbounded admiration, not only by you and me, but by every being in the physical universe. What else could the word “God” possibly mean?

The being in Scenario A is the creator of the universe but not an SGB. The being in Scenario B is an SGB.

Now, notice an interesting fact. In Scenario B, I said nothing about whether the SGB created the universe. Perhaps this being created the universe—or perhaps not. We were able to decide the being was worthy to be called “God.” We decided this without even knowing whether the being created the universe.

Here is the take-home lesson from this experiment: *The idea of God is the idea of a supremely good being.* This idea of God—and not the idea of the universal creator—should be our main idea of God.

If there is a God at all, then God is a supremely good being. Since there can be one SGB at most, we can say that if there is a God, then God is *the* supremely good being.

I’m not claiming that God isn’t the creator (though that’s a possibility worth discussing [3]). For all we know, perhaps God is the creator too. But whatever else God is, God is a supremely good being.

The word “God” means “the supremely good being.” If there is a supremely good being, then there is a God. If there is no supremely good being, then there is no God—even if someone, or *something*, created the universe.

This idea of God puts the dispute between believers and atheists in a surprising light. If

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we want to know whether there's a God, we should worry less about who or what caused the universe. Instead, we should think about whether there is a supremely good being.

3. The Creation Mistake

Many religions teach that God caused the universe to begin. Today, some believers think God was the cause of the Big Bang, which is the event that modern science says started the universe. Because of these beliefs, many people think that if there were no creator who caused the universe to begin, then there would be no God.

Believers often think that way. Atheists often do too.

Believers sometimes think it's an insult to God to say that random natural forces started the universe. Many believers feel that a purely natural origin for the universe would contradict their faith in God. Some have thought that the scientific study of the beginning of the universe is a threat to faith. These believers think that *if* no one caused the Big Bang, then there would be no God.

Some atheists say exactly the same thing. They think that if no one caused the Big Bang, then there would be no God. Atheists sometimes claim that since we don't know what came before the Big Bang, we shouldn't assume there had to be an intelligent cause for the Big Bang. Atheists sometimes argue that we shouldn't believe in God because science hasn't shown that the Big Bang has an intelligent cause.

The believers and the atheists are equally wrong. They overlook the fact that there could be a God even if the Big Bang were *not* caused by an intelligent creator. God, if there is a God at all, is the supremely good being. There could be a supremely good being—a being who is the most admirable and adorable being imaginable—even if the Big Bang had no cause at all. There could be a supremely good being even if random physical forces caused the Big Bang, or even if the universe always existed and never had a

beginning.

Yes—there could be a God even if the Universe had no beginning!

Some people's religious beliefs would be in trouble if it turned out the universe had no beginning. Some people strongly believe that God is the cause of the beginning of the physical universe. These believers would have a problem if the universe had no beginning, or if the beginning had natural causes. Those who believe this way might have to change some of their beliefs. But they absolutely would NOT have to stop believing in God!

There could be a supremely good being even if there were no creator. However, there might be a creator even if the universe had natural physical origins or had no beginning! There are at least two ways this could happen.

Some philosophers have suggested that God might be responsible for creating every new moment of time. [4] According to this view, as time rolls forward, and new moments of time come into being, it's God who makes possible the existence of each of those new moments. There's nothing in science to rule out the possibility that God is behind the creation of new moments. In this way, God could be the creator of the universe, even if God had nothing special to do with kicking off the Big Bang.

There's another way that God could have created the universe without being the literal cause of the Big Bang. The noted philosopher Leibniz wrote about this way. [5] His idea, in brief, was that God might create a whole history of the universe—containing past, present, and future—as one unit, instead of just starting the universe at the beginning and leaving it run. By this method of creation, God could make a universe that needs no supernatural tinkering at all. No one would touch off the Big Bang; no one would have to meddle in the universe later. The whole universe could run according to natural laws at all times. And yet God would be the creator of it all.

I'm not going to argue for or against either of these ideas of creation. I'm only mentioning them to make a point. The point is that there are many ways a creator could make a universe. Some of those methods of creation could lead to a universe in which the Big Bang, and everything else, has natural causes. For science, such a universe would look exactly as it would look if there were no creator—yet there would be a creator.

There could be a creator even if the beginning of the universe had purely natural causes—or even if the universe had no beginning. Also, as we saw earlier, there could be a God even if there were no creator at all. There still could be a supremely good being, even if that being did not make the universe.

These ideas might seem offensive to some believers. Many people believe firmly that God is the literal cause of the beginning of the universe. I'm not going to argue for or against that belief (at least not yet). I'm only discussing these possibilities to point out an important mistake in our thinking about God. This mistake is the belief that if there were no literal conscious cause of the beginning—no one who caused the Big Bang—then there would not be a God. We need to get past this mistake and realize that there can be a God no matter what started the universe.

Scientific discoveries about the beginning of the universe might lead us to change some of our traditional beliefs about God. None of these discoveries can show that there is no God, because God might exist without causing the beginning of the universe.

4. The Abstract God

What kind of being is God?

Is God a material thing, like the items in the physical world around us?

Is God a spiritual thing, made of a mental kind of substance invisible to the human eye?

People sometimes think of God in both of these ways. However, there is another possible answer to the question.

God might not be a thing at all. Instead, God might be what philosophers call an *abstract object*. [6]

A. Abstract Objects: a Whirlwind Tour

What is an abstract object?

Our daily experience shows that there are other kinds of “items” besides concrete material objects. We live in a material world, yet not everything around us is a material thing. Material things are not just vague, featureless things. Instead, all material things have *properties*, or (as I will call them here) *qualities*.

What are some examples of qualities? All red objects have the quality of redness. All triangular objects have the quality of being triangular (which we also could call the quality of triangularity). All hard things have the quality of hardness. All liquids have the quality of liquidity.

Redness, triangularity, hardness, and liquidity are examples of qualities. They are not things—they are the qualities of things. There are red things in the world—but there also is a quality, redness, that these things have in common.

Qualities are examples of *abstract objects*. They are not things, but are found in things. Usually they are features of things. The mind can pick them out by examining many similar things and recognizing something in common.

Qualities don't have to belong to physical objects. There are some qualities that belong to other qualities. For example, redness, greenness and blueness are color qualities—they share the quality of *being color qualities*. Rectangularity, triangularity, and circularity all share the quality of *being geometric qualities*. So there are qualities of qualities, as well as qualities of things.

Other examples of abstract objects are *relations*. These are features that connect together more than one thing. For example, one mountain may be taller than another. The relation of *being taller than* connects together two physical things. *Being taller than* is not just a quality that one thing can have. It is a relation that can connect two things. A more familiar example of a relation is friendship. This is a relation that holds between any two people who are friends of each other.

For still other examples of abstract objects, we can look at *patterns*. The posts in a wooden fence form a definite, repeating pattern. Once your mind has recognized this pattern, you can notice it in fences anywhere. If you do digital photography, you probably know about the “Moiré patterns” that appear in some photos. These are patterns made of straight or curved bars of dark and light. A computer program also is a pattern—a pattern of bits of information, which can be found in any processor that is running the program.

Patterns, qualities, and relations are important to our reasoning and our experience. We

find patterns, qualities, and relationships in the world around us. We did not invent them; they really are there. Yet these items do not “exist” in the same way that a physical object exists. They are not things at all. They are *abstract objects*.

Philosophers have long debated whether abstract objects are truly real. I think this question is somewhat confused. Instead of worrying about this question, we should just accept that our world contains physical objects, patterns, qualities, and relations, and stop fretting about which of these objects “really” exists. Patterns, qualities and relations do not “exist” in the same way in which sticks and stones “exist”—yet clearly a Moiré pattern in a photograph *really is there*. We should not try to deny that this pattern is real, even though it is “only” a pattern and not a physical object. The photographer who denies that a conspicuous Moiré pattern is there may end up losing a customer! And it seems rather silly to claim that a computer program is unreal.

I am not going to take up the debate over the reality of abstract objects. (At least I’m not going to take it up here; I’ve discussed it enough in my other writings.) For now, we can bypass this entire debate by noticing that abstract objects are *real enough for all practical purposes*. Colors, patterns, shapes, and the like are real enough. We can work with them (as artists and engineers do) or reason about them in our thinking.

B. God, the Abstract Object

Now I am going to examine an outrageous idea about God. This is the idea that *God is an abstract object*.

If this idea is true, then God is neither a material thing nor some kind of invisible spirit-stuff or mind-stuff. Instead, God is an abstract object—an entity of the same general kind as qualities, relations, and the Moiré pattern in a digital photo.

At first, this view might seem to cheapen God. It says that God is not a thing, not even a ghostly thing. It says that God is a “non-thing”—an abstract object. God is not a material thing, and is not an invisible spiritual substance either. God simply is not a thing at all.

This does *not* mean that God is nothing! It only means that God has the same kind of reality that abstract objects have. The Moiré pattern in a digital photo is not “nothing.” The redness of a flower is not “nothing.” The relation of friendship certainly is not “nothing.” But none of these are *things*.

I am suggesting that perhaps God also is not a thing.

The view that God is an abstract object may seem outrageous at first. Actually, it’s fairly close to some known religious ideas about God. Religious mystics sometimes say that God is beyond “existence” as we usually think of existence. This view that God does not exist like a thing does not lessen God in any way. Instead, it makes God even greater! This idea says that God is more than just a hunk of matter-like spiritual stuff. The idea that God is an abstract object may be more complimentary to God than are the usual, ghostly views of God!

Some philosophers have argued that the human personality or self is an abstract object instead of a concrete physical object. [7] If this is so, then an abstract God would be just as real as you or me! If the human soul or spirit is an abstract object, and God is an abstract object too, then the old religious saying that “God is a spirit” takes on a new meaning. An abstract “spirit” of this kind would be different from the supernatural “spirits” of traditional belief. However, an abstract spirit would be a *real spirit*—not just a watered-down version of the spirit, but a real presence that is more than just the matter of the body.

Is God really an abstract object? Read on for a possible answer.

C. The Good Itself [8]

The next big question is: If God is an abstract object, what kind of abstract object might God be?

I am going to suggest an answer to this question. First, I want to take a closer look at the idea of the “good.”

Earlier in this book, I said that God is the supremely good being. What kind of abstract object could be a supremely good being?

There is one abstract object that just might fill the bill. To find out what this object is, we first need to look at some examples.

If a person is merciful, that person has the quality of mercy. The quality of mercy is a *good* quality. It is a quality that is good, valuable, and worthwhile to have.

If a person is wise, that person has the quality of wisdom. This too is a good quality.

Imagine a vast green meadow. If this meadow is beautiful, then the meadow has the quality of beauty. This is a good quality. The value of beauty is aesthetic instead of ethical. But beauty has value nonetheless. It is a good quality.

The fact that different things seem beautiful to different people doesn’t affect what I just said. If the meadow looks beautiful to anyone, then the beauty that they find in it is a *quality*—and this quality is a good quality, not a bad or neutral one.

The qualities of mercy, wisdom, and beauty have a quality in common—they are *good* qualities.

There are many other examples of good qualities. It isn't always easy for us to tell whether a quality is good. People might have legitimate differences of opinion about the goodness of some qualities. But that doesn't change my point. The point is that *some* qualities are good.

The qualities that are good all have something in common: they are good. In other words, they have a quality that we could call *goodness*. This "goodness" is a quality that other qualities (like real beauty or kindness) can have.

To prevent confusion, let's make up a new word for the kind of goodness found in good qualities—the kind of "goodness" that we just defined. Let's borrow a term from the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, and call this quality *the Good Itself* [9]. This name makes sense, because the quality we're dealing with isn't just a normal good quality. Instead, it's what all good qualities have in common. It isn't just one specific kind of good—it's the Good Itself!

The Good Itself is a quality that other qualities can have. Good qualities are instances of the Good Itself. However, a physical object also can "have" the Good Itself indirectly, by having good qualities. A physical object can show or reveal the Good Itself by having those qualities which have the Good Itself.

Earlier I suggested that God is an abstract object. Now I'll suggest which abstract object God might be. Warning: This is only a preliminary suggestion! Later on I will change this suggestion a little, and argue that God is something more than just this abstract object. But for now, I'll use this suggestion as a starting point for further discussion.

Here is the preliminary suggestion: *God is the Good Itself*.

(Actually, this is about the same as Plato's idea of what the supreme being or supreme

reality is like. However, my definition of the Good Itself is different from Plato's. I leave it to the Plato scholars to figure out how different it really is.)

D. The Divine Universe

Let's start with the assumption that God is the Good Itself, and see where it leads us.

God is an abstract object—a quality. However, this is not all there is to God. A quality seldom, if ever, stands alone. Most or all qualities have *instances*—items that have the quality. For the quality of redness, the instances are all the red things in the world. For the quality of triangularity, the instances are all triangular things. And so forth.

Besides its instances, a quality can have what you might call *reflectors*. These are items that don't necessarily have the quality, but that reveal or show the quality in some way. This idea of a reflector is important, but somewhat subtle. The following four examples will show what I mean by a reflector.

(1) Suppose you fall asleep in a garden and have a dream about red roses. You aren't actually seeing anything red. Somehow, your brain is representing the color red, or processing information about the color red, within itself. But there are no red things (instances of red) before your eyes. You could say that your dreaming brain is a *reflector* of the quality of redness. It doesn't have the redness of the rose, but it reveals or shows that quality in some way. (How the brain does this is a question best left to brain scientists.)

(2) When you see a picture of a boat, and you are in the right mood, you may be reminded of the beauty and wonder of the sea. The great beauty and wonder of the sea are qualities of the sea, not of the picture of the boat. (The picture, of course, might be beautiful in its own way—but not like the sea!) However, the picture acts as a *reflector*

of those qualities of wonder and natural beauty, because it shows or reveals them to you (with a lot of help from your imagination).

(3) A merciful person has the quality called mercy. Mercy is a virtue. Thus, a merciful person is an instance of mercy, but a reflector of the quality of being a virtue.

(4) Think about a red rose. The rose is red. Red is a quality. Hence the rose is an instance of the quality red. However, red is a color. Red has the quality that artists would call *being a warm color*. When you look at the rose, you can notice that it's red. However, if you have a good eye for color, you also can feel that there's something warm about its color. In other words, you can notice not only the red, but red's quality of *being a warm color*. Thus, the rose shows or reveals the quality of being a warm color, even though the rose doesn't have this quality itself (the color red has this quality instead). We could say that the rose is *reflecting* the quality of being a warm color, without *having* that quality.

Warning: Do not confuse this kind of "reflector" with other kinds of "reflectors," like reflectors of light in physics! In this book I'm using the word "reflector" with a special meaning. It seemed like a good word to use for this idea.

A reflector of a quality does not have to be an instance of that quality. (A dream of a red rose is not actually red.) However, an instance of a quality is a reflector of that quality, because it shows or reveals the quality. (A real red rose is a reflector of red, because it is an instance of red.) Thus, I'll use the word "reflector" to mean either an instance or a reflector of some other kind.

My preliminary suggestion was that God is the quality that we called "the Good Itself." The instances of the Good Itself are good qualities, like beauty, mercy, and kindness. What are the reflectors of the Good Itself? All things that have the good qualities!

Everything that has a good quality is a reflector of the Good Itself.

A beautiful meadow is an instance of beauty. By being an instance of beauty, it shows and reveals the Good Itself. Therefore, the meadow is a reflector of the Good Itself.

A beautiful person also is a reflector of the Good Itself, for the same reason. (This means a person in whom you find beauty, or in whom someone finds beauty. It does *not* mean a person who fits society's silly, artificial standards of beauty.)

A person who shows mercy, kindness, or wisdom is a reflector of the Good Itself. The good acts that such a person performs—acts of mercy or kindness, or wise acts—also are reflectors of the Good Itself.

If God is the Good Itself, then God is an abstract object—but God is not just a “bare” abstract object with no physical presence. God has many, many reflectors in the physical world. [10] These reflectors include the things, persons, and qualities in the physical universe that show forth the Good Itself. These reflectors are connected to God in ways that reveal or manifest God. The reflectors may be instances of the Good Itself (as love, mercy, and beauty are), or else they reflect the Good Itself in other ways (as do loving and merciful people and beautiful meadows).

If the abstract quality of the Good Itself were alone in the universe, that quality would have no physical reality. However, God is not alone. Countless creatures reflect God in a countless number of ways. Speaking poetically, we can think of all these creatures as forming the “body” of God. The naked abstract quality of the Good Itself is only the core, or essential “self,” of God. In the real universe, this quality is spread among billions of physical beings, all showing the essence of God in their own ways. We can think of the sum total of these creatures as forming God's body. [11]

This “body” isn't much like a human or animal body. Perhaps we shouldn't really call it

a body at all. But we can call it a “body” if we speak metaphorically—in the same way that we can say a rose garden “embodies” redness. And this body is like a human body in one important respect. Your body, and especially your brain, reflect the abstract object called your “self” or “personality.” In a similar way, the “body” of God reflects God. The analogy is far from perfect, but it is close enough. So I’ll keep using the term “body of God” to mean the sum total of all reflectors.

Once we recognize that God has a body, we also can say that God has consciousness. Every time a conscious experience reflects God, that conscious experience is part of the body of God. Every time a conscious being reflects God, that being is, for a time, a part of the body of God. God might, or might not, have a conscious mind separate from the physical universe. (I can’t rule out either possibility.) But in any case, the body of God is partly a conscious body. There is consciousness in God. That consciousness includes the conscious experiences of creatures, whenever those experiences reflect God. [12]

This “consciousness of God” isn’t unified as our consciousness seems to be. God’s consciousness consists of the consciousness of many different individual beings. Perhaps we could say (as many Christians and Hindus do) that God, though basically one, has various persons or personalities. [13] However, the “persons” I have in mind here are simply individual beings like us, along with any other conscious beings that might exist. Belief in supernatural “persons” is not required.

Just as God can be conscious by having reflectors, so God can act in the world by having reflectors. If the Good Itself were simply a solitary, isolated abstract object, it could not perform actions. However, the Good Itself is not alone. Billions of creatures are doing actions that aim toward the good. Because these actions (events) have good qualities, they are reflectors of God and are parts of the body of God. We can say that they are the actions of God.

Thus, we can think of God as a being with a mind and a body. God’s “body” is the sum

total of all reflectors of God. God's "mind" is the sum total of all conscious or mental events that are reflectors of God. Behind this mind and body lies the abstract core of God, the Good Itself.

E. A Concept of God

Earlier I said that I was going to change my suggestion about God being the Good Itself. Now I am going to make that change. Here is my updated suggestion about what God is:

God is the whole composed of the Good Itself and all reflectors of the Good Itself.

Now we have arrived at the alternative concept of God that I hinted at earlier. Here are a few key points about this concept:

1. At bottom, God is an abstract object and not a thing. This abstract object is not all there is to God, but it is an essential part of God.
2. This abstract object is the quality we have called the Good Itself. This is the abstract quality that all good qualities have in common.
3. However, God is not simply a naked abstract object existing alone. God also has "reflectors"—countless objects, beings, events and qualities in the physical universe that show and reveal the Good Itself.
4. These reflectors, taken together, form a kind of body for God. Through them, God has consciousness and physical and mental powers. These powers are not supernatural, and are not God's alone. They are just the natural powers of the beings that reflect God.

5. God is the sum total of all these reflectors, together with the core quality of the Good Itself.

F. Back to the Supremely Good Being

Earlier I said that God is the supremely good being. Now we can begin to see what this means.

According to the view of God I presented in this chapter, God is based on an abstract object, the Good Itself. This quality is what all good qualities have in common. Therefore, it is the very pinnacle of good. No other type of good can exist without it.

What is more, this supreme good is reflected in a “body” that contains all good qualities, beings, and actions. This body also is part of God. *Since the body of God already contains everything that is good, no other being can be as good as God.*

God is supremely good indeed!

G. Is God a Person?

Is God a person? Some believers don't feel that an impersonal God could be the real God. The idea of God I just suggested does not equate God to a single, unique, timeless person, as some forms of theology do. However, my idea of God is not impersonal at all. God might be a person without being the same single unique person for all time. God, as the manifest or embodied Good Itself, can “be” (be reflected as) any number of persons. For God to be personal, isn't it enough that a person is a reflector of the whole of the Good Itself?

H. Another Kind of Creation

Earlier I said that God need not be the creator of the universe to be God. Also, I said that there are ways God could have created the universe without being the cause of the beginning of the universe. If we equate God to the embodied Good Itself, we can find yet another way that God could be the source of the universe.

Think of the Big Bang. This is the event that started the universe. We owe everything we have, including our very existence, to this event. The Big Bang might not be a consciously designed act, but because it is the source of everything in the universe, it is an example of great good on a cosmic scale. Because of its supreme value and worth to all beings in the cosmos, the Big Bang is a reflector of the Good Itself. Thus, it is part of the body of God. In this sense, the universe started in God, even if the Big Bang was not consciously designed.

Something similar could be said for the processes that shape the cosmos after its beginning. These processes include the evolution of life and all the other natural processes that make the universe what it is. (For example, there is the set of non-biological processes that lead to the creation of galaxies, stars and planets. These processes are evolutionary in the broad sense of the word, even though they are not much like biological evolution.) Many of these natural processes are crucial to the existence of living beings in the cosmos. We owe our entire existence to such processes. Therefore, these processes are reflectors of the Good Itself for the same reason that the Big Bang is a reflector of the Good Itself. In this sense only, the evolution of life on Earth is a process occurring within God. This is the case even though evolution is *completely* natural and does not involve any supernatural tinkering. (Note that this view of evolution has absolutely nothing to do with creationism or any of its modern variations!)

5. Beyond the All-Powerful

Believers in God typically think God is all-powerful. Our new idea of God does not guarantee that God is all-powerful. The traditional theological “problem of evil”—the question of why an all-good and all-powerful God would permit evil to happen—strongly suggests that a supremely good being cannot be all-powerful.

Even if we reject the old idea of an all-powerful God, we still can believe that God is “all-powerful” in another, more subtle way.

When conscious beings in the universe do good, they are acting in favor of the supremely good being, whether they realize it or not. They are doing deeds that reflect God’s goodness. Such deeds are parts of what I have called “the body of God.” Therefore, when *we* do good in the world, we are contributing our own powers to God’s overall power. In a sense, our powers become God’s powers too. By “sharing” our powers with God in this way, we are, in effect, making God stronger. If all physical beings became adherents of the good, then all the powers of conscious beings would be acting on behalf of God.

We can think of God as potentially becoming more powerful over time. Whether God actually becomes more powerful depends on how physical beings behave. Though God is not all-powerful, we can think of God as *potentially all-powerful*—as capable of moving toward a pinnacle of ability that would make good qualities like love, mercy and kindness paramount in the cosmos.

Any good deed that beings in the universe can do, God can do too. We can say this because if physical beings do a good deed, they are doing it on behalf of God, whether or not they realize it. Any good deed that creatures in the universe possibly can do, God can

do too—not because God has supernatural powers, but because if creatures do a good deed, then that deed is part of God’s effort toward the good. This is true only of good deeds, not of bad ones. A bad deed does not reflect the quality of goodness, and hence is not part of the “body of God” (unless perhaps there also is something overridingly good about the deed).

In this sense, *God can do all things eventually*. Even if God is not “all-powerful” in the old-fashioned sense of that term, God still is “all-powerful” in a less dramatic sense. God can do anything that any creature or combination of creatures can do—perhaps not today, but in some possible tomorrow.

6. How Spiritual Experience Might Work

A. Knowing the Abstract God

Many so-called religious experiences are merely products of hallucination or illusion. However, if our new view of God is right, then some religious experiences yield real knowledge of God. They can do this because of a peculiarity of the way that the human mind knows about abstract objects. [14]

In an experience of an ordinary physical object (like a table), the object helps to cause the experience—for example, by reflecting light into your eyes so you can see the object. If the table isn't causing anything to happen in you, then you aren't really having an experience of the table, even if it seems like you are. For abstract objects, things are not this simple. Some experiences of abstract objects yield real impressions of those objects, even though the abstract object is not causing the experience.

Think about experiences of colors. [14] Colors are qualities of things; hence colors are abstract objects. If you see a green flash, then you know you have had an experience of the color green. This is true if you see the green with your eyes—but it is equally true if you had an illusory experience of green. If someone hit you over the head and you saw a green flash, then you *really experienced* the color green—even if that experience was a hallucination produced by your brain, and had nothing to do with external reality. The experience of *green* is real, even if it came from your brain and no real green object was involved. Thus, you can have a real experience of an abstract object (green) even if the cause of the experience is not an instance of the abstract object.

In this respect, abstract objects are very different from concrete physical objects. If you

see a horse and there is no horse there, then you have had a false experience (a hallucination). But if you see green, then you *did* experience *green*, even if there was no real green light and the experience itself involved a hallucination.

Now let's look at another kind of experience of an abstract object. This is an experience of the *sublime*—an experience important to poets, to artists, and to every lover who ever lived.

Think of our earlier example about the color green. When you experience the color green, you know it—and you can be confident that you really experienced green. In the same way, when you experience the sublime, you know it. In moments of great love, or encounters with overwhelming beauty, you feel the wonder and immense significance of what you are experiencing. In those moments, there is no question that *this* is of value, that *this* is ultimately good.

When this experience happens, you are feeling the real *goodness* of what you are experiencing. To use a term I used earlier, you are experiencing the Good Itself.

According to our new idea of God, the Good Itself, together with its reflectors, is God. Therefore, when you experience the sublime, you are literally experiencing God. An experience of the sublime provides a glimpse of what God is like.

Experiences of this kind need not involve anything supernatural. As far as I know, they do not involve God acting supernaturally on your brain. These experiences can happen even if God does nothing to you. They are purely the results of information processing within your brain. Nothing supernatural is needed.

An experience of this kind can be a real encounter with God *even if the experience itself is an illusion*. This is because you can know you experienced an abstract quality, even if the experience of that quality is an illusion or a hallucination. An experience of green

really is an experience of the color green, even if a blow on the head (and not green light in the eye) caused the experience. If you see something that looks square to you, then you are having a real experience of the quality of squareness. This is the case even if the object isn't really square, but is merely a long quadrilateral seen from an odd angle. Similarly, your experience of the quality of the Good Itself really is an experience of the quality of the Good Itself, even if the experience is caused by an illusion of some kind.

Humans can find God through experiences of the sublime in physical things. You might suddenly experience a beloved person as utterly sublime. *When this happens, it is an experience of God for you.* This also can happen with experiences of nature. When you experience some awesome feature of the natural world as sublime, you are experiencing God. [15]

A number of mystics and poets have felt that they found God through the physical world—especially in the beauties of nature or in love. Because of the way the human mind experiences abstract objects, these experiences of God can be accurate. Any physical being that seems sublime to you is, in a sense, an example of God *for you*, no matter what that being is like in physical reality.

Some experiences traditionally regarded as “mystical” can be experiences of God in this same way. In many so-called mystical experiences, the observer suddenly feels that everything in the universe is one and that the universe as a whole is indescribably good. In this case, the universe itself is seen as utterly sublime, and becomes an example of the Good Itself for the observer.

B. The Rights and Wrongs of Religions

The way of encountering God in other beings, as I just described it, is not limited to experiences of physical objects. There is no reason why abstract objects, or even ideas

created by the human mind (information patterns in the brain), could not reflect the Good Itself in the same way that physical objects do. If an idea or an abstract entity seems sublime to you, then you can encounter God through that idea or abstract entity.

Think about the gods of mythologies and religions. I'm talking now about "gods" with a small "g"—the great supernatural beings in which mythologies and religions believe. This is different from "God" with a big "G", which I have been discussing until now. It's important not to confuse these two very different kinds of being. A small letter can make a big difference. God and gods are two different things.

In mythologies and religions there are many small-g gods. Do any of these gods exist outside of the human mind, or are they all products of our imaginations?

Instead of trying to answer this question, I'd like to point out that gods (with a small "g") can be important even if they exist only in the human mind. If people believe in a god and tell stories about that god, then that god is a property of stories created by the human mind. One also might think of the god as an information pattern that exists in human brains. [16] Either way, the god is an abstract object.

Even if the gods of a religion exist only in the mind, a believer guided by love and by a good heart might be able to feel the sublime while worshipping these *features of stories* or *patterns of information*. This can happen even if the believer erroneously thinks the gods are living physical beings outside of us, and not mere features or patterns inside of us. Such a believer might be in serious error about the nature of the gods—and yet may still experience the sublime while praying to them or meditating on them.

I am not advising anyone to believe that humanly created gods are externally real. I am only suggesting this: even if a god exists only in the mind, if a person loves that god and sees the good in it, then their feelings about that god may occasionally provide a glimpse of the real God. The small-g god is not a living, external being; it is a feature of a story,

or a pattern of information in human brains. Nevertheless, if the believer's mood is right, the god can become a reflector of the real God. Speaking poetically, one might call this brain-created "god" *a humanly created face of the true God*.

If a person is good-hearted and guided by true feelings about the good, then even a religion with purely mythical gods might help that person experience the real God. The quality of the believer may be more important than the quality of the religion.

Needless to say, this does *not* mean that a bad, cruel religion has any good in it. The world would be much better off without religions of that sort! But not all religions—even those with erroneous beliefs—are bad and cruel. My point is that a religion does not have to be entirely right, philosophically and scientifically, to provide some benefits to the believer. If the believer is sensitive to the good in things, even a religion whose gods are purely psychological might lead to mental glimpses of the essence of the real God—the Good Itself.

In this sense, all religions that strive for the good are partly true. All such religions contain grains of truth and can lead believers to God. This is true even if most of the specific beliefs of the religion are wrong.

I am not recommending that anyone follow a religion with false beliefs. I am only pointing out that even a flawed religion can contain spiritual truth for a believer who can find what is good in the religion and reject what is bad.

C. A Note on Some Poetic Insights

In an experience of the sublime, the person or thing seen as sublime is a reflector of God. Is it right to say that this person or thing *is* God? Sometimes it seems that way to a poet.

Maybe the poet is right, in a way. Philosophers know that the word “is” has multiple meanings. They know of many different kinds of identity—different ways in which things can be the same. For one example, consider the identity of a person through time. Old John is the same person as young John—but old and young John can be very different from each other in many ways. This kind of sameness is what philosophers call “personal identity.” It’s very different from so-called “numerical identity,” which means being exactly the same in all respects. I don’t want to go into details here about all the different kinds of identity or sameness that philosophers have discussed. My point is much simpler: that two things can be the same without being *completely* the same.

God and a reflector of God are not exactly the same being. There are two beings involved: God and the reflector. One may be a part of the other, but there is not just one being. Despite their differences, could we call these two beings the same in some loose sense of “same”? If we decide to speak this way, we will find that the poet who sees something visible as divine is not so far from the mark.

7. Some Conclusions

Here is a summary of some ideas from this book, together with a few additional ideas about God.

1. If there is a God, then God is a supremely good being.

Most religions that believe in God say God created the universe. When we think of God, we automatically think of a creator. However, there also is another idea of God: the idea of a supremely good being. This idea of God is not the same as the idea of a creator. Theologians may wrangle over the definition of God—but for many believers, the notion that God is supremely good plays an important role in their day-to-day lives.

In this book, I argued that the most reasonable idea of God is the idea of a *supremely good being*. If there is a supremely good being, then there is a God. The question of whether God created the universe, or whether something else created it, does not change this. Someone might believe that the supremely good being is the creator of the universe—but even if this were not the case, the supremely good being would be God. Whatever else God is, God is the supremely good being.

2. God does not exist in the same way that physical objects exist.

The idea of reality used in science comes from humanity's experience with material things. However, our daily experience shows that there are other kinds of "items" besides concrete material objects. These are abstract objects, such as patterns, qualities, and relations. These do not exist in the same way that physical objects exist, but calling these

abstract items “unreal” leaves out something important. I have suggested that God is, at bottom, one of these abstract objects.

You can be a skeptic about the traditional picture of God as a quasi-material, ghostly being, and still believe the idea of God I presented in this book.

3. There can be a God even if no one created the universe.

If God is the supremely good being, then there could be a God even if no one created the universe. It is possible to believe in a supremely good being even if random physical forces created the universe, or even if the universe always existed and never had a beginning. You do not have to believe in a creator of the universe to believe in God.

This argument does not rule out the possibility that God created the universe. It only means that you do not have to believe in a creator to believe in God. Most believers think God is the creator as well as a supremely good being. However, God does not have to create anything to be God.

If God turns out to be the creator, there are at least three ways that God could create without violating any natural laws. I mentioned two of these ways in chapter 3, and the third way in chapter 4. If God created the universe in any of these three ways, then everything in the universe would be a product of physical causes alone, just as if there had been no creator. If God created the universe in the way described in chapter 4, then God is a creator with no supernatural intervention at all.

Those who want to prove there is a God should stop obsessing about how life and the universe came to be. Instead, they should focus on showing there is a supremely good being. Those who want to debunk God will have to show there is no supremely good being. It is not enough for them to show that life and the universe have natural, physical

origins. You can believe that everything in the universe (and even the universe itself) has natural, physical origins, and still believe in God.

4. You do not need to believe in the supernatural to believe in God.

Many forms of religious belief involve belief in supernatural happenings, such as miracles that violate the laws of nature, or a supernatural event of creation. Many religions also involve belief in supernatural beings. Nowadays many people reject belief in the supernatural. Science has not found any use for the supernatural—though strictly speaking, science cannot rule out the existence of the supernatural.

In this book, I did not discuss arguments for or against the supernatural. These arguments would be beside the point, because the idea of God I am describing here does not involve anything supernatural. A supremely good being could exist even if there were no supernatural happenings or beings. You can be a skeptic about the supernatural and still believe the idea of God I have proposed in this book.

5. Belief in God may be rational, even without scientific evidence.

Science has found no use for the idea of God in its theories. However, science is not the only form of human knowledge. The belief that science is the only valid form of knowledge is called “scientism.” Scientism is wrong from up front; it leads to absurd, illogical results. Scientism is self-contradictory because it is illogical to use science to prove that science is correct. If you use science to prove that science is trustworthy, then your “proof” can work only if science is trustworthy to begin with—so you are just assuming what you are trying to prove. If you believe in scientism, then according to your own beliefs, you should not believe anything scientifically unprovable—so you cannot believe in science, or in scientism! This is a well-known objection to scientism.

Since there are other forms of knowledge besides science, we might well be able to know about God by other means besides science. For all we know, there may be good *nonscientific* reasons for belief in God. I discussed one of these reasons in this book. Experiences of the supreme good in things are true experiences of God. Once you have had such an experience, you can know that a certain abstract quality exists—the quality that I equated to God in chapter 4. Hence you can know that there is a God of the kind I described in this book. Even if you have not had such experiences, the belief that some qualities are good implies the existence of a God of this kind, by way of the argument in chapter 4. [17]

6. The existence of evil does not disprove God.

The well-known “problem of evil” in theology—the question “if there is a God, then why does God allow evil in the world?”—does not force us to disbelieve in God. The most it can do is force us to believe that God is not as powerful as we once thought. Is it possible for there to be a God who is not all-powerful? Yes—because God is just the supremely good being, and it is not necessary for a being to be all-powerful to be supremely good. (As we know all too well on Earth, power and goodness do not always occur together.)

The idea that God is not all-powerful may seem offensive to some believers. However, this idea is more respectful toward God than is the usual idea that God is all-powerful! If we assume that God is all-powerful, then we have to explain why God allows the horrible evils that happen in the world. An all-powerful supremely good being would not allow those evils.

If we abandon the idea that God is able to stop evil, then the existence of evil cannot trouble our belief in God. The problem of evil, as theologians know it, does not exist for us.

In spite of all this, God still might be “all-powerful” in an indirect way, as I described in chapter 5.

7. Belief in God is a matter of values and not of facts. [18]

In chapter 4 I described an abstract quality that I called “the Good Itself.” This is simply the feature that truly good qualities have in common. If you believe that some qualities (such as love, mercy, or beauty) are truly good, then you are committed to the belief that the Good Itself exists. Once you accept this, you are stuck with God—the kind of God that I discussed in this book.

This means that you can tell there is a God just by considering information about values. You don’t need any scientific or historical facts—about creation, miracles, or anything else—to show that there is a God.

Skeptics might try to debunk this idea, and all of my talk about the good, by arguing that goodness and values are products of human biology and evolution. These skeptical arguments miss the point. Human values can be real, even if our moral and aesthetic feelings evolved from something simple and animalistic. Values set up by evolution can be true values, for the same reason that the human brain can be intelligent even though it evolved from simple unintelligent mechanisms. (How a thing *started* does not determine what that thing is *now*.) In any case, the idea of a supremely good or perfect being does not depend on the details of what is good for specific creatures. All that matters is that there really are some good qualities. The alternative is to believe that no qualities are good. This would force the skeptic to believe that things like beauty and love don’t matter. If you don’t want to believe nonsense like that, you must accept that there are some good qualities. That assumption is enough to commit you to the existence of God.

Some skeptics will try to claim that qualities like beauty and loveliness are merely

subjective—or “in the eye of the beholder,” as the saying goes. This skeptical argument does not succeed in showing that these qualities are unreal. Even if different things seem beautiful to different people, there still is no question that beauty is a quality. This quality is valuable and worthwhile.

Also, the fact that something is observer-dependent does not make it unreal. Modern physics teaches us this. In relativity theory, an object’s measured mass and size depend on the state of the observer who is doing the measurements. However, no sensible physicist would claim that an object’s mass and size are unreal! Similarly, an object’s beauty may depend upon the state of the observer’s brain—but this does not make beauty unreal. [19]

8. Personal religious experiences can sometimes yield real knowledge.

People have used the term “religious experience” to describe many different kinds of personal experiences. Some of these experiences are signs of mental illness. Others are products of dreams or of drugs—or of the spontaneous breaks with reality that even healthy and drug-free people sometimes suffer. However, a few kinds of religious experience or “enlightenment” can be quite accurate. It is rational to believe what we learn from these special experiences. As I hinted in chapter 6, certain experiences related to beauty and love are of this sort. These experiences need not seem “religious” to be true glimpses of God.

References and Acknowledgments

General Acknowledgments

The idea of God I am presenting here owes much to the Platonic conception of God, which was presented by Plato and subsequently developed by many other thinkers over the centuries. Many of the concepts in this book are either Platonic or reminiscent of concepts from Platonism. This book's debt to the Platonic philosophical tradition goes beyond what individual endnotes can acknowledge. Note that you do *not* have to believe in Plato's entire philosophy (especially his political ideas) to agree with this book.

Besides Plato and the Platonists, I would especially like to acknowledge Charles Hartshorne, to whose concept of God I owe much. See especially his books *The Logic of Perfection and Other Essays in Neoclassical Metaphysics* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1962) and *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany, N.Y.: State Univ. of New York, 1984). Hartshorne's ideas, and his rational approach to theology, did much to shape the ideas in this essay. There are many points of similarity between Hartshorne's ideas and mine—again, more than individual endnotes can cover.

Also, I would like to acknowledge the influence of G. H. Howison, whose way of thinking about God has contributed much to mine. The view of God I presented here is not truly Howisonian. However, Howison's idea of God as an ideal being, who serves as an ideal for all things but is not a miraculous creator, is important to the present essay. Howison also thought, as I do, that beauty and poetry can be revelations of the divine in a certain sense. See Howison's book *The Limits of Evolution and Other Essays* (2nd ed. (rev.); New York, N.Y.: The Macmillan Co., 1904).

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the many believers and skeptics with whom I have had the opportunity to argue during my philosophical career. These discussions helped shape the list of questions in chapter 1, as well as other aspects of this book.

Notes

1. The idea that God is a supremely good being is not new. Philosophers and theologians have debated this idea, in various versions, since the time of the ancient Greeks. In Plato's philosophy, "the Form of the Good" (a term also sometimes rendered as "the Good Itself") is the goal of the spiritual quest. The idea of defining God as a "perfect being" (about the same as what I call a "supremely good being") has played a large part in Western theology. To find out more about this idea of God, read the works of Charles Hartshorne, especially *The Logic of Perfection and Other Essays in Neoclassical Metaphysics* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1962) and *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany, N.Y.: State Univ. of New York, 1984). Another book I like is *God, Freedom, and Evil* by Alvin Plantinga (reprint ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1989). Chapter 2 in this book is just an exploration of this old idea of God. This chapter owes much to all the thinkers I just mentioned.

In my ebook *God and Science? Of Course!*, I discussed this idea of God as a supremely good being. I also pointed out that such a being need not be the creator, and that science cannot disprove the existence of such a being. (See my website for further information on this ebook.)

2. The idea that there can only be one supremely good being (or "perfect being") also is old. It's part of the idea of God that I discuss in note 1.

3. The idea that God might be real but might not be the Creator is an old idea. In ancient

times, there were Gnostic sects that believed a being lesser than God created the universe. Plato also presented a version of this idea, with the Form of the Good (or the Good Itself) as the true supreme being, and the Demiurge as world creator.

4. The idea of moment-to-moment creation occurs in several places in philosophy and theology. Two examples are occasionalism (the idea that God is the real cause of every event; I don't agree with this) and preservationism (the idea that God continually preserves the created world). I discussed moment-to-moment creation in my ebook *God and Darwin—Buddies!* (See my website for further information on this ebook.)

5. Leibniz's idea of creation is based on his idea of possible worlds, which forms the basis for a branch of modern logic (modal semantics). Leibniz's ideas about possible worlds and creation are discussed in his *Theodicy*—a philosophical classic. I discuss this kind of creation in my ebook *God and Darwin—Buddies!* (See my website for further information on this ebook.)

6. The idea that God is an abstract object is not new. It seems to be what Plato is saying when he identifies the Form of the Good as the pinnacle of reality. There is a vast philosophical literature on abstract objects and the so-called “problem of universals.” My discussion here is just the barest introduction—just the part I need to make my point about God.

7. See, for example, Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1991).

8. The conception of God that I will discuss in this part is a version of the Platonic conception of God. It is a simplified and modernized version, but it is a version nonetheless. My earlier acknowledgment of the Platonists applies especially to this part.

9. I'm borrowing the term “the Good Itself” directly from the Platonic tradition. This is

the way some people translate the expression often translated as “The Form of the Good.” The idea as presented here is a (perhaps simplified) version of Plato’s idea.

10. In the Platonic tradition, these reflectors might be called *theophanies* of God.

11. The idea that the Universe is God’s body, or embodies God, is not new. It was known to Platonists and Transcendentalists and often plays a part in pantheistic thought. In my version, God’s body might not quite be the whole Universe. For a similar (and perhaps compatible) idea, see my book *God, Son of Quark*. (See my website for further information on this book.)

12. The idea that all consciousness is God’s consciousness is not new. It occurs in Eastern mystical thought and elsewhere. However, my version of that idea does not make the individual mind just a puppet or facet of God, as some older teachings seem to do. Instead, the individual mind is fully real on its own, but can *reflect* God. Some religious mystics already think this way.

13. I am referring to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, and to the Hindu type of monistic polytheism.

14. The argument I present here is the same in its gist, if not in detail, as an argument of Nicholas Rescher, who compared experiential knowledge of God to experiential knowledge of color (“The Ontological Proof Revisited,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 37 (1959), pp. 138-148).

15. Thank you, romantic poets, for these two insights.

16. This is not far from the idea, currently popular among atheists, that the idea of God (or of the gods) is a nasty chunk of information that afflicts human brains. I do not think this chunk of information has to be all that nasty!

17. There also may be other nonscientific reasons for belief in God. I take up this question in my ebook *God and Science? Of Course!* (See my website for further information on this ebook.) Attempts to establish God's existence rationally are nothing new.

18. I made this same claim, using a different line of argument, in Chapter 15 of my book *From Brain to Cosmos*. (For further information on this book, see my website.)

19. For more discussion of this argument, and of the reality of beauty, see my ebooks *Poetry's Secret Truth* and *God, Son of Quark*. (See my website for further information on these.)