Does Religious Belief Infect Philosophical Analysis?

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One popular conception of natural theology holds that certain purely rational arguments are insulated from empirical inquiry and independently establish conclusions that provide evidence, justification, or proof of God's existence. Yet, some raise suspicions that philosophers and theologians' personal religious beliefs inappropriately affect these kinds of arguments. I present an experimental test of whether philosophers and theologians' argument analysis is influenced by religious commitments. The empirical findings suggest religious belief affects philosophical analysis and offer a challenge to theists and atheists, alike: reevaluate the scope of natural theology's conclusions or acknowledge and begin to address the influence of religious belief.

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1. Religious Belief and Philosophical Argument

Reason is fundamental to many projects of natural theology.[1] I use 'natural theology' as a rough label for the branch of theology and philosophy of religion on which I focus here. I follow a narrow definition, upon which projects in 'natural theology' are those presenting rational arguments for the existence of God (De Cruz, 2014).

Importantly, many interpret natural theological arguments as having real epistemic weight (Braine, 1988; Miller, 1991; Swinburne, 2004). There are other possible interpretations of these arguments. For instance, we might use them as methods of *understanding* God rather than as ones providing independent epistemic support (Sudduth, 2009). But this kind of use is not my immediate focus.[2] Instead, my targets are those philosophical or theological projects taking certain natural theological arguments to provide evidence, justification, or proof of God's

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[1] This stands in contrast to (e.g.) revealed approaches to philosophy of religion, claiming knowledge of God through revelation (e.g. Dulles, 1969; Mavrodes, 1988) as well as fideism (e.g. Wolterstorff, 1983; Evans 1998; Bishop, 2007).
[2] I address this further in section 5.

existence (see Moore, 2010).

Many of these target approaches situate natural theological arguments in the domain of purely *a priori*, analytic, or conceptual reason, holding that no empirical evidence bears on these arguments. On this view, whether or not (e.g.) an ontological argument for the existence of God is successful certainly does not depend on empirical investigation. For such projects, rational argument is sufficient to establish conclusions about the nature and existence of God and is insulated from empirical inquiry.

But there is a notable phenomenon in philosophy of religion that suggests an empirical challenge to these rationalist projects. In comparison to the rest of the philosophical profession, there is an overrepresentation of *theistic* philosophers of religion (Chalmers and Bourget, 2014; De Cruz, 2013). In fact, of *all* specialization and philosophical view correlations in Chalmers and Bourget's large (2014) study of philosophical views, the greatest is between specializing in philosophy of religion and endorsing theism.

To some, this raises suspicion that natural theological arguments are subject to a pernicious influence of religious belief. That proponents of one side of a philosophical debate largely constitute the field might suggest that their personal beliefs are inappropriately shaping argument analyses. But that there is an overrepresentation of theists in the philosophy of religion need not be problematic; (e.g.) the correlation between specializing in philosophy of religion and endorsing theism *might* instead be explained by the convincing nature of theism. There is no good reason based *solely* on the overabundance of theists in the field to think religious belief problematically influences philosophical argument.

Importantly, resolving this issue requires answering an empirical question; do religious beliefs affect philosophical analyses of presumably empirically-insulated arguments? Those who

defend these arguments hold that religious beliefs do not and should not affect them. Identification as a theist or atheist should not affect one's ability to judge a particular philosophical argument's strength or logical validity. In the same way, identification as a consequentialist or deontologist should not affect one's ability to judge a particular ethical arguments' strength or logical validity.[3]

De Cruz's (2013) 'Cognitive Science of Religion and the Study of Theological Concepts' provides some compelling empirical evidence that religious commitments influence certain types of philosophical belief. Philosophers of religion and theologians were asked to rate arguments for theism (e.g. 'the argument from beauty') and arguments for atheism (e.g. 'the argument from evil') on a scale from 'very weak' to 'very strong.' De Cruz found that theists rated arguments for theism more strongly than did atheists, while atheists rated arguments for atheism more strongly than did theists.

This is a fascinating empirical finding, but it is not necessarily troubling for natural theology. Theists, well versed in theistic argument, might recall *the best* version of an argument for theism (e.g. the *most compelling* version of the 'cosmological argument'); atheists, on the other hand, might recall *the best* version of an argument for atheism (e.g. the *most compelling* 'argument from divine hiddenness'). Participants were not provided with an explicit argument, but rather with a generic argument title. One plausible interpretation of the data is simply that when asked to rate an argument for theism titled the argument of '*x*,' theists recalled better versions and atheists worse ones; and when asked to rate an argument for atheism titled the argument of '*y*,' theists recalled worse versions and atheists better ones.

To empirically test whether personal religious commitments affect philosophical analysis

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[3] Put another way, even a committed consequentialist should be able to recognize a strong, weak, valid, or invalid argument, whether this argument results in consequentialist or non-consequentialist conclusions.

of natural theological arguments, philosopher and theologian experimental participants should be provided with an *explicit* argument. What would provide an even more convincing test would be the presentation of two arguments of *equal quality*, one establishing a theistic conclusion and another establishing an atheistic conclusion. In this case, defenders of a purely *a priori*, analytic, conceptual method in natural theology would hope that there is no effect of religious belief on argument analysis; trained philosophers and theologians (atheistic or theistic) should recognize the quality of equivalently strong arguments independently of the arguments' (atheistic or theistic) conclusions.

I will shortly present an experimental study providing such an empirical test. For a basis of constructing two such comparable arguments, I turn next to an introduction of the modal ontological argument. This argument can be formulated in two extremely similar ways, but with radically different conclusions: one establishing the existence of God, and the other establishing the non-existence of God. This provides an ideal test case for empirical inquiry; if personal religious beliefs do not affect analysis of purely *a priori*, analytic, conceptual arguments, we should expect philosophers and theologians to evaluate comparable modal ontological arguments equivalently, whether the argument concludes in God's existence or non-existence.

2. The Modal Ontological Argument

Ontological arguments for God's existence abound in theology and philosophy of religion, from Anselm to Gödel (Charlesworth, 1965; Sobel, 1987). Despite variance among ontological arguments for God's existence, an often-cited unifying feature is their analytic, *a priori* method (Oppy, 1995). On this view, ontological arguments for God's existence are those that seek to establish conclusions about God's existence from reason alone, without the need for

a posteriori or empirical inquiry. This makes them a suitable target for the present investigation; an ontological argument is one that *should* be insulated from contingent or irrelevant empirical facts, including facts about the person considering or evaluating the argument.

One of the best-known recent arguments is Plantinga's (1974) modal ontological argument. Plantinga defines a being as having 'maximal excellence' if (and only if) it is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect. A being has 'maximal greatness' if (and only if) it has maximal excellence necessarily (in every possible world). From the claim that it is possible (or, there is a possible world in which) a being has maximal greatness and the relevant modal assumptions, we deduce that there is a being with maximal greatness.

But as some have noticed, this style of argument can be applied to construct an argument for the *non-existence* of a being with maximal greatness (Oppy, 2011). From the claim that it is possible that no being has maximal greatness, we deduce (on the relevant modal assumptions) that there is *no* being with maximal greatness. This argument closely mirrors the standard modal ontological argument in form, but arrives at the opposite conclusion.

3. An Experiment

I conducted one experiment to investigate how philosophers and theologians holding various religious beliefs evaluate two versions of the modal ontological argument. Participants were recruited in June 2013 through an online blog, the *Prosblogion*, widely read by philosophers of religion and theologians. All participants received the same three survey components, in varied orders. The components were an evaluation of a modal ontological argument for God's existence, an evaluation of a modal ontological argument for God's nonexistence, and a demographical questionnaire. The arguments were not ones explicitly for or

against '*God's* existence,' but rather for or against the existence of 'a being with maximal greatness.' Here I will refer to a being with maximal greatness as 'God' for convenience.

Participants received two arguments, one for the existence of God and one against the existence of God, in counterbalanced, randomized order. The 'for' argument was presented as follows:

Consider the argument below and answer the following questions.

Argument:
  1. (Assumption) That which is possibly necessary is necessary.
  2. (Definition) A being has *maximal greatness* if and only if, necessarily, it exists and is omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good.
  3. (Premise) It is possible that there is a being with maximal greatness.
  4. Therefore, necessarily, there exists a being with maximal greatness.
  5. Therefore, there exists a being with maximal greatness.

The 'against' argument was similar, replacing 3-5 above with:

  3. (Premise) It is possible that there is not a being with maximal greatness.
  4. Therefore, necessarily, there does not exist a being with maximal greatness.
  5. Therefore, there does not exist a being with maximal greatness.

After reading each argument, participants answered a number of questions. First they were asked about the *validity* of the argument presented: 'Is the above argument valid (does the conclusion follow logically from the assumption, definitions, and premise)?' They were also asked about the *strength* of the argument: 'How strong do you find the above argument?' (on a scale from 1 to 10).[4] Participants were also asked for their religious beliefs: whether they identified religiously as a Theist, Agnostic, or Atheist.

Participants failing a comprehension check question ('What is the conclusion of the above argument?') were excluded from analyses. There was no effect of order of presentation of

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[4] There are various possible interpretations of these terms. The experimental materials indicated explicitly the relevant sense of validity: 'does the conclusion follow logically from the assumption, definitions, and premise?' No similar definition was provided for 'strength' since this measure is intended to capture a broader sense of argument quality.

the arguments or of the demographics on strength and validity ratings of either the 'for' or 'against' argument.

64 participants (98% male) completed the survey. All participants in the analysis had an educational background in a relevant field (philosophy or theology) and over 70% had completed a masters degree or higher in a relevant field. 68% of participants identified as Theists, 16% as Agnostics, and 16% as Atheists. The main analyses conducted involved determining whether religious identification affected the argument validity and strength ratings.

For each group (Atheists, Agnostics, Theists), I compared the number of participants rating each argument ('for' or 'against') as *valid*. For Theists, 88% rated the 'for' argument as valid, while 65% rated the 'against' argument as valid.[5] Among non-Theists there was no significant difference in argument ratings.[6] Because there were more Theistic participants than Atheistic or Agnostic ones, these differences may be explained in part by an underpowered analysis of these latter groups. Yet, the difference in validity ratings between arguments ('for' and 'against') was smaller for agnostics (10% difference) and atheists (10% difference) than theists (23% difference).

To assess the effect of religious belief (or disbelief) on argument *strength* ratings, I used religious identification (Atheist, Agnostic, Theist) as condition and the *difference* in argument strength score ratings as the dependent measure. This 'argument strength rating difference' score was calculated by subtracting a participants' strength rating for the 'against' argument from his strength rating for the 'for' argument. For instance, someone rating the 'for' argument as 7 on the strength scale and the 'against' argument as 10 on the strength scale would have a difference in strength ratings score of -3. Religious belief identification affected difference in strength ratings,

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[5] Fisher's Exact Test, $p = .02$
[6] Fisher's Exact Tests, $p > .70$
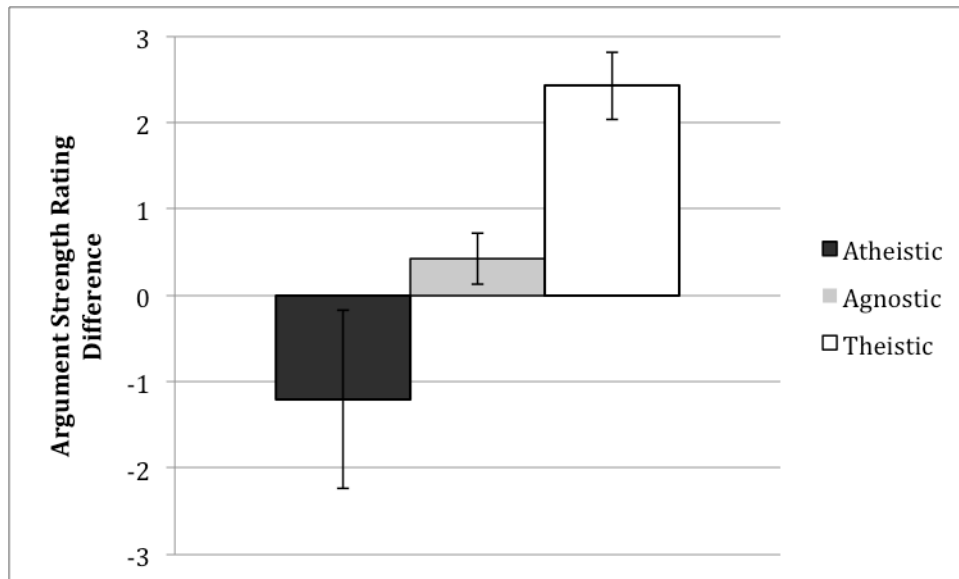
see Figure 1 below.[7]

Figure 1. 'For' strength score minus 'Against' strength score, by reported religious affiliation

Atheist identifiers had overall negative ratings, indicating they gave greater strength ratings for the 'against' argument than for the 'for' argument. Theist identifiers demonstrated the opposite pattern. Agnostic ratings fell between those of these two groups.[8]

Looking closer for effects of religious belief on the 'for' and 'against' arguments revealed a main effect of religious belief on strength scores for the 'for' argument.[9] Intriguingly, there was no significant effect of religious belief on strength scores for the 'against' argument.[10]

These results indicate that there was an effect of religious belief on analysis of the philosophical arguments. Theists (but not atheists or agnostics) saw a modal ontological argument as logically *valid* more often when it established God's existence compared to when it

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[7] $F(2, 60) = 8.72$, p < .001, $\eta_p^2 = .23$

[8] atheist M = -1.20, SD = 2.40; agnostic M = .43, SD = .79; theist M = 2.43, SD = 2.81

[9] $F(2, 60) = 12.31$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .30$

[10] $F(2,60) = 1.14$, $p = .33$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$

established God's non-existence. There was a main effect of religious belief on the perceived *strength* of the modal ontological argument; atheists rated the 'against' argument as stronger than the 'for'; agnostics rated the arguments roughly equivalently; and theists rated the 'for' argument as stronger than the 'against.'

Some might worry that this effect is driven by particular demographic features of the participant pool. For instance, one might contend that (e.g.) philosophers of religion are better suited to evaluate the modal ontological argument than (e.g.) epistemologists.[11] In anticipation of this concern, I asked participants to identity (i) their level of educational background and (ii) any areas of professional specialization. Since participants were recruited from an online philosophy and theology blog, their backgrounds were representative of a broad array of academic fields.

The effect of religious affiliation on strength difference ratings remained significant when controlling for educational background (e.g. "4-year College Degree," "Masters Degree," "Doctoral Degree").[12] The effect of religious affiliation remained significant when controlling for specialization categories (metaphysics, epistemology, language, mind, logic, philosophy of religion, ethics, political philosophy, legal philosophy, history of philosophy, philosophy of science, philosophy of mathematics, theology, and religious studies).[13] It might be of particular interest to readers to note that none of the seemingly most plausible candidate specializations (theology, religious studies, philosophy of religion) significantly affected strength difference ratings.[14] This suggests the found effect of religious identification is not confined to one

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[11] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this suggestion.

[12] $F(2,60) = 8.08$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .22$. F < 1 for a main effect of educational background.

[13] $F(2,60) = 10.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .33$

[14] All $p > .21$.

subgroup of specialists; it also seems no group of specialists is particularly immune.[15]

4. The Robustness of the Empirical Results and Challenge

The most important potential objection to address is one claiming that the 'for' and 'against' arguments are not comparable. This objection could take a number of specific forms, but generally these are varieties of a line of objection that the 'for' and 'against' versions of the modal ontological argument presented are not equally strong or valid.

One reason that such objections are tempting is that any argument requires interpretation. Admittedly, there are many possible subtle variations of interpretation of the modal ontological arguments presented here. However, on the most plausible interpretations the arguments are of equivalent quality.

It might help to interpret the arguments in terms of possible worlds (Lewis, 1986). Imagine there are possible worlds W_1, W_2 ... W_n and ours is W_1. From W_1, that it is possible there is a being with maximal greatness (e.g. in W_2) implies that necessarily, a being exists and is omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good. In other words, in W_1, W_2, ... W_n this being exists. Therefore, there exists a being (in W_1) with maximal greatness. For the opposing argument, we start by assuming it is possible there is *no* being with maximal greatness. For instance, if (from W_1) it is possible that in W_2 there is no being with maximal greatness, there is necessarily *no* being with maximal greatness in any world since maximal greatness requires existence in every possible world. Thus, there is no being with maximal greatness in our world.

There might yet be other interpretations of the arguments. But to ground *an objection*,

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[15] Extended possible objections remain. Perhaps, one might insist, it is *just* scholars specializing in X that we should expect to be immune from these effects. The study here was not large enough to fully answer this claim. It is certainly possible that just scholars specializing in X are immune from these effects, while scholars specializing in Y and Z are not. For now, this remains an open empirical question.

one must not merely posit a novel interpretation. One must also defend the existence of a plausible interpretation of the 'for' and 'against' arguments such that one is stronger than the other and only one is valid. Such interpretations may be *possible*, but grounding a successful objection also requires defending such an interpretation as a *plausible* alternative, one that the experimental participants were likely to employ.

Following the logic of such putative objections reveals their obscurity; is it really plausible that theists endorse a logic which validates only the 'for' argument while atheists tend to endorse a logic validating the 'against' argument? Such objections have the flavor of post-hoc rationalization. When considering whether the empirical results are likely explained by the hypothesized effect of religious belief *or* (e.g.) an interaction of religious belief and the endorsement of particular axioms and inference rules of modal logic such that the 'against' argument is more often valid and strong for atheists and the 'for' argument is more often valid and strong for theists, one must admit the former abductive inference is *much* more plausible.

There are a number of other possible 'objections' one might raise. For instance, 'the experimental material does not distinguish between metaphysical and epistemic possibility!' But this does not at all intimate why atheists, agnostics, and theists should evaluate the two arguments differently. Do theists infer metaphysical possibility in the 'for' argument, but epistemic possibility in the 'against' argument, and atheists vice-versa? This is at best unmotivated, and it is at worst absurd. Even more absurd is how such a hypothesis – if true – *ought* to explain the found pattern of analysis ratings.

In this way, the empirical results are *robust*. There are possible issues of interpretation since arguments must be interpreted, but merely flagging these does not constitute a successful objection. That requires further explanation of how some difference in the arguments plausibly

leads to interpretations upon which religious beliefs *do* and *ought* to affect ratings of strength and validity. I see nothing close to a plausible explanation of this kind.

For the reader who is still not convinced that the arguments are of equal strength and validity, there is one final response. For this reader, the experimental challenge shifts from one aimed at atheists and theists alike to one directed at *either* atheists or theists (and also agnostics). If, for instance, one insists that the most plausible interpretation of the 'for' argument is one in which it is valid and strong but the most plausible interpretation of the 'against' argument is one in which it is invalid and weak, there is *still* a challenge directed at atheists; why have atheists' religious beliefs interfered with purportedly objective argument analysis? In this case, there is also a challenge to agnostics; why have their agnostic religious beliefs affected argument analysis in which one argument should be rated as better than the other? For a reader who insists the opposite (that the 'for' argument is invalid and weak and the 'against' is valid and strong), there is still a challenge to theists and agnostics. Why, if the 'for' argument is invalid and weak and the 'against' valid and strong, have theists and agnostics expressed analyses in which the 'for' argument is rated as better or roughly equal to the 'against'?

I argued previously that the experimental *results* are robust. Additionally, the experimental *challenge* is robust. An objection that one argument ('for' or 'against') is better than another does not evaporate the challenge from the effect of religious belief; it merely relocates it since atheists, agnostics, and theists provided different argument analyses. The results demonstrate an effect of religious (atheistic, agnostic, or theistic) belief on argument analysis. Claiming one argument is better than the other might save one group from empirical challenge. For instance, if the 'for' argument is stronger, this provides comfort to theists. But it is then even more troubling that atheists and agnostics evaluate the arguments in the empirically uncovered

fashion.

Before turning to the next section it is worth dispelling a possible false conclusion some might draw from the interpretation I favor. There is a clear empirical challenge to atheists and/or theists, but what about the agnostics? Their strength ratings were roughly equivalent for the 'for' and 'against' arguments, so it might seem they are immune from the effect of religious belief.

On the interpretation I argued for previously, the 'for' and 'against' arguments are of comparable quality and should be rated equivalently. On this interpretation, there are two possible explanations of the agnostics' results. On the *positive* view, the results suggest agnostics were not affected by their personal (agnostic) religious beliefs. But there is a *negative* view available. Imagine what we would expect *if* the agnostics' religious beliefs were to influence their ratings of these arguments. The most likely expectation is that this would encourage them to rate arguments for or against a theistic conclusion *overly moderately*. Where religious belief encourages theists to over-endorse theistic arguments and atheists to over-endorse atheistic arguments, might it most likely encourage agnostics to provide overly moderate evaluations of both atheistic and theistic natural theological arguments?

On my view, in which the arguments here are comparable, we do not have the evidence to distinguish between the positive and negative view of the agnostics' ratings. Perhaps their equivalent ratings were driven by cool rational analysis. Or perhaps their equivalent ratings were driven by a pernicious equalizing effect of agnostic religious commitments. The experiment was not designed to distinguish between these possibilities. We must remain agnostic.

5. From Magisterial to Ministerial Reason

Recall from the first section that my targets are natural theological arguments whose

conclusions purportedly have real epistemic weight. These arguments, if sound and valid, provide evidence, justification, or even proof of God's existence. This is a frequent contemporary interpretation of natural theological arguments, including the ontological argument (e.g. Lowe, 2007; Maydole, 2009). This corresponds roughly to Craig's *magisterial* use of reason; 'reason stands over and above the gospel like a magistrate and judges it on the basis of argument and evidence' (Craig, 2008).

But this is not the only available interpretation of natural theological arguments. In fact, there is a competing interpretation of the role of reason in natural theology. On the *ministerial* interpretation, 'reason submits to and serves the gospel ... Reason is a tool to help us better understand and defend our faith' (Craig, 2008). This flavor of interpretation of rationalist argument can be traced to at least St. Augustine, and can also be found in contemporary philosophy of religion.[16]

Oppy characterizes ontological arguments as those proceeding from considerations 'entirely internal to the theistic worldview' (Oppy, 1995, 1). Notably, many hold Anselm's original ontological argument invoked something close to this kind of reasoning. Plantinga's modal ontological argument is also not meant as a *proof* of God's existence. Plantinga writes of the arguments: 'since it is rational to accept their central premise, they do show that it is rational to accept that conclusion' (Plantinga, 1974, 221). This again suggests that something like ministerial (rather than magisterial) reasoning is at work.

If we assume reason plays a ministerial role in natural theological arguments, the empirical results appear less troubling. On this interpretation, that religious belief influences philosophical argument analysis is not a distorting effect, but rather a relevant expression of

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[16] Thanks to audience members at Oxford's conference "Cognitive science of religion, philosophy and theology" for this suggestion.

one's own internal commitments. What *is* more troubling, however, is if natural theologians and philosophers of religion pass off ministerial reasoning as magisterial reasoning. This constitutes an inappropriate inference from one's internal perspective to a conclusion in the realm of magisterial reason. I am sympathetic to those who claim the empirical results reflect something like a use of ministerial reason, but (if so) we must also acknowledge that such natural theological arguments do not support magisterial conclusions.

The thought that ministerial reasoning explains the found results could be expressed in a number of ways. Another possible interpretation of the empirical results in this line is that they are a product of the participants' *relevant* differing initial background beliefs or priors. If, before approaching either modal argument, my credence in God's existence is great, I should assign greater credence to the premise of the 'for' argument than the premise of the 'against' argument. Perhaps, even, for this reason I *should* rate the former argument as stronger than the latter.

I am initially sympathetic to this kind of interpretation, though it is mysterious how such an interpretation should explain the found effect of religious belief on the arguments' logical *validity*. Furthermore, the costs of such an interpretation are *not* trivial. If seemingly independent analyses of natural theological arguments' strength or validity are (rightly) influenced by prior religious beliefs, this entails a different conception of the methodology of natural theology than is typically assumed. On this revised view, when a theist criticizes the argument from evil or the argument from poor design, his background beliefs for God's existence (supported, perhaps, by the cosmological argument or argument from miracles or a *sensus divinitatis*) are relevant to the present analysis *of a different argument*.

In the same way, a consequentialist might be impressed by argument X for consequentialism – if he is a consequentialist there probably is some argument that impressed

him along the way. But when he is asked to evaluate argument Y, also for consequentialism, the fact that argument X is impressive just should not be relevant to his analysis, which is an analysis *not of consequentialism*, but *of argument Y*. Furthermore, if it were relevant then we should expect consequentialists and nonconsequentialists to have sharply different evaluations of any ethical argument involving consequentialism. But consequentialists can and should recognize bad arguments for consequentialism, as nonconsequentialists can and should recognize good ones.

The same is true of philosophy of religion. Background beliefs, priors, or religious convictions could be relevant when asked generally, 'does God exist?' But it is delusive to offer these as a justification for supposedly independent analyses *not of general claims of God's existence*, but rather of *particular magisterial arguments*. The question here was not 'does God exist?' Rather, the questions were about *this* argument: how strong is *this argument* and is *it* logically valid?

There is a final problem with claiming that background beliefs or priors are relevant to analysis of these arguments. The method of philosophy of religion is presumably one in which analysis of propositions and arguments can proceed independently of one's religious affiliation and can be shared between two philosophers despite differences in their background beliefs. If two philosophers of religion disagree about the strength or validity of argument X, we typically do not think that in order to resolve this dispute we *should* inquire about their other religious beliefs. When two philosophers of religion disagree about the validity of an argument, it does not seem that to resolve this dispute we should have to look to such background beliefs. Perhaps some readers will think that this is just how we should proceed. This would result in an interesting philosophical method, but also one fraught with the need for disclosure of many

personal beliefs.

6. Conclusion

It is worth recalling that the results and arguments presented here are not anti-theistic or anti-atheistic; this is a challenge from the effect of religious belief (theistic *or* atheistic and perhaps also agnostic) to certain rationalist projects in natural theology. Furthermore, the results do not *necessarily* support a claim that religious belief has a pernicious effect on argument analysis. If philosophers and theologians employ ministerial reasoning, we should expect such effects and should not be deeply troubled by them – so long as philosophers and theologians do not pass off this ministerial reasoning as magisterial.

If, however, philosophers of religion and theologians have grander aims, employing magisterial reason and seeking to provide independent and objective evidence or justification for claims of God's existence, then we have more reason for concern. In this latter case, personal religious beliefs and commitments should not influence analysis of rationalist arguments in natural theology. This leaves philosophers of religion and theologians with a choice about such arguments: reevaluate the role of reason and the scope of conclusions *or* acknowledge and begin to address the influence of religious belief.

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