



of government. Moore notes a major shift in nineteenth- and twentieth-century approaches to Buddhist political theory, from approaches that favor enlightened monarchy to approaches that instead emphasize more republican forms of governance. Against more decided advocates of either one of these approaches, Moore proposes a judicious and moderate alternative: he argues that the shift to republicanism is compatible with, but not necessarily required by, a faithful interpretation of relevant texts in the Buddhist tradition. Moore presents his most original insights in Part II of the book, where he argues that Buddhism's threefold denial of the self, of a nonnatural source of moral obligation, and of the importance of politics to human life, provides the foundations for a distinctively Buddhist take on political theory. Moore's commentary on the last of these "denials" is particularly valuable: countering Max Weber's claim that early Buddhist texts advance an entirely anti-political vision of human society, Moore helpfully points out that early Buddhist texts offer a positive take on a form of "limited citizenship." Moore's book will be particularly useful to undergraduate courses. The main arguments are accessible and clear-cut, and Moore compares relevant Buddhist ideas to the ideas of other authors that undergraduates may be familiar with, for example, Nietzsche and Thoreau. Advanced scholars may not be satisfied with the depth and rigor of Moore's argumentation. Nevertheless, Moore's book constitutes an important contribution to analytic philosophy's regrettably neglected subfield of Buddhist political theory.

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**MONOTHEISM AND CONTEMPORARY ATHEISM.** By Michael Ruse. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. 68. Paperback, \$12.49.

Today it is difficult to find succinct books that discuss and defend select worldviews for students who are studying philosophy and theology at the undergraduate level. Ruse's newest book on atheism is one of the best introductory texts to the subject in print. Written with entertaining prose, the work covers briefly the history of unbelief and how it eventually led to the most vocal opponents of the great monotheistic religions in a post 9–11 world. Although the New Atheists have lost most of their appeal since Sam Harris' *The End of Faith* (2004) and Dawkins' *The God Delusion* (2006), Ruse's book is an excellent primer for students who are studying some of the basic reasons for faith and unbelief: "My aim is to look at these earnest thinkers...to put them in context and to see what they are saying. Then I seek to assess the strengths of their arguments—to see the good points, to see the bad points, and to draw conclusions." The greatest strength of the book is the comprehensive and clear exposition of the arguments on both sides of the debate. Although Ruse is an agnostic, he distances himself from the atheistic side. As a case in point, although the New Atheists tried to use science to refute the arguments of natural theology, the God question cannot be settled by appealing to science. In the Western philosophical tradition, God is not usually defined as one natural being among many others. This is why atheists should not use science to make their case. At the same

time, Ruse maintains that the arguments for God's existence and the revealed religions remain unconvincing. But this does not mean that all the arguments are bankrupt. Indeed, it is precisely at this point that classical theists (such as St. Augustine and Aquinas) stand with Ruse in exposing the weaknesses of modern theism. But in so doing, they have their own battery of arguments that have been typically misunderstood by contemporary atheists.

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**MONOTHEISM AND THE MEANING OF LIFE.** By T.J. Mawson. Edited by Chad Meister and Paul Moser. Cambridge Elements. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. 58. Paper, n.p.

What is the relevance of monotheism to life's meaning? This question is challenging due in part to the enormity of the sub-issues it connects (monotheism and life's meaning). It is also challenging due to a minefield of ambiguities: the multiple meanings of "meaning," "life," and "monotheism"—not to mention the various combinations thereof. Despite the slimness of his monograph, Mawson masterfully navigates readers through this minefield, carefully crafting a strong case for a novel position. His approach is analytic and systematic. The volume is divided into two main parts. Section 1 lays the definitional groundwork. As defined there, monotheism is the view that there exists a unique perfect being (construed in theistic rather than deistic or pantheistic terms). Four levels of "life" are distinguished: contingent *concreta*, biological life, humanity's life, and individual lives. Finally, three meanings of "meaning" are identified: explanation, destiny, and meaningfulness. Section two then establishes answers under each definition. Popular answers tend toward extremes: theists who claim that God is necessary for meaning; nontheists who embrace nihilism (meaninglessness) or claim that God is irrelevant to (or detracts from) meaning. Mawson proposes a refreshingly nuanced compromise: God, though unnecessary for meaning, provides (if He exists) a positive (on balance) contribution (greater than any Godless alternative)—a claim which holds for all definitions under consideration. Detractors might question the parenthetical qualifications of this proposal (which Mawson does not explore in-depth, understandably given space limitations). Alternatively, detractors might worry that the proposal diminishes God's special status as sole source of meaning. Each of these two camps threatens to deprive the other of meaning. By contrast, Mawson's proposal carves out an appealing intermediate space where each side receives its share. Wherever the cards may fall, there is much to commend this work. Mawson's writing is clear and effective. His approach is fair and balanced. His dialectic closely engages a wide-ranging body of literature (historical and contemporary, religious and secular). The result is not only a valuable contribution to scholarship on the meaning of life, but also serves as an accessible and insightful resource for upper-level undergraduate courses and graduate studies.

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