

*On the Nature and Existence of God*, by **Richard Gale**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Pp. viii and 422.

THOMAS D. SENOR, The University of Arkansas.

Richard Gale's book *On the Nature and Existence of God* is a detailed, at times difficult, yet highly readable discussion of issues and arguments central to the philosophy of religion. What makes Gale's book particularly enjoyable is the fact that he doesn't seem to have any particular agenda. That is, many books about the divine nature are believers' attempts to demonstrate the coherence or logical consistency of the traditional theistic conception of God; while there is nothing wrong with a theist's trying to make her case, there is something philosophically refreshing about Gale's stance in this book. He seems fully imbued with the Socratic spirit: he will go where the argument leads. Sometimes this means taking sides with theists; other times he is the atheist's ally.

The book is divided into two halves: one concerning atheological arguments, one concerning theological arguments. Gale explains that he has reversed the traditional order, discussing the atheological arguments first because (or so he claims) many of the former objections to religious belief result in an alteration of the concept of God. Thus, by the end of the first half of the book, the theist will have a concept that has been honed to withstand the better arguments against the coherence of theism. Equipped with the best candidate concept, we are then in a position to see whether it can be shown that there exists a being who matches this description.

Gale begins the conceptual exploration with a discussion of the attribute of omnipotence. One can see straight-away why Gale claims that considering atheological objections will lead to a refinement of the theist's conception of God. As the initial characterization of omnipotence, Gale suggests that "an omnipotent being can do anything" (p. 18). When familiar objections to this definition are raised, Gale claims that "[t]here is considerable room for conceptual reform here" (p. 19). The 'reform' that Gale has in mind is limiting the domain of omnipotence to the logically possible. But it's hard to see why the theist should think that any alteration of a first-pass definition of a theological predicate requires conceptual change. Rather, one should suppose that the preliminary definition has been found lacking, much as Gettier's examples showed not that the concept of knowledge required adjustment but that the justified-true-belief account of knowledge was inadequate.

One of the many features that make this a remarkable book is the number of philosophical issues that are discussed in its 387 pages. In addition to omnipotence, Gale discusses the attributes of immutability, omniscience, and eternity by examining various arguments that purport to show that two or more of them are incompatible (e.g., omniscience and immutability). The atheological section concludes with a discussion of the problem of evil and a presentation of an argument based on the extreme modal realism of David Lewis. Throughout, Gale's discussion is never simplistic or rushed, and is generally insightful and original (not to mention humorous and sometimes irreverent).

The second half of the book is a consideration of arguments for the existence of God and for the pragmatic justification of religious belief. Various versions of the ontological and cosmological arguments are considered as are arguments from religious experience and pragmatic arguments from prudence and morality.

In the end, Gale concludes that while the atheological arguments force changes in the theist's conception of God, they aren't sufficient to show that God doesn't exist; similarly, the arguments for the existence of God surveyed in the book fail to demonstrate God's existence. Gale points out that he hasn't considered inductive arguments, but on the assumption that they fare no better than their deductive cousins, "faith would lack any rational justification" (p. 387). Gale ends by saying that this conclusion would be embraced by Kierkegaardian theists, and that he resonates "to their view of faith as a subjective passion that outstrips our reason" (p. 387).

In a short review, one can't hope to discuss every point in the book with which one might want to take issue. What I will do for the remainder is to consider briefly what Gale has to say in his chapter on arguments from religious experience.

It is striking that the relevant chapter in Gale's book (Chapter Eight) is entitled "Religious Experience Arguments." Now in the context of Gale's writing, this is not so odd; for he claims that if religious experience is justification-conferring, then it is suited to serve as a basis for a good argument for God's existence. However, Gale's chief target in this chapter, William Alston, explicitly states that one should *not* construe him as offering a theistic argument from religious experience. Why, then, does Gale insist upon reading Alston as though he were offering an argument for God's existence?

The answer can be readily seen. Gale contends that if religious experiences constitute evidence for those who have them, if they justify the belief of the experient, they will serve as the basis for a theistic argument. Gale claims "that a cognitive experience's evidential status is not person-relative is a fundamental conceptual requirement for an experience having cognitive status, a point that is often missed by those who defend the cognitivity of religious experiences" (p. 288).

I think Gale is wrong on this score. Consider an analogy with sense perception. Suppose I have a visual experience with the content that  $X$  is  $\emptyset$ . On the basis of this, I come to believe that  $X$  is  $\emptyset$ . Now does my justification provide *you* with justification for believing that  $X$  is  $\emptyset$ ? Well, surely not if you don't know that I have had an experience that indicates that  $X$  is  $\emptyset$ . But suppose I tell you that I have had such an experience. Have I then passed along my justification to you? I don't think I have. And the reason is simple: I haven't been able to give you *my* reason for believing  $X$  is  $\emptyset$ . My reason is my visual experience (or at least my memory of such an experience), and my reporting this to you doesn't give you *that* reason. Now it might be that my reporting to you my experience gives you a different justification than the one I have, but since it isn't grounded in the same reason, it is hard to see why we should suppose that, necessarily, my reason provides you with precisely the same justification that it provides me with.

The significance of this dispute is that if Gale is right, then showing that there is no good argument from religious experience will show that reli-

gious experience is epistemically of little or no value to the theist (apart from the possibility of a good inductive argument, which Gale acknowledges he hasn't considered). However, it is at very least arguable that the primary epistemic role that religious experience has to play for the theist is not as the foundation of an argument for God's existence, but rather as a ground for *directly* or *immediately* justified religious belief. On this view, religious experience provides one with a non-inferential, non-propositional reason for belief in God in much the same way that my experience of my word processor provides me with a non-inferential, non-propositional reason to believe in its existence. It is worth noting that many epistemologists have held that if my word processor belief (and my other physical world beliefs) requires me to have a non-circular justificatory argument, I'm in epistemic hot water. So Gale's construal of the epistemic role of religious experience as primarily inferential is at odds with what the majority of current defenders of the value of such experience are arguing.

Despite this problem, I think that Gale's book is splendid. No one working in philosophical theology can afford not to take note of it. While some of the argumentation will be over the heads of standard undergraduates, I highly recommend it for use in graduate courses in philosophy of religion.

*Does God's Existence Need Proof?*, by **Richard Messer**. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993. Pp. 160. \$29.95 (cloth).

ALAN PADGETT, Azusa Pacific University

This is a helpful book that does a good job of laying out the issues in an important area of philosophy of religion. It illustrates the difference that deep disagreement over our basic approach to philosophy makes to theology and philosophy of religion. The book, however, is not really about arguments for the existence of God, as the title might suggest. Instead, it compares the differing approaches to philosophy in the work of two well-known British scholars, D. Z. Phillips and Richard Swinburne. It concludes, in the light of such fundamental philosophical pluralism, that some relativist position is the most reasonable view to adopt.

Chapter One looks at the problem of religious language. It begins by discussing Swinburne's theory of religious language, and finds three principles (assumptions) at work in his philosophy: cognitivity, expressibility, and rationality. He notes that religious language is literal and factual on "most" occasions for Swinburne, and analogical on the others (6). The existence of God is a purported fact which is either true or false, and which claim we make can be assessed on the basis of evidence. Messer labels this the "traditional" school. On the other hand, Phillips and the other "devout" Wittgensteinians (Malcolm, Rhees, Winch), have a very different conception of the meaning of religious language. For them, philosophy is descriptive and "grammatical" rather than analytical or normative.

Much of this chapter covers old ground, but it is interesting reading. Messer clearly favors the Wittgensteinian approach. "To think otherwise is