

PROOFS *of* GOD

CLASSICAL ARGUMENTS FROM TERTULLIAN TO BARTH



MATTHEW LEVERING



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To Thomas Joseph White, OP

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The simple words of Genesis 24:67 express what I wish Joy to know: “he loved her.”

The book is dedicated to a master theologian and dear friend, born in the same year and month as myself: Fr. Thomas Joseph White, OP. Of him it may be said, “The crown of the wise is their wisdom” (Prov. 14:24). God’s blessings be upon you, Fr. Thomas Joseph.

Introduction

In this textbook, I offer a concise survey of the major responses, pro and contra, in the Christian tradition to the question of whether the existence of God can be demonstrated by human reason. Readers and classroom teachers should feel free to use the book selectively, rather than studying all of the twenty-one figures I have chosen. My surveys of these twenty-one figures aim to be accurate, concise, and thorough. For readers who are interested, I give my assessment of these figures in the conclusions to the three chapters. In the surveys themselves, I try to be descriptive rather than evaluative.

In this introduction (as well as in the book's conclusion), I offer my view of where things stand in contemporary intellectual discourse and popular culture regarding the topic of whether God's existence can be demonstrated by human reason. In this introduction, I also give a rationale for choosing to study these twenty-one figures, and I examine the key biblical and Hellenistic ideas that set the terms for the demonstrations of God's existence in the Christian tradition.

To put my cards on the table, I think that the cosmos cannot be the source of its own existence. The cosmos is not a necessary being. In this regard, David Hart rightly remarks that "the contingent can only exist derivatively, receiving its existence from the Absolute."¹ When Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow claim that God's existence is no longer plausible because

1. David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 147. Hart helps to correct misperceptions of what Ilia Delio, OSF, critically calls "the Greek architecture of metaphysics" (Delio, *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution, and the Power of Love* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013], xx). The misperceptions are, unfortunately, apparent in Delio's book.

all things could have come forth from the quantum law of gravity, they fail to recognize, as Hart says, that the issue is “the very possibility of existence as such, not only of this universe but of all the laws and physical conditions that produced it.”² It is not necessary that any finite thing, let alone a quantum law, exist. Finite things exist, but they are merely limited modes of being; they are not being as such. A quantum law, insofar as it *is*, must derive its being from a source.

Hawking and Mlodinow can be excused for their failure to grasp that the issue is “existence as such.” Their misunderstanding is shared by many professional philosophers. Thus, in his *Arguing about Gods*, Graham Oppy supposes himself to be undermining Thomas Aquinas’s five ways for demonstrating God’s existence when he remarks that “it is hard to see that there is anything in Big Bang cosmology that rules out the existence of an infinite regress of changers, each changed by another.”³ Oppy’s point would not have bothered Aquinas at all, of course, since Aquinas allows philosophically for an eternal universe. In fact, none of Aquinas’s five ways depends on the universe having a temporal beginning. A similar mistake appears in Simon Blackburn’s *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy*. Blackburn devotes a chapter to God where he purports to engage Aquinas’s “cosmological argument.” But for his description of Aquinas’s argument, he rather oddly turns to Hume’s *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*. The

2. Hart, *Experience of God*, 40. See Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (New York: Bantam, 2010).

3. Graham Oppy, *Arguing about Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 103. For his part, Anthony Kenny directs a set of arguments against Aquinas’s five ways, including the following claim: “If a thing cannot be moved by itself, it does not follow that it must be moved by something else. Why cannot it just be in motion, without *being moved* by anything, whether by itself or by anything else?” (Kenny, *The Five Ways: St. Thomas Aquinas’ Proofs of God’s Existence* [London: Routledge, 1969], 19). Seizing on Aquinas’s example from the transmission of heat, Kenny suggests that Aquinas depends here on outdated Aristotelian physics. Edward Feser has responded to Kenny in his *Aquinas* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 67–69. Feser points out that “Aquinas is not making the obviously false claim that only what is already on fire can cause fire; he is rather making the claim . . . that whatever causes fire must have an inherent power to cause it” (*ibid.*, 68). In addition, Feser adds that Aquinas “is not saying that ‘whatever causes something actually to be *F* must itself be *F* in some way,’ but rather that ‘whatever causes something must itself be actual,’ that nothing merely potential can cause anything” (*ibid.*). See also the point made by Lawrence Dewan, OP, in commenting on Kenny’s *Aquinas on Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), that “Kenny’s word ‘existence’ really refers to the answer to the question: ‘Does it exist?’ rather than to the act of being (*actus essendi*). Thomas’ word ‘*esse*,’ though it does the work of signifying the answer to the question: ‘does it exist?’ (thus signifying the truth of propositions), also signifies the thing’s own act which is ‘to be,’ as meaning the perfection which terminates a thing’s generation” (Dewan, “On Anthony Kenny’s *Aquinas on Being*,” *Nova et Vetera* 3 [2005]: 335–400, at 340–41; cf. 400).

result is that Blackburn refutes an argument, supposedly Aquinas's own, that Aquinas himself would have immediately rejected.⁴ Likewise, in his textbook *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, William L. Rowe refutes the version of the "cosmological argument" put forward by William Clarke and Gottfried Leibniz in the early eighteenth century and thereby avoids having to address the problem of finite existence in terms of act and potency.⁵ All too often, questions regarding "existence as such" are naively dismissed by supposing that "the physical universe is merely a brute fact."⁶ Finite existence, far from being a self-sufficient "brute fact," requires explanation, since finite existence is not existence per se. This insight will be spelled out further as the chapters proceed.

I use the controversial term "proofs" in the title of the present book. When classical Christian thinkers such as Aquinas offered philosophical demonstrations of God's existence, did they think of them as proofs—that is, as rational arguments that strictly demonstrate that God exists? Rightly anxious to dissociate Aquinas from Cartesian or empiricist notions of "proof," some contemporary scholars deny that he intended his five ways to be rigorous demonstrations of God's existence. For example, in his generally excellent book responding to the new atheism, David Fergusson remarks that Aquinas's five ways "are less exercises in demonstration of God's existence than a directing of the human intellect towards a mysterious limit of thought that in

4. See Simon Blackburn, *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 159–62. Blackburn's presentation of the demonstrations of God's existence depends entirely on Hume, without exhibiting any knowledge of philosophical arguments prior to Hume's. For a similar caricature of arguments for God's existence (again, apparently without intention to caricature), see A. C. Grayling, *The God Argument: The Case against Religion and for Humanism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), chaps. 8–10. In discussing the argument from "design" or teleological order, for example, Grayling cites only Intelligent Design theorists, William Paley, and Hume; and Grayling states that the "cosmological argument" (for which his sole sources are Leibniz, Hume, and Kant) relies on "the facts that the world came into existence, that it could have been different (this is what is meant by the world being 'contingent'), and that everything is governed by causation" (*ibid.*, 95)—thereby mischaracterizing these arguments in a number of major ways.

5. See William L. Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2007). For background, see *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, ed. H. G. Alexander (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956). See also Alexander R. Pruss, *The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Reassessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

6. David Fergusson, *Creation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 28. See also Grayling's response to his own caricatured version of the "cosmological" argument: "Why cannot the universe be its own reason for existing? Science has a very good account of how the universe we occupy—whether or not it is one of many, perhaps infinitely many—has evolved from a beginning whose nature can be carefully reconstructed, to within a minuscule fraction of time after the initial singularity (the 'Big Bang'), by tracing back the evolution of physical phenomena as they now are" (*God Argument*, 97).

the *Summa Theologiae* can only be further illuminated by divine revelation.”⁷ Similarly, Stanley Hauerwas suggests that Aquinas’s five ways merely seek to “‘prove’ that language/reason may find itself to be insufficient to testify to the God who is the beginning and end of all that is.”⁸ Hauerwas emphasizes that “the God we worship and the world God created cannot be truthfully known without the cross.”⁹

Among philosophers and theologians who are not explicitly interpreting Aquinas, one finds the same concern regarding the use of the term “proof,” which here means rational demonstration. Thus, Rémi Brague warns against using the term “proofs” with respect to the existence of God, noting that this is “a term that the best theologians avoid, or only employ with a thousand caveats.”¹⁰ From a quite different theological perspective, Hans Küng makes

7. David Fergusson, *Faith and Its Critics: A Conversation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 57. In the same vein, Alister McGrath supposes that “Aquinas does not actually claim that such considerations [the five ways] prove this existence [of God]; the argument is much more along the lines of ‘providing support for’ or ‘resonating with’ faith.” See McGrath, *The Reenchantment of Nature: The Denial of Religion and the Ecological Crisis* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 157. For this view see also Lubor Velecky, *Aquinas’s Five Arguments in the Summa Theologiae Ia QQ. 2, 3* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994). For the variety of interpretations of the five ways, and for their historical antecedents and the twentieth-century debates about them, see Fergus Kerr, OP, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 52–72. To his credit, in a more recent book, Fergusson grants that Aquinas’s five ways do aim to demonstrate God’s existence: “These arguments do not unfold the nature of God so much as show us that there must be something which owes its existence to nothing else and which is the cause of everything not itself” (Fergusson, *Creation*, 27). Even so, Fergusson still holds that the five ways are not “developed as watertight arguments intended to persuade skeptics who advance a different worldview” (ibid.). But Aquinas certainly considered them to be “watertight arguments” in the sense of demonstrative arguments, although Aquinas was not advancing these arguments against skeptics. For thoroughgoing skeptics such as Montaigne or Hume, who reject reasoning about being and causality, the five ways can of course only be conjecture. It is difficult to find fully consistent skeptics, since if we cannot reason about being and causality, there is nothing that reason can truly know. See Paul J. Griffiths, “On the Mistake of Thinking Reason’s Products Transparent to Its Gaze: Denys Turner on Arguments for the Existence of God,” *Pro Ecclesia* 15 (2006): 472–82.

8. Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001), 165n51. For Hauerwas, indebted to Karl Barth, “Aquinas understood that the existence of God does not depend on any proof because such a proof cannot help but submit God to human hands and, as a result, make God less than God” (ibid., 164). For a critique of this position of Barth’s, see Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

9. Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe*, 17.

10. Rémi Brague, *On the God of Christians: (And on One or Two Others)*, trans. Paul Seaton (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2013), xvi. Similarly, in light of Kant, William Desmond observes that “almost always our search for ‘proof’ is tempted with falling under the bewitchment of univocity, and so with ending up as a rationalistic idol. . . . There is no apodeictic certainty” (Desmond, *God and the Between* [Oxford: Blackwell, 2008], 131, 140). Desmond prefers the term “probe.” Although he defends the *Summa theologiae* as a theological text that “transforms Aristotelian metaphysics” in light of “the biblical picture,” he worries

a similar point: “It must be admitted that, in so far as they seek to prove something, the proofs of God are meaningless. But in so far as they bring God into the discussion, they are very meaningful.”¹¹

However, this effort to avoid the term “proof” is mistaken, both as a reading of Aquinas and (in Brague and Küng) as a broader claim. Certainly, language and reason are radically insufficient when it comes to God, since God, who is transcendent and infinite, is in an obvious sense not comprehensible by finite minds. We cannot form a concept of *what God is* because God, to say the least, cannot be circumscribed by a finite concept.¹² Nor can the living God whom Christians worship be fully or adequately known without Jesus’s cross or without the ecclesial communion established by Jesus. In this regard, Roger Scruton is surely right that the God of the proofs, if the proofs were all we had, would be too impersonal.¹³ Yet, for good reason, Aquinas does not eschew the word “prove”—though his proofs are metaphysical, not empiricist or Cartesian. The word “prove” reminds us that we are not here dealing with an experiential intuition, a gesture toward infinite mystery, or an opinion based on personal sensibility. In the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas states, “The existence of God can

“about how Aquinas’s scholastic formulation displays a kind of forensic univocity in the mode of articulation. . . . His form of articulation seems sometimes more suitable to a legal disputation than a theme which calls also on meditative, even prayerful mindfulness” (ibid., 132–33). But Desmond ably sets forth and defends a version of Aquinas’s “*third way*, called by him the proof from possibility and necessity” (ibid., 132).

11. Hans Küng, *Does God Exist? An Answer for Today*, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Random House, 1981), 534. Küng rejects the demonstrability of God’s existence on the Humean grounds that “the bridge supposed to be provided by the principle of causality, together with its supports, gets lost in the incomprehensible infinite, of which it is by no means certain whether it is fullness or emptiness” (ibid.). The proofs do not depend on navigating the “incomprehensible infinite.”

12. John Haldane rightly points out, however, that not being able to know “what God is” does not mean that we know nothing of God other than that he is. See Haldane, *Reasonable Faith* (London: Routledge, 2010), 14. See also Brian Davies, OP, “Aquinas on What God Is Not,” in *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Brian Davies, OP (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 227–42; Gregory P. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God: Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004).

13. See Roger Scruton, *The Face of God* (London: Continuum, 2012), 10–21. Scruton presents Aquinas’s third way, and he is tentatively willing to accept its validity so long as we do not imagine God as an empirical “cause” alongside the causes that we find in the world. But he insists that such Aristotelian demonstrations must be combined with a much more important appreciation of God’s personal presence in the world; otherwise, the demonstrations end “by hiding God” (ibid., 15). God’s personal presence in the world is experienced in the community of believers, and above all, for Scruton, in the Eucharist. He states, “The connection between belief in God and the community of believers is recognized in the Christian concept of communion. And this connection, far from casting doubt on the validity of transcendental theology, points the way to supplying what it lacks” (ibid., 20).

be proved [*probari*] in five ways.”¹⁴ After explaining what constitutes a rationally probative demonstration from effect to cause, he observes that “the existence of God . . . can be demonstrated [*demonstrari*] from those of his effects which are known to us” and adds that the existence of God “can be known by natural reason,” even though “there is nothing to prevent a man, who cannot grasp a proof [*demonstrationem*], accepting, as a matter of faith, something which in itself is capable of being scientifically known and demonstrated.”¹⁵

In making this claim about the ability of human reason to demonstrate conclusively that God exists, Aquinas is hardly alone. Rooted in such biblical passages as Wisdom 13 and Romans 1, his position is shared not only by his contemporaries and medieval predecessors but also (as we will see) by the leading Greek and Latin fathers of the church. Indeed, Ian Markham is quite right to insist, “From St. Paul in Romans 1, through to St. Augustine and St. Thomas, we find natural theology central. The Barthian and post-modern lack of interest in this way of thinking is a significant departure and, I would add, betrayal of the Christian tradition.”¹⁶ In the Christian tradition, the demonstration of God’s existence by rational arguments has grounding in Hellenistic philosophy and in Scripture itself. Markham adds that “the tradition of natural theology should not be viewed as an exercise in seeking arguments to persuade the non-existent ‘traditionless’ person.”¹⁷ Even atheism is a “tradition,” as is apparent in Julian Baggini’s *Atheism: A Very Short Introduction*.¹⁸ And far from being simply an apologetic or defensive ploy in the

14. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.2.3. I employ the translation published in five volumes as *Summa Theologica*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981).

15. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.2.2, *respondeo* and ad 1. See also Steven A. Long, “Objectionary Potency, Natural Knowledge, and the Natural Knowledge of God,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 37 (1997): 45–63.

16. Ian Markham, *Truth and the Reality of God: An Essay in Natural Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 3. Drawing on Leibniz’s principle of sufficient reason and Aquinas’s third way (from contingency), Markham argues that there must be an explanation for the universe’s existence and coherence. If so, then we cannot proceed to infinity in contingent explanations—that is, in explanations that require a further explanation. Without the existence of a self-explanatory, necessary being, the universe and rationality itself cannot be other than absurd. See *ibid.*, 91.

17. *Ibid.*, 83. The fact that human reason is always embedded in particular traditions does not mean that reasoners from distinct traditions lack the ability to reason together and to follow one another’s logical arguments despite their diverse practices and stories. Thus I do not agree with Robert N. Bellah’s denial that “one can give convincing reasons why one religious or philosophical position is better than all the others” (Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011], 605). I share the view of human reason defended by Hart, *Experience of God*, 1–10, 15–19.

18. Julian Baggini, *Atheism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Baggini shows ignorance of the history of the demonstrations of God’s existence. Thus

Christian tradition, the demonstrations are a mode of praising God as the “I am” (Exod. 3:14), a mode that Jewish and Muslim thinkers have also shared.¹⁹

It is urgent that Christians today reclaim the two-millennia-old Christian tradition of demonstrating God’s existence without excluding the thinkers within this tradition who have attempted to *refute* the demonstrations. Thus, the main task of this textbook is to accurately set forth the ideas of twenty-one seminal thinkers about the possibility or impossibility of rationally demonstrating God’s existence.²⁰ Each thinker is introduced by a brief biographical sketch. Although significant thinkers have unavoidably been left out, I hope to have provided a sufficiently representative sample of the major contributors and positions, so that the present widespread ignorance of this tradition will be overcome.²¹

The first time period spans the patristic and medieval eras. Importantly, the Greek and Latin fathers agree about the demonstrability of God’s existence.

he states, “The cosmological argument is there whenever someone turns around and says to the naturalist, ‘Ah, well the universe may have begun with the big bang, but what caused the big bang?’” (ibid., 94).

19. For the Christian tradition of philosophical reasoning, see Jacques Maritain, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, trans. Edward H. Flannery (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955). See also the texts compiled in *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation: The 1930s Christian Philosophy Debates in France*, ed. and trans. Gregory Sadler (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011). See also such works as Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); David B. Burrell, CSC, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986); Francisco Javier del Castillo Ornelas, *An Analysis of St. Thomas’ Critiques of Maimonides’ Doctrines on Divine Attributes* (Rome: Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, 2007); Lenn E. Goodman, *God of Abraham* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

20. Anthony Kenny argues that “if we take natural theology to be the philosophical analysis of the concepts used in thinking and talking about God, then a disproof of God’s existence, or a demonstration that the very notion of God was incoherent, would itself be a successful piece of natural theologizing” (Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979], 4). In agreement with Kenny’s view here, I have included in this book the most eminent arguments for and against the demonstrability of God’s existence. In his book, Kenny argues that the attribute of divine omniscience is opposed to the attribute of divine immutability, and so a demonstration of God’s existence as pure act is rendered self-contradictory. This position depends, however, on the view that to know time one must be in time.

21. Among the figures whom unfortunately I could not treat is Friedrich Schleiermacher. His approach, based on religious intuition or the feeling of absolute dependence, has been recently adopted by Eric Reitan, *Is God a Delusion? A Reply to Religion’s Cultured Despisers* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). I do not treat thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche who simply assume, as an unargued given, that human reason cannot demonstrate God’s existence. For a somewhat similar project to mine, see Aidan Nichols, OP’s *A Grammar of Consent: The Existence of God in Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991). Nichols treats the ways to God offered by John Henry Newman, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, John of the Cross, Blaise Pascal, Immanuel Kant, Søren Kierkegaard, Gabriel Marcel, and G. K. Chesterton.

In Gregory of Nazianzus, we already find a deeply Aristotelian approach. This is even more the case with John of Damascus, though in both Gregory and John, Neoplatonic insights are also present. Tertullian draws on Stoic demonstrations of God's existence, and Augustine largely on Neoplatonic ones. Anselm develops Augustine's approach, while Aquinas adapts Aristotelian demonstrations and exhibits the influence of Augustine, Boethius, John of Damascus, Avicenna, and others. William of Ockham is known for his skepticism about standard ways of demonstrating God's existence and unity, in particular the argument from efficient causality.

The second period is the Baroque or modern period, inclusive here of the Reformers. John Calvin, known for his insistence on sin's profound impact on our minds and hearts, nevertheless holds that God can be known by demonstrative knowledge and that a sense of God's existence cannot be expunged from the human mind. Michel de Montaigne, educated in late-Renaissance humanism and possessed of a splendid grasp of classical Latin Stoic and Epicurean sources, offers a withering critique of the demonstrations of God's existence insofar as he knew them. Francisco Suárez develops a demonstration of God's existence that has roots both in Aquinas and in Ockham (and in John Duns Scotus as well); without agreeing with Suárez in certain important areas, I think that his arguments are successful in showing that God exists. René Descartes argues that skepticism can be answered by beginning with the thinking self's ability to conceive of perfections that we do not possess, perfections of which we therefore cannot be the source. Descartes also presents his own version of the Anselmian argument. Blaise Pascal's powerful reflections on demonstrating God's existence, including his brilliant wager, have Montaigne constantly in view. David Hume is in many respects a British Montaigne, and his critique of the cause-effect relation remains enormously influential in philosophical circles, despite its flaws. Immanuel Kant's argument that the cause-effect relation functions as a category of our mind, and thus can be used for certain purposes but certainly not for demonstration of an infinite cause, creatively recasts Hume. Kant's practical postulate of God's existence also merits attention, even though Kant does not consider it to be a basis of demonstrative speculative knowledge.

The third period comprises the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Admittedly, these two centuries receive disproportionate treatment in the present book by comparison with the other eighteen centuries. I include both well-known and lesser-known figures who made particularly distinctive contributions. John Henry Newman's work is (among other things) a highly creative response to Hume just as Pascal had responded to Montaigne. Maurice Blondel argues that in the dynamism of action or volition, we experience

ourselves to be always seeking more than contingent goods. Just as the universal Good is discernible at the root of our action, so also is the thought of God at the root of our thought. Pierre Rousselot argues that in knowing finite beings, we must affirm that “being exists,” which implies the synthesis of essence and existence. This judgment is one that we cannot know intuitively but that is necessary for intelligence to proceed, and it implies God’s existence. Rousselot also highlights the role of our loves, of our inclination toward being, within both natural and supernatural knowledge. Ludwig Wittgenstein develops a philosophy of language that builds on Kant’s categories of the mind but does so, arguably, with greater room for mystery and for the values of particular cultures. In Wittgenstein’s approaches to language, however, there is no room for a demonstration of God’s existence. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange provides a brilliant exposition of Aquinas’s modes of demonstrating God’s existence and in the process responds to a wide array of modern philosophical positions. Like Wittgenstein, but via a critique of any attempt to conceptualize being, Martin Heidegger rejects the demonstrations of God’s existence as antiphilosophical and as an attempt to force the divine into an overarching human framework. Last, Karl Barth argues that the whole attempt of fallen humans to demonstrate that God exists leads only to the construction of an idol.

Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Barth have the last word chronologically in this book. Along with Hume and Kant, their influence is felt deeply in the contemporary theological and philosophical academy, where there exists a “cultural presupposition” that “philosophical arguments for the existence of God as they existed in classical form are no longer intellectually tenable” and indeed may well be idolatrous.²² But what S. L. Frank describes as “the inner psychical grave into which the question of the meaning of life is buried” is continually demanding to be explored.²³ Not surprisingly, therefore, a number of contemporary philosophers and theologians, such as David Braine, Pierre-Marie Emonet, Edward Feser, John Haldane, David Hart, Ian Markham, Christopher Martin, Barry Miller, Anna Moreland, Francesca Aran Murphy, Denys Turner, and Thomas Joseph White, have been rediscovering the classical demonstrations of God’s existence.²⁴ Indeed, as D. Stephen Long remarks, “As

22. Thomas Joseph White, OP, “Toward a Post-Secular, Post-Conciliar Thomistic Philosophy: *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity* and the Challenge of Contemporary Natural Theology,” *Nova et Vetera* 10 (2012): 521–30, at 522. For the same point, see also Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, 23.

23. S. L. Frank, *The Meaning of Life*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 3.

24. See David Braine, *The Reality of Time and the Existence of God: The Project of Proving God’s Existence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Pierre-Marie Emonet, OP, *God Seen in the Mirror of the World: An Introduction to the Philosophy of God*, trans. Robert R. Barr

long as people continue to assume and act as if truth, goodness, and beauty matter (to do otherwise is impossible), and as long as some ask questions about God and being (to do otherwise is possible), metaphysics has not yet come to an end.”²⁵

The present textbook is a contribution to the metaphysical retrieval undertaken by these scholars. The demonstrations of God’s existence have a necessary place within what the Episcopalian theologian Mark McIntosh describes as the “formation in holiness that liberates the mind, leaving it sensitive to the overwhelming reality of the divine mystery.”²⁶ This is so not least because the demonstrations (and the attempts to refute them) help to purify what we mean by a “God” who is the Creator and sustainer of all finite things rather than a mere finite being among other finite beings. By so doing, the demonstrations nourish our encounter with the God who is “spirit” (John 4:24).²⁷

(New York: Crossroad, 2000); Edward Feser, *The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2008); Feser, *Aquinas*; Christopher Martin, *Thomas Aquinas: God and Explanations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997); J. J. C. Smart and John Haldane, *Atheism and Theism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); Barry Miller, *A Most Unlikely God: A Philosophical Enquiry* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996); Miller, *From Existence to God: A Contemporary Philosophical Argument* (London: Routledge, 1992); Anna Bonta Moreland, *Known by Nature: Thomas Aquinas on Natural Knowledge of God* (New York: Crossroad, 2010); Francesca Aran Murphy, *God Is Not a Story: Realism Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*; Thomas Joseph White, OP, *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity: A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia, 2009). See also Mats Wahlberg’s *Reshaping Natural Theology: Seeing Nature as Creation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), which argues persuasively for the existence of a creator.

25. D. Stephen Long, *Speaking of God: Theology, Language, and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 186. See also my *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) and Thomas G. Guarino’s excellent “*Philosophia Obscurans? Six Theses on the Proper Relationship between Theology and Philosophy*,” *Nova et Vetera* 12 (2014): 349–94. For further discussion see Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005); A. N. Williams, *The Architecture of Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

26. Mark A. McIntosh, *Discernment and Truth: The Spirituality and Theology of Knowledge* (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 174–75. For the point that “true knowledge of God is a fundamentally relational and transformative notion” and “full and authentic knowledge of God arises through divine self-disclosure,” see Alister E. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 2, *Reality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 290–91. This does not undermine the fact that, as McGrath recognizes, “the Christian tradition holds that some knowledge of God may arise through nature” (*ibid.*, 290).

27. Since this intellectual purification is always needed, it would be misleading to think of metaphysics as a mere foundation for revealed theology, to be set aside once we turn to revealed theology proper. See Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, trans. Philip Clayton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), chap. 1. In Pannenberg’s view, however, “whenever philosophy claimed to be in the position to derive the true conception of the one God and to be able to prove his existence through the power of philosophical reflection alone, one finds, bound up unavoidably with that belief, the claim to stand in the place of the revelation-based knowledge of religion” (*ibid.*, 19).

At the same time, as Aquinas observes, “human reason is very deficient in things concerning God” due to the effects of sin.²⁸ Joseph Ratzinger remarks that the history of religion shows on the one hand that “there has always been a kind of basic evidence for the reality of God,” and on the other hand that there has also always been a “tremendous obscuring and twisting” of this reality.²⁹ It makes no sense, then, to hold that every “epistemically justified belief that God exists must be based on a sound *argument* for God’s existence.”³⁰ Furthermore, the demonstrations do not even touch, let alone sate, our desire for an interpersonal relationship with God, which can only be received through divine revelation; and neither do the demonstrations respond to the questions raised by our experience of evil. Thus, Fergus Kerr rightly insists that “even the theologically orientated metaphysics of antiquity (as Thomas supposed it to be), the best reasoned knowledge of the existence of the *arche kai telos*, could only leave one in a certain ‘anguish.’”³¹ Or, as Ratzinger puts it, “the basic certainty of the existence of God was and is always accompanied by a sense of its being an immense riddle.”³² The demonstrations do not resolve the “anguish” or answer the “immense riddle,” but they encourage us to seek the resolution and the answer.³³ It is for this reason that I fully share Eric Mascall’s

28. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* IIa-IIae.2.4 See also my *Paul in the Summa Theologiae* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), chap. 7: “Romans 1:20 in the *Summa Theologiae*.”

29. Joseph Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 28.

30. Paul K. Moser, *The Evidence for God: Religious Knowledge Reexamined* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 150. While correctly rejecting the view that such arguments are necessary for “epistemically justified belief,” Moser goes astray in concluding that the living God wills to remain obscured and therefore entirely out of reach of rational demonstrations. Moser accepts Hume’s view that even if we could reason to a first cause, the first cause would have to be *strictly* proportionate to “the observed causal chains in the sensory world” (*ibid.*, 153). With regard to “epistemically justified belief” without arguments for God’s existence, see also Martin Buber, *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation between Religion and Philosophy*, trans. Maurice S. Friedman (New York: Harper & Row, 1952), 28.

31. Kerr, *After Aquinas*, 66. As Henri de Lubac, SJ, rightly says, “The more we feel the proof as proof, the more conscious we become of the misery of the human condition which obliges us to resort to it, and which remains after it has been provided” (de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, trans. Alexander Dru with Mark Sebanc and Cassian Fulsom, OSB [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 43).

32. Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, 28.

33. See also Alasdair MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009); Robert J. Spitzer, SJ, *New Proofs for the Existence of God: Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Keith Ward, *God and the Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009); C. Stephen Evans, *Why Believe? Reason and Mystery as Pointers to God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Evans, *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God: A New Look at Theistic*

desire, in his Gifford Lectures of 1971, “to vindicate . . . a fundamentally and unashamedly metaphysical approach to theism.”³⁴

Biblical and Hellenistic Background

Since the present textbook does not include a chapter on the biblical and Hellenistic sources of the Christian tradition of demonstrating God’s existence, let me briefly survey some of their most valuable contributions. The biblical books of Job and Wisdom of Solomon contain arguments for God’s existence.³⁵ Job and his friends observe that the natural order testifies to the existence of God. Job states, for example, that God “stretches out the north over the void, and hangs the earth on nothing. He binds up the waters in his thick clouds, and the cloud is not rent under them. . . . Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways; and how small a whisper do we hear of him!” (Job 26:7–8, 14). Similarly, Job’s friend Elihu appeals to the ways in which this world bespeaks its own dependence: “Hear this, O Job; stop and consider the wondrous works of God. Do you know how God lays his command upon them, and causes the lightning of his cloud to shine? Do you know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge? . . . Can you, like him, spread out the skies, hard as a molten mirror?” (Job 37:14–16, 18). In the book of Job, it is the goodness of God, not his existence, that is contested.³⁶ For its part, the Wisdom of Solomon

Arguments (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Nathan Schneider, *God in Proof: The Story of a Search from the Ancients to the Internet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); W. Jay Wood, *God* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011).

34. E. L. Mascall, *The Openness of Being: Natural Theology Today* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971), vii. For the opposite perspective, see Jeffrey W. Robbins’s praise of the “radical death of God theology” as “a critical and prophetic voice” that criticized “the moral-metaphysical God of ontotheology” and established “the conditions for a recovery of a distinctly biblical faith that gives emphasis not to the power and glory of God but to God’s suffering and love” (Robbins, introduction to John D. Caputo and Gianni Vattimo, *After the Death of God*, ed. Jeffrey W. Robbins [New York: Columbia University Press, 2007], 1–24, at 9–10). Robbins’s seeming ignorance of the Christian tradition of demonstrating God’s existence may be intentional, given his appreciation for John Caputo’s classically liberal separation of faith from knowledge and of “religious tradition” from “actual historic faith communities” (*ibid.*, 16). For a much richer (critical) engagement with the perspective of Gianni Vattimo, see Thomas G. Guarino’s *Vattimo and Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2009).

35. See my “The Book of Job and God’s Existence,” in *A Man of the Church: Honoring the Theology, Life, and Witness of Ralph del Colle*, ed. Michel René Barnes (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 231–40. For psalms that are particularly instructive regarding “natural theology,” see Psalms 19, 104, and 119.

36. In light of Job’s protest against God, see Bernard Schweizer’s literary study *Hating God: The Untold Story of Misotheism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

states that, “all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know him who exists, nor did they recognize the craftsman while paying heed to his works. . . . For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator” (Wis. 13:1, 5).³⁷

In Romans 1:19–20, the apostle Paul testifies to the demonstrability of God’s existence: “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.”³⁸ Philo of Alexandria also deserves mention here. Philo states that just as we know a well-built house (or city or ship) has a builder, so also the universe’s order leads us to know that it has a maker, given that nonrational things could not otherwise arrange and coordinate themselves in an integrated whole. Philo concludes, “They, then, who draw their conclusions in this manner perceive God in his shadow, arriving at a due comprehension of the artist through his works.”³⁹

A few centuries earlier, Xenophon had attributed to Socrates the view that just as the mind governs the human body, so also “Thought indwelling in the

37. See my discussion of Wisdom of Solomon 13, Romans 1, and Acts 17 in chap. 8 of my *Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation: The Mediation of the Gospel through Church and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014). On the book of Wisdom (and the Psalms), see especially James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

38. For the extent of Paul’s debt to Wisdom of Solomon, see Douglas A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 360–62. Yet, for Campbell, Romans 1:18–32 recounts a position held by an anonymous opponent of Paul’s, a position that Paul rejects. Campbell states that “the speaker [of Romans 1:18–32] is a recognizable ‘Teacher’ of some sort, whose influence at Rome Paul is seeking to neutralize throughout Romans. And Romans 1:18–32 is in fact the fullest presentation of the Teacher’s position that we receive from the hand of Paul” (*ibid.*, 542; cf. 162). For a rejoinder to Campbell, see N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 766–67; cf. 638–39. For the view that Paul does not intend Romans 1:20 to be taken as his own teaching, see also W. Schmithals, *Der Römerbrief* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1988), 77, and, somewhat similarly, E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 123. Barr responds to such approaches in his *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*, 49–57. On Campbell’s perspective in light of the work of other Pauline exegetes, see also Kerr, *After Aquinas*, 61–63.

39. Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.32.97, in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C. D. Yonge, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 61. This proof appears in the midst of Philo’s allegorical reading of the scriptural testimony to Joseph’s sons (Ephraim and Manasseh) and to the temple craftsman Bezalel! See also Roberto Radice, “Philo’s Theology and Theory of Creation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, ed. Adam Kamesar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 124–45, esp. 126; Cristina Termini, “Philo’s Thought within the Context of Middle Judaism,” trans. Adam Kamesar, in *Cambridge Companion to Philo*, 95–123; Charles A. Anderson, *Philo of Alexandria’s Views of the Physical World* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

Universal disposes all things according to its pleasure.”⁴⁰ In arriving at this conclusion, Xenophon’s Socrates argues on the basis of the wisdom present in created things. Thus, Socrates asks his interlocutor, Aristodemus, whether he admires any wise human beings. When Aristodemus names certain artists and poets, Socrates notes that these wise humans only created imaginary characters; by comparison, how wise must the “creators of living, intelligent, and active beings” be.⁴¹ Aristodemus responds that living beings may have come to be by chance rather than by any wise design. In reply, Socrates urges Aristodemus to think about whether humans display the marks of chance or of design: “Suppose that it is impossible to guess the purpose of one creature’s existence, and obvious that another’s serves a useful end, which, in your judgment, is the work of chance, and which of design?”⁴² The point is that if a creature serves a useful end, as the human body shows to be the case, then there appears to be design.

Nonetheless, Aristodemus confesses that he remains doubtful about the existence of a wise designer, because, as he says, “I don’t see the master hand, whereas I see the makers of things in this world.”⁴³ To this objection, Socrates points out that the soul or rational power in humans cannot be seen, and yet we willingly attribute design to it. Furthermore, the form of our body is so well suited to our soul, and our souls even have the dignity of being able to apprehend “the existence of gods who set in order the universe, greatest and fairest of things.”⁴⁴ Aristodemus responds that he will believe in such things when the gods “send counsellors” to tell us what to do and what to

40. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.4.17–18, trans. E. C. Marchant, in Xenophon, *Memorabilia, Oeconomicus, Symposium, Apology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923), 2–359, at 63. See also Mark L. McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 272–91. After a careful analysis of Xenophon’s Socrates in light of the evidence of Plato’s dialogues, McPherran concludes, “Socrates’ endorsement of the *Memorabilia*’s teleological argument places him at the leading edge of fifth-century theological reform. Raised in a culture of passionate gods—gods hungry for honor, full of strife, morally distant, and confusedly and intermittently involved with the daily life of nature and humanity—Socrates managed to travel a very great conceptual distance indeed. For beginning there he appears to have arrived at an idea that was to dominate Western thought for many centuries to come: the existence of an immanent—albeit still anthropopsychic—cosmic intelligence and loving Maker” (*Religion of Socrates*, 290–91). See also the discussion of Xenophon’s Socrates in David Sedley, *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 78–86. Sedley argues, “Whatever Xenophon or his source may have done to shape or adapt the material, its originality and significance make it a natural assumption that its authorship really does in essence belong to Socrates. And it does contain . . . the first recorded antecedent of the Argument from Design” (*ibid.*, 82).

41. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.4.4, p. 55.

42. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.4.4, p. 55.

43. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.4.9, p. 59.

44. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.4.13, p. 61.

avoid.⁴⁵ In Socrates's view, however, the gods are already doing this for the Athenians and other cities, and the key point is that if human wisdom is able to know many things, God's wisdom is so great that "he sees all things and hears all things alike, and is present in all places and heedful of all things."⁴⁶

In the *Republic*, Plato presents Socrates as developing an account of the Good as the cause of all other things. In discussion with Glaucon, Socrates argues that we should "say that the objects of knowledge not only receive from the presence of the good their being known, but their very existence and essence is derived from it."⁴⁷ As is his wont, Socrates begins his discourse with Glaucon by noting that the greatest object of study is the Good, because the Good is what we all seek. He points out that most people consider the Good to be pleasure. Those who think more about it, however, recognize that this cannot be so, since there are bad pleasures; such persons posit that the Good is knowledge. In Socrates's view, however, it is the Idea of the Good that fixes our minds on the eternal forms; thus it is the Idea of the Good that "gives their truth to the objects of knowledge and the power of knowing to the knower."⁴⁸ He thereby arrives at the Good as the supreme principle, above being and truth, that in some way causes the being and truth of all things that can be objects of knowledge (i.e., the eternal forms).⁴⁹

In the *Timaeus*, Plato (speaking through the figure of Timaeus) reflects on the origin of the cosmos by first distinguishing between being and becoming: "What is that which is Existent always and has no Becoming? And what is that which is Becoming always and never is Existent?"⁵⁰ Things that change

45. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.4.15, p. 61.

46. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.4.18, p. 63. Sedley connects Socrates's view here with Socrates's encounter, as a young man, with the philosophy of Anaxagoras, as recounted in Plato's *Phaedo* 96a–100d. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates criticizes Anaxagoras on the grounds that he "made no use of intelligence, and did not assign any real causes for the ordering of things, but mentioned as causes air and ether and water and many other absurdities. And it seemed to me it was very much as if one should say that Socrates does with intelligence whatever he does, and then, in trying to give the causes of the particular thing I do, should say first that I am now sitting here because my body is composed of bones and sinews" (*Phaedo* 98c, in Plato, *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960], 339). Socrates goes on to argue that "if anything is beautiful besides absolute beauty it is beautiful for no other reason than because it partakes of absolute beauty" (Plato, *Phaedo* 100c, p. 345). On Anaxagoras, see L. P. Gerson, *God and Greek Philosophy: Studies in the Early History of Natural Theology* (London: Routledge, 1994), 28–32. See also R. K. Hack, *God in Greek Philosophy to the Time of Socrates* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1931).

47. Plato, *Republic* 509b, trans. Paul Shorey, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 744.

48. Plato, *Republic* 508d–e, p. 744.

49. See the succinct discussion in Gerd Van Riel, *Plato's Gods* (London: Ashgate, 2013), 105–6.

50. Plato, *Timaeus* 28a, in Plato, *Timaeus, Critias, Cleitophon, Menexenus, Epistles*, trans. R. G. Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 49.

are “becoming.” All changing things require something that causes them, “for without a cause it is impossible for anything to attain becoming.”⁵¹ Has the cosmos, then, come to be, or has it always existed? Plato answers, “It has come into existence; for it is visible and tangible and possessed of a body; and all such things are sensible, and things sensible . . . come into existence.”⁵² Given that the cosmos has come to be, it must have a transcendent cause—a cause that at least transcends the cosmos of changing things, even if Plato denies that one can say anything about this mysterious “Maker and Father of this Universe.”⁵³ Emphasizing that “that which has come into existence must necessarily . . . have come into existence by reason of some Cause,” Plato goes on to say that this cause is “good” and is “the supreme originating principle of Becoming and the Cosmos.”⁵⁴ Plato calls this cause, who establishes the cosmos of changing things by fixing “his gaze on the Eternal” as on a model, “God” (), “Father” (), and the “Constructor” (μ), the “demiurge”.⁵⁵

Scholars debate how we should understand this argument for the existence of a creator God, since there are many other gods in the *Timaeus*, and since the status of the “demiurge” is not clear, other than that the demiurge is divine. Sarah Broadie comments that Plato’s approach “resembles the Abrahamic schema in maintaining a sharp distinction between the cosmos and its divine maker,” while at the same time allowing for “a plurality of gods and of divine cosmic principles.”⁵⁶ This judgment seems correct to me.

51. Plato, *Timaeus* 28a, p. 49.

52. Plato, *Timaeus* 28b, p. 51.

53. Plato, *Timaeus* 28c, p. 51.

54. Plato, *Timaeus* 28c and 29e, pp. 51 and 53.

55. Plato, *Timaeus* 29a and 37c, pp. 29 and 37. For discussion of the *Timaeus* see Sedley, *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity*, 95–132. He notes that most readers, including himself, “take *Timaeus* to be insisting on the indispensability of divine causation as an explanatory principle” (ibid., 101). On the relationship between the *Timaeus*’s cosmology and its politics, see Catherine H. Zuckert, *Plato’s Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), chap. 6.

56. Sarah Broadie, *Nature and Divinity in Plato’s Timaeus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 12, 22. L. P. Gerson argues that Plato implies “a similarity or even an identity between demiurge and Forms. But the demiurge is *nous* and Forms are *noēta*. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that at least in part the demiurge is hypothesized in order to provide the permanent intellectual activity required for Forms to do their work” (Gerson, *God and Greek Philosophy*, 69). On the grounds that Plato’s ontology allows only for being and becoming, and the “demiurge” appears to fit neither, Gerd Van Riel suggests that for Plato the “demiurge” is not a self-standing divine principle, but rather “the gods enact cognitive intellect, and demiurgic intellect, in their souls” (*Plato’s Gods*, 95). For Van Riel, “in the *Timaeus*, the intellect (the Demiurge) is not treated as a particular god, but rather as ‘intellect () in general,’ bringing all the operations of Platonic intellect under a single heading” (ibid., 107). By comparison, see John Peter Kenney’s insistence that “the *Timaeus* does not support the claim

In his *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, Aristotle helps us to see why the cosmos's existence requires a self-sufficient source of all finite being. Since matter decays and changes without utterly going out of being, it may seem that we do not need to explain the existence of the cosmos, especially if with Aristotle we suppose the cosmos to have existed everlastingly. Perhaps the cosmos simply *is*.⁵⁷ Aristotle observes that the being of particular things is subject to change. Such things therefore have potency; they are not pure actuality. Insofar as a thing has potency, it cannot be the only source of its actuality and must depend on others ontologically. Aristotle argues, therefore, that although the cosmos has no beginning, it cannot account for its own limited actuality. Instead, its finite actuality must be grounded in a first mover, Pure Act, that does not depend on anything else for actuality and that has no potency. Pure Act causes "the simple locomotion of the universe" but does not itself "move" or change, since Pure Act cannot "be otherwise than as it is" (not because it is statically immobile, but because it is fully actual).⁵⁸ Aristotle also demonstrates that Pure Act must be one; there cannot be two or more pure actualities.⁵⁹

How, according to Aristotle, does Pure Act cause the everlasting circular motion of the first moved mover? In book 12 of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle states

that the forms are the derivative thoughts of a divine mind" (Kenney, *Mystical Monotheism: A Study in Ancient Platonic Theology* [Hanover, NH: Brown University Press, 1991], 16). For the argument that the "demiurge" is temporal, see Thomas K. Johansen, "The *Timaeus* on the Principles of Cosmology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 463–83.

57. For a response to such a view, drawing on Thomas Aquinas, see Patrick Masterson, *Approaching God: Between Phenomenology and Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 46–53.

58. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1072b and 1073a, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinnell, IA: The Peripatetic Press, 1979), 205–6; cf. book 9 on actuality and potency. See also the arguments for the unmoved mover found in Aristotle's *Physics*, trans. and ed. Glen Coughlin (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2005), esp. books 7–8. For discussion of Aristotle, see Gerson, *God and Greek Philosophy*, chap. 3; Sedley, *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity*, chap. 6; Joseph Owens, CSsR, "Pure Actuality and Primacy in Being," in Owens, *Aristotle's Gradations of Being in Metaphysics E–Z*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2007), 20–38; Christopher Shields, *Aristotle* (London: Routledge, 2007), 220–29. Owens shows that in important respects "Aristotelian separate substance" does not "coincide with a Judeo-Christian conception of God" ("Pure Actuality and Primacy in Being," 38).

59. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1074a, p. 208; 1073a–b, pp. 206–8. Since Aristotle suggests earlier that there might be fifty-five unmoved movers, Gerson proposes that "the fifty-five unmoved movers of *Lambda* chapter eight are the inseparable causes of self-moving spheres, arrived at by reasoning along the line of efficient causality" (*God and Greek Philosophy*, 133). These unmoved movers differ from "an unqualifiedly unmoved mover" because the latter "must be unique perfect actuality" (*ibid.*). Gerson explains why there can only be one Pure Act: "Let there be two gods or unmoved movers. Then being in the primary sense will be identified with them. But it cannot literally be identified with both of them; if one is being in the primary sense, then the other is not, or if it is, how does it differ from the first? Presumably, only by being something less than perfect actuality" (*ibid.*, 130).

that Pure Act moves all things solely as their final cause—that is, by attraction. By contrast, in book 8 of the *Physics* he holds that the unmoved mover is the efficient cause of the everlasting motion of the first moved mover.⁶⁰ Either way, for Aristotle, God’s existence consists simply in the perfect eternal contemplation of himself: “Thinking is the thinking of Himself through all eternity.”⁶¹ Over the centuries, interpreters have been divided about whether, in God’s thinking of himself, all that is intelligible is included. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle teaches that the best human life is devoted to contemplating (and thereby imitating) God, but he does not say that God has knowledge, let alone love, of creatures.⁶²

Aristotle’s argument that the cosmos is not founded on sheer chance is also worth presenting here. With the philosophy of Empedocles in view, Aristotle remarks that some consider that “chance is the cause of this heaven and of everything in the cosmos. For they say that the vortex and the motion which distinguished and arranged the all into this order comes to be from chance.”⁶³ As Aristotle points out, such thinkers accept that particular plants and animals (for example) come to be from recognizable causes rather than from chance. How, then, can such thinkers suppose that the whole cosmos, far more extraordinary than particular plants or animals, comes to be by chance? Aristotle goes on to argue that even when things come to be by chance, chance functions as an “accidental” cause rather than as a “per se” cause: in every case, “chance and luck are posterior to mind and nature.”⁶⁴ Thus, the cosmos—keeping in mind that the cosmos (in Aristotle’s view) is everlasting—cannot ultimately be traced to mere chance: “it is necessary that mind and nature is the prior cause both of many other things and of the all.”⁶⁵

60. For discussion see Gerson, *God and Greek Philosophy*, 119–28, 134–41; Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 200–204. For the view that Aristotle considers the unmoved mover to be both a final and efficient cause, see for example Ernesto Berti, “Metaphysics Lambda 6,” in *Aristotle’s Metaphysics Lambda: Symposium Aristotelicum*, ed. Michael Frede and David Charles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 181–206. For the contrast between Aristotle’s account of the unmoved mover (God) and the Neoplatonic account of God, see Gerson’s *Aristotle and Other Platonists*, chap. 6.

61. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1075a, p. 210. For discussion see Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists*, 195–200; Sedley, *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity*, 170. See also Myles F. Burnyeat, *Aristotle’s Divine Intellect* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008).

62. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934).

63. Aristotle, *Physics* 196a, p. 32.

64. Aristotle, *Physics* 198a, p. 36.

65. Aristotle, *Physics* 198a, p. 36. For discussion, see Sedley, *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity*, 186–94. Sedley concludes that for Aristotle “the priority must be causal or explanatory, rather than temporal. The world is an eternal purposive structure, causally dependent on intelligence and nature. The ‘intelligence’ (*nous*) he intends cannot be a Platonic Demiurge: instead,

A generation after Aristotle's death, Zeno of Citium undertook a response to Epicurus as well as an updating of Socratic (as distinct from Platonic) philosophy. In Stoic philosophy, founded by Zeno and carried forward by numerous prominent figures, the argument from design takes on a particular prominence. Thus, in Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods*, Balbus—representing Stoic views—argues that “the parts of the world are in such a condition that they could not possibly have cohered together if they were not controlled by intelligence and by divine providence.”⁶⁶ The regularities of the cosmos, says Balbus, require philosophers “to infer the presence not merely of an inhabitant of this celestial and divine abode, but also of a ruler and governor, the architect as it were of this mighty and monumental structure.”⁶⁷ The biblical scholar Luke Timothy Johnson observes that Stoic philosophers equate God “with the immanent principle of reason governing the world” and conclude that “since the world is itself in some sense divine, it is providentially guided: all that is and that happens bears the signs of rational design.”⁶⁸ Denying the existence of immaterial substances, and associating the cosmos's divine rational principle (*logos*) with the fire-air composite (*pneuma*) constitutive of the cosmos, Stoic philosophers suggest that God repeatedly re-creates the cosmos anew out of himself.⁶⁹ One can see, then, how Stoics such as Chrysippus and Plutarch can say that “God” is creative, immortal, and invisible

he can only be referring to that detached divine intellect, the Prime Mover, which as the ultimate source of all change he does indeed consider causally prior to the world, and, as the ultimate model for emulation, the *per se* cause of all the changes lower down the scale” (ibid., 194). See also Monte Ransome Johnson's emphasis that Aristotle offers a proof for the necessity of a first (unmoved) mover, but not a “teleological’ proof for god's existence” (Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005], 258). Another student of Plato, Xenocrates, influenced by the Pythagoreans, appears to have held that the divine intellect, comprising all number, makes the world. See John Dillon's reconstruction of Xenocrates's position in Dillon, *The Heirs of Plato: A Study of the Old Academy (347–274 BC)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 98–107; cf. however the critical engagement with Dillon's reconstruction by John Peter Kenney, *Mystical Monotheism*, 26–27.

66. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.34, in Cicero, *De natura deorum and Academica*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), 207.

67. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.35, p. 211. For discussion of the various arguments advanced by Cicero's Balbus, see Gerson, *God and Greek Philosophy*, 154–66. Gerson links the Stoic argument from design with that of William Paley.

68. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 69. For discussion, including the relationship of Stoic thought to the *Timaeus* and Xenophon's Socrates, see Sedley, *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity*, chap. 7. See also chap. 4 (on Stoicism) in Gerson's *God and Greek Philosophy*.

69. See Michael Frede, “The Case for Pagan Monotheism in Greek and Graeco-Roman Antiquity,” in *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire*, ed. Stephen Mitchell and Peter Van Nuffelen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 53–81, at 71–72; Gerson, *God and Greek Philosophy*, 148–49, 173.

without implying a transcendent or immaterial God.⁷⁰ One can also see how Stoicism provoked the response of Academic Skepticism (or Pyrrhonism), well represented in the work of Sextus Empiricus, who rejects all Stoic attempts to demonstrate the existence of a divine source.⁷¹

Among first-century BC thinkers, the Neo-Pythagorean Eudorus of Alexandria deserves mention for his theory that there is a supreme One beyond either the monad or the dyad. The One is the supreme principle or origin of all things, whereas the monad and the dyad are causal principles within the universe. Eudorus was indebted to Plato's *Parmenides* for his speculations. Similarly, the first-century AD Neo-Pythagorean Moderatus of Gades appears to have taught that the One is beyond being and intellect, which come forth from the One as the second principle. This second principle is termed the Logos and is connected with the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*. I mention these thinkers largely because of their influence on Plotinus, the final thinker that I treat in this section.⁷²

Plotinus wrote in the third century AD and was aware of Christianity; his first biographer, Porphyry, records a respectful encounter between Plotinus and Origen of Alexandria. In book 6 of the *Enneads*, indebted especially to Plato's *Parmenides* and in critical dialogue with Aristotle and the Stoics (via Neo-Pythagorean and Neoplatonic thought), Plotinus states of the One, "It is in virtue of unity that beings are beings. This is equally true of things whose existence is primal and of all that are in any degree to be numbered among beings."⁷³ Everything that is not Absolute Unity must receive its unity, even if it also imparts unity. For example, the soul gives unity to the body, but the soul has various powers. The soul differs from other souls and even is distinct from its own unity. Unity is not the same thing as the soul; therefore the soul,

70. Robert Sokolowski argues that "human reason left to itself will always tend to see the divine as the ultimate principle in the world. . . . The biblical word of God, the biblical and Christian understanding of God, always has to resist the natural impulse to see the divine as the best part of the world" (Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995], xi).

71. See Gerson, *God and Greek Philosophy*, 174–84; Gerson replies to Sextus Empiricus at 179.

72. For Eudorus and Moderatus, see Kenney, *Mystical Monotheism*, 36–43. I skip over another important influence on Plotinus, Numenius of Apamea, discussed by Kenney at 59–74. On Plotinus, see Kenney's *Mystical Monotheism*, 91–156.

73. Plotinus, *The Enneads* 6.9.1, trans. Stephen MacKenna (Burdett, NY: Larson, 1992), 698. This edition of the *Enneads* also contains Porphyry's short biography of Plotinus. For Plotinus, the One is above both being and thinking (by contrast to Aristotle's view). As Gerson observes, "In saying that the One is beyond being he is actually saying that being as understood by Aristotle (and many others) is not the *archē*" (*God and Greek Philosophy*, 201). Gerson suggests that Plotinus, in locating the One above being, is speaking about finite, composite being; cf. Gerson's *Aristotle and Other Platonists*, 207. For Plotinus's critique of Aristotle on God, see especially *Aristotle and Other Platonists*, 205–8.

like the body, must participate in unity. Indeed, everything other than Absolute Unity (including thinking and being) participates in unity. Absolute Unity is “the principle of all, the Good and the First.”⁷⁴ Without participation in Absolute Unity, there could be no unity, and things would break apart.

Christian Faith and Metaphysical Reason

Biblical scholar N. T. Wright observes with regard to Romans 1:19–20, “Paul clearly does believe that when humans look at creation they are aware, at some level, of the power and divinity of the creator,” so that there is a “divine self-revelation in creation.”⁷⁵ Yet, can it really be said that pagans arrived at some knowledge of the living God? Certainly, Plato’s “Maker,” Aristotle’s Pure Act, and Plotinus’s One are not the Christian God. There are simply too many differences. But when these thinkers argue for the existence of a Maker, for the existence of Pure Act as the first principle, or for the existence of the supreme One, they do in fact touch the living God. I disagree, therefore, with the position—well described by Bruce Marshall—that “while anyone can make a valid argument for an unmoved mover or first cause, only under the conditions of Christian faith can we recognize that this mover or cause is the God Christians are talking about.”⁷⁶ There cannot be a God who creates and transcends everything but is not Pure Act. If there is Pure Act but the Christian

74. Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.9.3, p. 700. Gerson notes that according to Plotinus’s demonstration, the One is “that without which any composite would not exist” (*God and Greek Philosophy*, 186). See also John Bussanich, “Plotinus’s Metaphysics of the One,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 38–65. For Plotinus’s view of divine causality, see Bussanich, “Plotinus’s Metaphysics of the One,” 46–57; Cristina D’Ancona Costa, “Plotinus and Later Platonic Philosophers on the Causality of the First Principle,” in *Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, 356–85; Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists*, 202. For further discussion of Plotinus, see Gerson, *Plotinus* (London: Routledge, 1994); John M. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); Rist, “The One of Plotinus and the God of Aristotle,” *Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1974): 74–87. See also William F. Lynch, SJ’s *An Approach to the Metaphysics of Plato through the Parmenides* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1959).

75. N. T. Wright, *The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 10, *Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 395–770, at 432. Even so, Wright regrets that Romans 1:19–20 has “had to bear the weight of debates about ‘natural theology’” (*ibid.*).

76. Bruce D. Marshall, introduction to George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), vii–xxvii, at xx. Marshall inclines toward this view but makes clear that his thought remains in development on this point, noting that “there is surely more work to be done on this question” (*ibid.*, xxvin35). See also his “*Quod Scit Una Uetula*: Aquinas on the Nature of Theology,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph P. Wawrykow (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 1–35, at 17–20.

God is lesser, then the Christian God is not God at all. The demonstration of Pure Act is the demonstration of God, though it is not all that needs to be said about the living God, the God of Christians.⁷⁷

David Hart states matters with his customary forcefulness. Remarking that “there are many persons who object in principle to any fraternization between different religious vocabularies,” he argues that it would be churlish to suppose that knowledge of the true God’s existence is only possible for those whose minds have been healed and elevated by faith in God’s revelation of himself in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.⁷⁸ This seems right to me, not least as an interpretation of Wisdom 13, Romans 1, and other New Testament texts such as Acts 17 and 19. Indeed, Hart goes so far as to assert that “all the major theistic traditions claim that humanity as a whole has a knowledge of God, in some form or another, and that a perfect ignorance of God is impossible for any people.”⁷⁹

Whether or not this can be substantiated for each of the major theistic traditions, it is surely what the Catholic Church teaches. After criticizing “rationalism or naturalism,” the First Vatican Council’s dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius* proclaims that “God, the source and end of all things, can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason.”⁸⁰ Along broadly similar lines, the Second Vatican Council’s declaration *Nostra Aetate* states, “From ancient until modern time there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that unseen force which is present in the course of things and in events in human life, and sometimes even an acknowledgement of a supreme deity or even of a Father.”⁸¹ The arguments for

77. Richard B. Hays rightly says that the Gospels, precisely through their reading of the OT to identify Jesus, force us to rethink what we mean when we say the word “God.” . . . The Gospels narrate the story of how the God of Israel was embodied in Jesus. This means, *inter alia*, that we should stop using the terms “high” Christology and “low” Christology to characterize the four canonical Gospels. These very categories presuppose an a priori philosophical account of ‘God’ that the Gospel narratives contradict. (Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014], 108)

Here it is necessary to add, however, that the Gospel narratives contradict the “philosophical account of ‘God’” in some ways but not in all ways, particularly once one recognizes that “transcendence” does not mean “aloofness” (though it often does in Greek philosophy) but rather simply means that God is not ontologically on the same level as creatures. Indeed, precisely to be incarnate in Jesus (and to be Creator), Israel’s God must be transcendent, Pure Act: see Thomas G. Weinandy, OFM Cap, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 55–57; cf. 108–12, 120–27.

78. Hart, *Experience of God*, 3.

79. *Ibid.*

80. See Vatican I, *Dei Filius*, prol. and chap. 2, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2, *Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, SJ (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 804, 806.

81. Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate* 2, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2:969.

God's existence arrive at self-subsistent Act, the source of all things, the cause of order in the universe, the infinitely perfect source of all finite perfections. It is in this sense that, as Hart comments, "the God of faith and the God of the philosophers are in many crucial respects recognizably one and the same."⁸²

Even so, Rémi Brague voices a common opinion when he states that the personal and living God "is only accessible to faith."⁸³ Indebted to Pascal, Brague holds that God reveals himself only to those who seek knowledge of him as one would seek to know a transcendent *person* rather than as one would seek to know an empirical *fact*. This is no doubt true regarding intimate knowledge of God. But God also wills that the truth of his existence be knowable by human reason. There need be no competition between revelation and reason.⁸⁴ God created our minds to stretch toward God and to know him. Of course, it is personal intimacy with God—the saving God who loves us, heals us, and draws us to union with him forever—that we most desire rather than simply demonstrative knowledge that God exists. As Albert Dondeyne observes, "The believer is not content with thinking of the world as created by a transcendent first cause; in the act of faith he cleaves to God himself, he addresses him directly, opens his heart to him as to an absolute Thou, in the hope that God will be his light, his truth and his life."⁸⁵ But the demonstration of a transcendent first cause is good too.

82. Hart, *Experience of God*, 9. As Hart states, "God is Spirit, incorporeal, not an object located somewhere in space, not subject to the limitations of time, not a product of cosmic nature, not simply some craftsman who creates by manipulating materials external to himself, not composed of parts, but rather residing in all things while remaining perfectly one, present to us in the depths of our own beings" (*ibid.*).

83. Brague, *On the God of Christians*, 40.

84. Denys Turner refers in this regard to the "ancient scholastic distinction between the 'material' and the 'formal' objects of knowledge" as a "way of construing the relationship between the God of the philosophers and the God of faith—the same God can be known under different descriptions . . . and within different relations of knowing" (Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, 17–18). Turner notes that Giles of Rome

explained that the God of the philosophers is known as it were "by sight," and the God of the theologians by "touch" and "taste"; for the philosophers know God "at a distance" and intellectually across a gap crossed not by means of direct experience but by means of evidence and inference, and so through a medium, as sight sees; whereas, through grace and revelation, the theologian is in an immediate and direct experiential contact with God, as touch and taste are with their objects. (*ibid.*, 18)

But Turner considers that Aquinas provides "us with a probably more helpful, because less polarized, account of sameness and difference of 'object.' What I see at a distance is a dark patch I can distinguish as a human being moving towards me. When it is close enough to me, I can see that it is Peter. When the object was at a distance what I saw *was* Peter, but it was not *as* Peter that I saw him. Thus the God of reason in relation to the God of faith" (*ibid.*, 18–19).

85. Albert Dondeyne, "The Existence of God and Contemporary Materialism," in *God, Man and the Universe: A Christian Answer to Modern Materialism*, ed. Jacques de Bivort de La Saudée (London: Burns & Oates, 1954), 3–32, at 9.

It may seem, however, that by this emphasis on the demonstrations of God's existence I am falling into the error that Michael Buckley attributes to his fellow Jesuit Leonard Lessius (1554–1623). Lessius's *De providentia numinis* sought to counter Enlightenment atheism by critiquing skeptical ancient philosophers rather than by critiquing the Enlightenment denial of the divinity of Jesus Christ. Buckley observes that “atheism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is treated as if it were a philosophic issue, rather than a religious one; this shift characterizes Catholic apologetics for the succeeding four hundred years.”⁸⁶ Christology became “irrelevant in establishing the reality of god”; Christ's revelation of God was displaced in the quest for certitude about God.⁸⁷ According to Buckley, Lessius's approach lasted so long because theologians forgot that the defense of God's existence primarily requires attention to Christ and the Holy Spirit.

I agree with Buckley that metaphysical reasoning on its own, without the God who reveals himself, cannot nourish the real relationship with the living God that is the true purpose of knowing that God exists. Buckley, however, undermines the significant, though secondary, value of the demonstrations of God's existence for the Christian tradition by his claim that “if one abrogates this [Christological and Pneumatological] evidence, one abrogates this god.”⁸⁸ This would be so only if the God whose existence is demonstrable by reason were necessarily a distortion of the biblical God. In fact, as Denys Turner observes, “the proofs of God prove very little indeed, but just enough: as ‘proofs’ they fall into that class of ‘demonstrations’ which merely show *that* something exists by way of explanation (*demonstratio quia*), from which, no doubt some properties are derivable which must hold true.”⁸⁹ What the proofs show is that a transcendent, infinite source of all finite things exists.

To demonstrate God's existence, then, is not to encapsulate God in a concept—which of course cannot be done—but rather to exercise what Thomas Joseph White terms “the deep human tendency toward God enrooted in the spiritual faculties of intellect and will.”⁹⁰ Since our created reason is ordered

86. Michael J. Buckley, SJ, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 47.

87. *Ibid.*

88. *Ibid.*, 361. Buckley's full sentence reads, “Within the context of a Christology and a Pneumatology of both communal and personal religious experience, one can locate and give its own philosophical integrity to metaphysics, but Christology and Pneumatology are fundamental. If one abrogates this evidence, one abrogates this god.”

89. Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, 19.

90. White, *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity*, 252. White underscores that “there are capacities proper to human nature that do not need grace in order to exist, and . . . the capacity to know God and even to desire God as one's true final end is one of these. However, in the

to God in this way, and since we can know through reason that God exists and possesses “eternal power and deity” (Rom. 1:20), divine revelation does not introduce us to an alien God—even as it reveals to us the wondrous “depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God” (Rom. 11:33), clarifies the meaning of “eternal power and deity,” and frees the nations from “the times of ignorance” (Acts 17:30). As White points out, philosophical wisdom “intensifies our recognition of the transcendence of God, and correspondingly makes us acutely aware of the limitations of our human knowledge.”⁹¹ Far from threatening to make divine revelation redundant, the demonstrability of God’s existence makes revelation all the more desirable and urgent. In the words of Ronald Knox, “If you once prove that he [God] exists, you will find that he fills the whole stage.”⁹²

With the ancient Israelites, then, let us seek the God who gives to rational creatures, whose days “are like a passing shadow” (Ps. 144:4) and who are “like the beasts that perish” (Ps. 49:20), the ability to perceive the One whose “glory is above earth and heaven” (Ps. 148:13). “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge” (Ps. 19:1–2).

concrete historical state of fallen and redeemed humanity, such capacities *in order to be exercised properly, or perhaps at all*, may well stand in need of the healing and corrective effects of grace and revelation” (ibid., 283n103). He adds that

in the concrete historical order, in order to recognize God as one’s true final end, *even naturally*, some kind of *supernatural grace* of God (that itself implies—but is not limited to—the gift of supernatural faith) is necessary. Last, it should go without saying that the natural knowledge of and desire for God are in no way a substitute (according to Aquinas or Catholic doctrine) for the activity of justifying faith, informed by charity, and the revealed knowledge of God that accompanies this faith (*ST I–II*, q. 109, aa. 5–10). The latter alone leads to salvation. Our wounded natural capacity for God, therefore, can *in no way* procure for us the gift of justification or salvation. (ibid.)

91. Ibid., 290. See also White’s “Engaging the Thomistic Tradition and Contemporary Culture Simultaneously: A Response to Burrell, Healy, and Schindler,” *Nova et Vetera* 10 (2012): 605–23. D. C. Schindler argues for a specifically Christian metaphysics in his “Discovering the Given: On Reason and God,” *Nova et Vetera* 10 (2012): 563–604. He holds that “our most basic philosophical concepts have been colored in profound and subtle ways by revelation” (ibid., 601). The example that Schindler gives is that of the divine goodness, which he interprets on the basis of divine revelation as pure self-donation. He argues that goodness and being are revealed to be love, so that kenotic love (gift) is the fundamental ontological reality. I agree that Pure Act is infinite love/gift (and infinite wisdom). But I think that the transcendentals cannot be conflated in our mode of thinking without causing problems (in this case, an incipient voluntarism, and difficulties in conceiving divine unity). When we think of existence, the categories of actuality (act of being) and potency, fully knowable to non-Christians, remain the definitive ones. Schindler cites Stefan Oster, “Thinking Love at the Heart of Things: The Metaphysics of Being as Love in the Work of Ferdinand Ulrich,” *Communio* 37 (2010): 660–700.

92. Ronald A. Knox, *In Soft Garments: A Collection of Oxford Conferences*, 2nd ed. (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1953), 25.