

## THE QUESTION OF FOUNDATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

(Why accept or reject the existence of God, or of a Divine Reality, or other religious doctrines?)

### A. Candidate reasons IN FAVOR

#### 1. revelation

- a. events (as known through testimony or first-hand experience)
- b. propositions
- c. mystical experiences (as known through testimony or first-hand experience)

[2. and 3.: natural or rational theology]

2. *a priori* reasons: an ontological argument (God would not be Perfect if God did not exist. But God is, by definition, Perfect.)

3. *a posteriori* reasons: cosmological considerations

- a. from the fact of existence: “the” cosmological argument (God explains why there is something rather than nothing)
- b. from some general feature of the cosmos, e.g. the teleological argument (since the world exhibits design, it’s like other artifacts and must have a creator—God is the best candidate)

4. religious and mystical experience

5. cumulative case (including a “moral” and an “axiological argument”)

### B. Candidate reasons AGAINST

1. no reason to believe: the candidate reasons to believe all fail, e.g. with regard to the teleological argument, an alternative scientific explanation of the order in the universe shows “design” to be a misinterpretation.

2. problems of coherence, e.g. the fact of evil in tension with the view that God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent

3. religious and doctrinal pluralism

4. cumulative case against, including psychological, sociological, economic, and historicist explanations (“debunking explanations”) of religious beliefs and experiences

### C. Faith vs. philosophy: REJECTION of the importance of having reasons for this type of belief

1. Romantic fideism: religion is not a matter of belief but of feeling, not of the mind but of the heart.

2. Existential fideism: religious belief is an irrational but nevertheless commendable choice by criteria that transcend the merely “ethical” (Kierkegaard).

3. Wittgensteinian fideism: one cannot understand religion without participating in it—philosophers have no right to criticize what they don’t understand.

4. Anti-evidentialism: fundamental or basic beliefs require no evidence.