



## Editorial preface

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Published online: 29 August 2018  
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The first two articles in this issue explore the contributions of Wittgenstein to the philosophy of religion.

In the first essay, Brad Kallenberg discusses Wittgenstein's claim that a person's philosophical thinking (especially in religious matters) ought to have, and be guided by, a central component of existential self-involvement. This recommendation grew out of his insistence that beliefs are grounded in concrete practices. Kallenberg shows that Wittgenstein not only recommended this method of self-involvement, he employed it. This is clear in his recounting of Wittgenstein's time in Norway. During this period, Wittgenstein explored Christian beliefs by engaging in the practices of prayer and confession, and in the diligent study of the passionate beliefs of Christian thinkers. In doing this, he exemplified a method that philosophers of religion would do well to follow.

Hermen Kroesbergen explores the idea that Christian faith brings with it a feeling of absolute safety. He notes that it is possible to interpret this feeling as echoing Socrates' famous claim that a good man cannot be morally harmed. The problem Kroesbergen finds with this, is that for Socrates this safety from moral harm requires a kind of transcendence of one's humanity, a philosophical detachment from the world. Wittgenstein also spoke of the feeling of absolute safety. His concept of absolute safety, however, which he associates with Christian faith, need not follow Socrates's strategy of detachment or his prediction that no harm will come to the faithful. Rather, the feeling that Wittgenstein seems to have in mind is generated by surrendering oneself to God's goodness, even in the midst of suffering moral harm. The feeling of safety comes with the faith that God is with us, through thick and thin, even as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

It is often said that a concept can suffer the death of a thousand qualifications. Certainly this seems to apply to the concept of divine omnipotence. For the non-philosopher, it seems enough to say that God can do anything. Yet the philosopher is quick to bring up versions of the playground conundrum: can God make a rock too heavy for him to lift? Such problems have led to endless refinements of the concept of omnipotence. Michael Wreen goes into much detail in his comprehensive

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remarks about these proposed definitions. He ends with a proposal of his own that seems to accord more with the non-philosopher's understanding of omnipotence. On his view, the term omnipotence "reasonably captures the range of actions that many people take an agent to be required to be able to perform in order to be regarded as omnipotent."

James McBrayer critically discusses what Stephen Law has called the x-claim argument. This argument holds that it is irrational to believe in the existence of extraordinary beings, such as God, angels, spirits, demons and the like. Two standard arguments against the rationality of religions belief in the existence of such beings are (1) the argument from diversity and (2) the argument from unreliable sources. McBrayer argues that Law's x-claim argument contains an ambiguous premise that needs clarification. The clarification he proposes shows that the x-argument is nothing but a version of arguments (1) and (2) and hence adds nothing new to them. This does not mitigate the force of these two arguments. Both remain serious challenges to religious belief.

Einar Bohn critically discusses Soufiane Hamri's cosmological argument (published in this journal) for there being one and only one ultimate ground of being. Hamri's argument runs as follows: Premise 1: Any dependent thing x has one and only one sustaining cause. Premise 2: Any existentially independent thing is such that its essence and existence are identical. Premise 3: There are dependent things. Premise 4: There can only be one sustaining cause. Conclusion: There is one and only one sustaining cause (the God of monotheism) of all dependent things. Bohn finds fault with Premise 3 and Premise 4. He argues that these problems must be addressed if the argument is to go through.

In the final essay, Lloyd Strickland discusses the age-old complaint against belief in God, to wit, that it inevitably leads to (is the "cause" of) human suffering. Indeed, there is no doubt that much evil (needless human suffering) is the result of religious wars, executions, and the like. Such facts are enough for Daniel Kodaj to warrant atheism. Strickland claims, however, that Kodaj's argument is problematic and that it need not yield atheism. Nevertheless, Strickland acknowledges that "there is something unsettling about religious evil, and it is surely right to ask how much of a role religion plays in it..."