

AXIOLOGY OF THEISM AND OTHER WORLDVIEWS

BIBLIOGRAPHY WITH ABSTRACTS

Last updated September 2026. If you notice any errors or omissions,
please contact Klaas Kraay at kraay@torontomu.ca.

SURVEYS / INTRODUCTORY ARTICLES

- Kraay, K.J. (2018) [Invitation to the axiology of theism](#). In K.J. Kraay, ed., *Does God Matter? Essays on the Axiological Consequences of Theism*. New York: Routledge, pp. 1-36.
- Lougheed, K. (2019) [The axiology of theism](#). In J. Feiser and B. Dowden, eds., *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Lougheed, K. (2021) Introduction to the axiology of theism: the current debate and future directions. In K. Lougheed, ed., *Four Views on the Axiology of Theism: What Difference Does God Make?* London: Bloomsbury, 1-19.
- Lougheed, K. (2022) [The axiology of theism: problems and prospects](#). *Philosophy Compass*.

ANTHOLOGIES

Note: all chapters from these three anthologies are also listed as separate entries below.

- Kraay, K., ed. (2018) *Does God Matter? Essays on the Axiological Consequences of Theism*. New York: Routledge.
- Lougheed, K., ed. (2020) *Four Views on the Axiology of Theism: What Difference Does God Make?* London: Bloomsbury.
- Lougheed, K., ed. (2023) *Value Beyond Monotheism: The Axiology of the Divine*. New York: Routledge.

MONOGRAPHS

- Ballard, B. (under contract) *God, World, and Value*. Routledge.
- Kraay, K.J. (2021) *The Axiology of Theism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lougheed, K. (2020) *The Axiological Status of Theism and Other Worldviews*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Lougheed, K. (2022) *Ubuntu and Western Monotheism: An Axiological Investigation*. New York: Routledge.
- Shea, M. (2024) *God and Happiness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

ARTICLES AND CHAPTERS

Aikin, S.F. (2016) Does divine hiding undermine positive evidential atheism? *Religious Studies* 52: 205-212.

Abstract: Positive Evidential Atheism is the two-part view that our available evidence sufficiently supports the belief that God does not exist and that God's non-existence is a morally good thing. Paul Moser's recent work (2012, 2013, 2014, and forthcoming) provides a case that Positive Evidential Atheism is undermined by 'intentional divine elusiveness'. This essay defends Positive Evidential Atheism from Moser's objection along two lines: (1) Moser's undercutting argument does not respect the fact that the positivity and evidentiality claims of Positive Evidential Atheism are logically connected, and (2) positive atheists needn't be those from whom God has hidden.

Alimi, T. (2026) Divine Domination. *Religious Studies* 62, 389-407.

Abstract: This article develops the problem of divine domination. Classical theism describes God as essentially all-powerful, sovereign, personal, omnipresent, and a se. If such a being exists, then he dominates humans in virtue of his essential properties. Since dominative relationships are unjust, the divine-human relationship is unjust. I reject solutions to this problem that appeal to humanity's childlikeness or divine goodness, justice, or greatness. I conclude by gesturing towards what a solution to the problem might require.

Almeida, M. (2020) On discovering God in the pluriverse. In K. Loughheed, ed., *Four Views on the Axiology of Theism: What Difference Does God Make?* London: Bloomsbury, pp. 19-40. (See also the subsequent commentaries on this piece by the other three contributors, followed by Almeida's reply – pp.41-58.)

Abstract:

Anderson, M. (2022) Anti-theism, the underground man, and escaping absurdity. *Philosophical Forum* 53: 115-131.

Abstract: Guy Kahane holds that theism has unattractive consequences, since it threatens both privacy and autonomy. Here, I suggest that Kahane's position echoes that of Dostoevsky's famous Underground Man. But the Underground Man is ensnared in difficulties that resemble the problem of absurdity as developed by Thomas Nagel. Dostoevsky's own solution to that problem involves love—but love naturally invites compromises with respect to privacy and autonomy. Perhaps the best way to solve the problem of absurdity is to make precisely the opposite of Kahane's axiological judgment—which would recommend pro-theism over anti-theism.

Azadegan, E. (2019) Antitheism and gratuitous evil. *The Heythrop Journal* 60: 671–77.

Abstract: Kahane introduces two versions of antitheism: impersonal and personal. I deny that impersonal antitheism can be cogently defended, but I accept that the meaningful life argument in favour of personal antitheism is sound. I then argue that the personal form of antitheism reduces to a form of gratuitous evil. Subsequently, I show that instead of denying

the existence of gratuitous evil by approving sceptical theism, one can accept the existence of gratuitous evil and show that this sort of evil provides for a special sort of goodness. In line with this, I demonstrate that the existence of personal antitheists makes the world a more valuable place than a Godless world free of antitheists would be. The conclusion is that even for antitheists the existence of God is valuable, because they can thereby find a new meaning for their lives.

Ballard, B. (2021) Christianity and the Life Story. *Faith and Philosophy* 38: 205-228.

Abstract: Should we understand our lives as stories? Narrativism answers Yes, a view that has recently been the subject of vigorous debate. But what should Christian philosophers make of narrativism? In this essay, I argue that, in fact, narrativism is a commitment of Christian teaching. I argue that there are practices which Christians have decisive reasons to engage in, which require us to see our lives as narratives, practices such as confession and thanksgiving.

Ballard, B. (2024) The threat of anti-theism: what is at stake in the axiology of God? *Philosophical Quarterly* 74: 408-430.

Abstract: Would God's existence be a good thing for us? According to anti-theism, the answer is No. Probably, many theists will want to reject anti-theism. But it isn't obvious why. After all, whether p is good for us is logically independent from whether p is true. So anti-theism seems entirely compatible with theism. In this essay, however, I argue this seeming compatibility is mistaken. If anti-theism is true, then the theism of most practicing believers is false. And if I am right about this, then anti-theism presents a serious challenge to traditional theistic belief, notably theistic belief anchored in the Bible.

Ballard, B. (2025) Our lives go better in a world created by God. *Religious Studies* 61: 350-364.

Abstract: This article develops a novel argument that God's existence would greatly increase our prospects for meaning in life. The key idea is that if God exists, He stands in certain relations to the world that would confer value upon it. For instance, God would be its creator and sustainer. The world would thus gain value in much the way that relics gain value by their links with historical persons and events. And crucially, as a result of this infusion of value, our lives go better because the things we engage with matter more.

Ballard, B. (2026) Would God be the ultimate attachment figure? Some hellish complications. In K. Loughheed and T. Myers, eds., *Religious Faith and Meaning-Making: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 125-164.

Abstract: In theistic religions, it's a commonplace that one is meant to have a relationship with God. He loves us, and we should love Him in turn. Recently, however, a range of authors from theologians to psychologists have understood this love in a particular way: They argue that many theists relate to God as an attachment figure. That is to say, many theists come to rely on God as a principal source of confidence and reassurance in the face of life's challenges, and they do so from a biologically-based tendency to form enduring attachments to others, the same tendency underwriting the bond between child and caregiver, or between romantic partners or lifelong friends.

Ballard, B. (forthcoming) Faith Because of Evil. *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*.

Abstract:

Ballard, B. (forthcoming) The power of self-narration in religious practice. In C. Taliaferro, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Religion and Soul Care*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Abstract:

Ballard, B. (forthcoming) The pragmatic argument from beauty. In P. Copan and P. Gould, eds. *The Argument from Beauty*. **Need City**. Wiley-Blackwell.

Abstract:

Beillard, J. (2025) God and value. *Faith and Philosophy* 41: 552-573.

Abstract: Over the last decade, Guy Kahane and others have argued for Narrow Personal Anti-Theism (NPA): Some world where God does not exist is significantly better for some people, in some respects, than any world where God exists. Their arguments depend on the assumption that the values of states such as privacy are invariant across worlds. Against this assumption, I claim that the ontological status of God partly determines the values of these states: There are worlds where we have a valuable kind of privacy, because God does not exist, and worlds where our privacy is not (equally) valuable, because God exists. I propose a kind of anti-theism appealing to values of values—the value of privacy being valuable, for example. Paradoxically, this kind of anti-theism may be coherent only if God exists: The omniscience of God may be necessary for anti-theism to be a value judgment.

Betenson, T. (2018) Recasting anti-theism. In K. Kraay, ed., *Does God Matter? Essays on the Axiological Consequences of Theism*. New York: Routledge, pp. 164-178.

Abstract: I offer a new defence of anti-theism by casting doubt on the notion that anti-theism should be understood as the judgement that God's existence 'makes the world worse'. Instead, anti-theism should be understood in terms of reasonable preferences that are not necessarily connected to rational judgements about the comparative value of possible worlds. I argue that it is reasonable to detach our preferences from our rational judgements about which possible worlds are 'better' or 'worse'. It follows that it can be reasonable to prefer the non-existence of God even whilst accepting that God's existence would be a good thing.

Brecka, J. (2025) Creatures and creators: God, humanity, and artificial general intelligence. *Religious Studies* 61: 734-745.

Abstract: This short piece addresses how the possibility of humanity's creating the technological singularity challenges and reshapes a host of traditional debates in the philosophy of religion about the significance of God's status as creator.

Buckareff, A. (2023) Axiological pantheism. In K. Loughheed, ed., *Value Beyond Monotheism: The Axiology of the Divine*. New York: Routledge, pp. 1-19.

Abstract: In this chapter, I consider the axiology of pantheism. By “pantheism” I mean to pick out an ontologically naturalistic metaphysics of the divine on which God is identical with the universe. On the conception of pantheism I assume, the universe exhibits the sort of unity and functional integration sufficient for it to be truthfully described as the divine mind. I argue that a pantheistic metaphysics of the divine delivers a conception of God on which its being true that God exists results in an overall better state of affairs for the cosmos as a whole than would be the case if it were not true. In particular, I argue that the sort of connectedness of the parts of the universe that we would find if pantheism were true would result in an overall more valuable state of affairs than would obtain if no such connectedness exists.

Cohoe, C. (2022) Endurance, acceptance, or constitutional gratitude: non-theistic and theistic attitudes to suffering. *Religions* 13: 1-12.

Abstract: Against those who think that only believers in a personal God are entitled to be grateful for their existence and for reality itself (cosmic gratitude), I show that there are non-theistic views on which everything that happens is part of an overall good order, supporting gratitude toward that order's source. However, most non-theist views that affirm reality's goodness, including pantheism, axiarchism, and ultimism, hold that an individual's existence has value as part of a larger whole. Some things may be bad for me but good for the whole. In such cases, acceptance is the best available positive attitude. Many versions of theism, by contrast, support constitutional gratitude, a characteristic attitude of thankfulness toward the ultimate source of goodness. Using Marilyn Adams' distinction between global and local goods, I show how Christianity, Islam, and other theistic views that affirm a personal God who cares for the well-being of each individual as such enable constitutional gratitude. If the evils you experience will be defeated by greater goods that you personally experience, you can be grateful to God for God's presence and plan even in suffering. Whether this attitude is more appropriate than acceptance or endurance depends on facts about reality and value.

Davis, R.B. and Franks, W.P. (2018) Plantinga's defence and his theodicy are incompatible. In K. Kraay, ed., *Does God Matter? Essays on the Axiological Consequences of Theism*. New York: Routledge, pp. 203-224.

Abstract: In this paper, we attempt to show that if Plantinga's free will defence succeeds, his *O Felix Culpa* theodicy fails. For if every creaturely essence suffers from transworld depravity, then given that Jesus has a creaturely essence (as we attempt to show), it follows that Incarnation and Atonement worlds cannot be actualized by God, in which case we have anything but a felix culpa.

Davis, S.T. (2014) On preferring that God not exist (or that God exist): a dialogue. *Faith and Philosophy* 31: 143-159.

Abstract: Recently a new question has emerged in the philosophy of religion: not whether God exists, but whether God's existence is or would be preferable. The existing literature on

the subject is sparse (see, for example, footnotes 2, 3, 4, and 5). The present essay, in dialogue form, is an attempt to marshal and evaluate arguments on both sides.

Davison, S. (2018) God and intrinsic value. In K. Kraay, ed., *Does God Matter? Essays on the Axiological Consequences of Theism*. New York: Routledge, pp. 39-45.

Abstract: There are many ways in which people value things, and corresponding to these, there are different concepts of value: intrinsic, instrumental, prudential, aesthetic, sentimental, epistemic, economic, etc. In this paper, I will focus only on intrinsic value. With respect to the intrinsic value in the world, would it make any difference if God were to exist? Yes, it would, or so I shall argue here. Consider the possible positions represented by the chart found on p. 11 of Chapter 1. I will defend a very limited version of a position that would be found in the vertical pro-theism column (one of the families of views identified as “axiological positions”); here I shall take no stand with regard to what are called the existential positions with respect to God’s existence.

Di Ceglie, R. (2022) Revisiting the complete understanding argument for anti-theism: a reply to Kirk Lougheed. *Philosophia* 50: 1001-1008.

Abstract: In a recent book devoted to the axiology of theism, Kirk Lougheed has argued that the ‘complete understanding’ argument should be numbered among the arguments for anti-theism. According to this argument, God’s existence is detrimental to us because, if a supernatural and never completely understandable God exists, then human beings are fated to never achieve complete understanding. In this article, I argue that the complete understanding argument for anti-theism fails for three reasons. First, complete understanding is simply impossible to achieve. Second, even if achieving complete understanding were possible, it would not be beneficial. Third, the only type of complete understanding that is possible to achieve and is beneficial to human beings is the understanding of that which is of primary importance to us, and not the understanding of everything, as Lougheed seems to assume. God can grant us complete understanding of that which is of primary importance to us. As a consequence, God’s existence ends up being beneficial and not detrimental to us.

Dumsday, T. (2016) Anti-theism and the problem of divine hiddenness. *Sophia* 55: 179-195.

Abstract: While most discussions in natural theology focus on the existence and nature of God, recently the axiological implications of theism have been taken up by such authors as Kahane (*Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 82: 674–696, 2011), Kraay and Dragos (*Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 43: 157–178, 2013), Davis (*Faith & Philosophy* 31: 143–159, 2014), McLean (*Sophia* 54: 13–24, 2015), Penner and Lougheed (*Faith and Philosophy*, 2015), and Penner (*Faith and Philosophy* 32: 325–337, 2015). Rather than asking whether God exists, they ask whether God’s existence would be a good thing or a bad thing. That general question breaks down into more precise sub-questions, with a wide variety of possible positions resulting. Here, I argue that one of these positions (theistic narrow personal anti-theism) is possibly true, and that this possibility provides for a new defence against one of the most prominent arguments for atheism in the current literature: the problem of divine hiddenness.

Dumsday, T. (2020) The axiology of theism: expanding the contrast classes. In K. Loughheed, *ed.*, *Four Views on the Axiology of Theism: What Difference Does God Make?* London: Bloomsbury, pp. 59-78. (See also the subsequent commentaries on this piece by the other three contributors, followed by Dumsday's reply – pp.97-94.)

Abstract:

Gonçalves, C.V. (2024) A reason for apatheism. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 95: 21-28.

Abstract: In a recent paper, Trevor Hedberg and Jordan Huzarevich assessed a number of objections against practical apatheism, concluding that they are either unsuccessful or at least very controversial. The aim of this discussion note is to contribute to their discussion by presenting and analysing a short argument for a reason in favor of apatheism; one that appeals to a particular universalist formulation of the thesis of theodical individualism. After briefly introducing a distinction between a particular and a universal version of apatheism, I present the argument, assess its merits in light of some objections to it, I conclude that at least one reason in favor of a particular practical apatheistic position is warranted by it. Finally, I suggest some alternative reasons that could be advanced in favor of apatheism, and I distinguish between strong and weak forms of apatheism.

Hedberg, T. and Huzarevich, J. (2017) Appraising objections to practical apatheism. *Philosophia* 45: 257-276.

Abstract: This paper addresses the plausibility of practical apatheism: an attitude of apathy or indifference about philosophical questions pertaining to God's existence grounded in the belief that they lack practical significance. Since apatheism is rarely discussed, we begin by clarifying the position and explaining how it differs from some of the other positions one may take with regard to the existence of God. Afterward, we examine six distinct objections to practical apatheism. Each of these objections posits a different reason for thinking that belief in God is practically significant. Five of these objections prove unsuccessful. The sixth, which appeals to the practical significance of belief in God with respect to our fates in the afterlife, is more promising but nonetheless encounters significant obstacles. Since the success of this objection is controversial, whether we have good grounds to reject practical apatheism should be similarly controversial, and the view should be given further examination.

Hendricks, P. (2020) Skeptical theism, pro-theism, and anti-theism. In K. Loughheed, *ed.*, *Four Views on the Axiology of Theism: What Difference Does God Make?* London: Bloomsbury, pp. 95-115. (See also the subsequent commentaries on this piece by the other three contributors, followed by Hendricks' reply – pp.116-136.)

Abstract: In this chapter, I consider personal and impersonal anti-theism and personal and impersonal pro-theism. I show that skeptical theism undermines arguments for personal anti-theism and impersonal anti-theism. Next, I show that (at least some) arguments for personal and impersonal pro-theism are not undermined by skeptical theism. This throws a wrench in debates about the axiology of theism: if skeptical theism is true, then it is very difficult to establish certain positions in answer to the axiological question about God.

Hendricks, P. (2023) Axiarchism: How to narrow the gap between pro-theism and anti-theism. In K. Lougheed, ed., *Value Beyond Monotheism: The Axiology of the Divine*. New York: Routledge, pp. 114-128.

Abstract: Arguments for pro-theism and anti-theism typically make use of traditional theism and generic atheism. In my view, when the debate between pro-theists and anti-theists makes use of traditional theism and generic atheism, pro-theism clearly comes out on top. In this chapter, I consider whether this result changes if we bring axiarchism into the mix: I compare axiarchistic theism and axiarchistic atheism. I argue that if we compare axiarchistic atheism with axiarchistic theism, the case for anti-theism is strengthened. This is because, given axiarchism, atheistic worlds can (and will) house goods that are traditionally associated with theistic worlds. Ultimately, there is one good that axiarchistic atheism does not enable anti-theism to capture – namely, God's intrinsic unlimited goodness – and I argue that this shows that there is still a gap between pro-theism and anti-theism; while the gap has been substantially narrowed, it has not been eliminated.

Hendricks, P. and Lougheed, K. (2019) Undermining the axiological solution to divine hiddenness. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 86: 3-15.

Abstract: Lougheed (*Ratio* 31: 331–341, 2018) argues that a possible solution to the problem of divine hiddenness is that God hides in order to increase the axiological value of the world. In a world where God exists, the goods associated with theism necessarily obtain. But Lougheed also claims that in such a world it's possible to experience the goods of atheism, even if they don't actually obtain. This is what makes a world with a hidden God more valuable than a world where God is unhidden (where it's impossible to experience atheistic goods), and also more valuable than an atheistic world with no God (and hence no theistic goods). We show that Lougheed never considers the comparison between a world where God hides and an atheistic world. We argue that it's possible for a person to experience theistic goods in a world where God does not exist, a possibility Lougheed never considers. If this is right it undermines his axiological solution to divine hiddenness. We conclude by showing how our discussion of the axiology of theism connects to the existential question of whether God exists; that is, we show that the axiological question is (partly) dependent on the existential question.

Jackson, E. (2024) Anti-theists cannot have theistic faith. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 54: 219-229.

Abstract: A topic of recent interest involves the nature of theistic faith, and in particular, the boundaries of such faith. For example, philosophers have taken opposing positions on whether atheists and agnostics can have theistic faith. I consider a related question: whether anti-theists, who think God's existence would be a bad thing, can have faith. I argue for a negative answer, although with several caveats.

Jackson, E. (forthcoming) The epistemic axiology of theism. *Ergo*.

Abstract: The axiology of theism concerns the question of whether God's existence would be a good thing. Pro-theists say yes, and anti-theists say no. This paper extends the axiology of

theism to the realm of epistemology: would God's existence be an epistemically good thing? It concludes in favor of epistemic pro-theism.

Jonbäck, F. (2022) Hopism. *Studia Theologica - Nordic Journal of Theology* 76: 172-192.

Abstract: Philosophers of religion have traditionally focused their attention on belief in God and assessed such belief in terms of it having some epistemic status like "rationality" or "probability", or indeed by determining whether or not it constitutes knowledge. In this paper, I focus my attention on the non-doxastic attitude of hope and formulate reasons for whether or not we should hope for God. In light of these reasons, I formulate hopeism as a research programme according to which we should develop concepts of God by starting with the question of what type of being would be worthy of our utmost hope. I compare this view with belief-based concepts of God, such as perfect being theism and what I call worship-worthiness theism. Arguably, the greatest benefit of choosing hopeism is that it is inclusive. Most atheists as well as agnostics and theists can endorse the view. I also suggest a number of directions in which hopeism can be developed.

Kahane, G. (2011) Should we want God to exist? *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 82: 674-696.

Abstract: Whether God exists is a metaphysical question. But there is also a neglected evaluative question about God's existence: Should we want God to exist? Very many, including many atheists and agnostics, appear to think we should. Theists claim that if God didn't exist things would be far worse, and many atheists agree; they regret God's inexistence. Some remarks by Thomas Nagel suggest an opposing view: that we should want God not to exist. I call this view anti-theism. I explain how such view can be coherent, and why it might be correct. Anti-theism must be distinguished from the argument from evil or the denial of God's goodness; it is a claim about the goodness of God's existence. Anti-theists must claim that it's a logical consequence of God's existence that things are worse in certain respects. The problem is that God's existence would also make things better in many ways. Given that God's existence is likely to be impersonally better overall, anti-theists face a challenge similar to that facing nonconsequentialists. I explore two ways of meeting this challenge.

Kahane, G. (2012) The value question in metaphysics. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 85: 27-55.

Abstract: Much seems to be at stake in metaphysical questions about, for example, God, free will or morality. One thing that could be at stake is the value of the universe we inhabit—how good or bad it is. We can think of competing philosophical positions as describing possibilities, ways the world might turn out to be, and to which value can be assigned. When, for example, people hope that God exists, or fear that we do not possess free will, they express attitudes towards these possibilities, attitudes that presuppose answers to questions about their comparative value. My aim in this paper is to distinguish these evaluative questions from related questions with which they can be confused, to identify structural constraints on their proper pursuit, and to address objections to their very coherence. Answers to such evaluative questions offer one measure of the importance of philosophical disputes.

Kahane, G. (2014) Our cosmic insignificance. *Noûs* 48: 745–772.

Abstract: The universe that surrounds us is vast, and we are so very small. When we reflect on the vastness of the universe, our humdrum cosmic location, and the inevitable future demise of humanity, our lives can seem utterly insignificant. Many philosophers assume that such worries about our significance reflect a banal metaethical confusion. They dismiss the very idea of cosmic significance. This, I argue, is a mistake. Worries about cosmic insignificance do not express metaethical worries about objectivity or nihilism, and we can make good sense of the idea of cosmic significance and its absence. It is also possible to explain why the vastness of the universe can make us feel insignificant. This impression does turn out to be mistaken, but not for the reasons typically assumed. In fact, we might be of immense cosmic significance—though we cannot, at this point, tell whether this is the case.

Kahane, G. (2018) If there is a hole, it is not God-shaped. In K. Kraay, ed., *Does God Matter? Essays on the Axiological Consequences of Theism*. New York: Routledge, pp. 95-131.

Abstract: Some people are deeply dissatisfied by the universe that modern science reveals to us. They long for the world described by traditional religion. They do not believe in God, but they wish He had existed. I argue that this is a mistake. The naturalist world we inhabit is admittedly rather bleak. It is very far from being the best of all possible worlds. But an alternative governed by God is also unwelcome, and the things that might make God's existence attractive—cosmic justice or the afterlife—could also be had without God. The most desirable of all possible worlds are therefore godless.

Kahane, G. (2019) Prudential objections to theism. In G. Oppy, ed., *A Companion to Atheism and Philosophy*. London: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 216-233.

Abstract: This chapter is concerned with objections to theism that revolve around prudential considerations. The prospects of prudential arguments that aim to show that God doesn't exist seem to me dim. But I consider whether prudential considerations can give us pragmatic reasons for not *believing* that God exists. I also consider how prudential considerations can figure in debunking arguments against theist belief. I then turn to the question of whether we *should* want God to exist. In answering this question, I consider a further kind of prudential argument – an argument that moves from claims about what would follow from God's existence or nonexistence, to prudential *conclusions*. In particular, I consider axiological arguments purporting to show that God's existence would make our lives worse. I end by briefly considering questions relating to nihilism, meaning, and significance.

Kahane, G. (2021a) Is anti-theism incoherent? *American Philosophical Quarterly* 58: 373-385.

Abstract: Anti-theists argue that the world, or our lives, would be overall worse if God exists because God's existence imposes distinctive downsides. Many hold, however, that anti-theism is incoherent if we assume that God would not permit gratuitous evil to occur. This is because that would entail that any alleged downsides of God's existence would be permitted only if they are necessary to bring about a greater good or to prevent an even greater evil. I will argue that this emerging consensus is mistaken: the argument from the principle of non-

gratuitous evil to the falsity of anti-theism is invalid because it trades on an ambiguity. Appealing directly to God's perfect goodness fails for similar reasons. Anti-theism can therefore only be rejected via substantive axiological debate.

Kahane, G. (2021b) Should atheists wish that there were no gratuitous evil? *Faith and Philosophy* 38: 460-483.

Abstract: Many atheists argue that because gratuitous evil exists, God (probably) doesn't. But doesn't this commit atheists to wishing that God did exist, and to the pro-theist view that the world would have been better had God existed? This doesn't follow. I argue that if all that evil still remains but is just no longer gratuitous, then, from an atheist perspective, that wouldn't have been better. And while a counterfactual from which that evil is literally absent would have been impersonally better, it wouldn't have been better for anyone, not even for those who suffered such evils.

Kahane, G. (2022a) Is the universe indifferent? Should we care? *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 104: 676-695.

Abstract: The scientific worldview is often claimed to reveal a universe chillingly indifferent to human suffering. But it's unclear what it means to describe the universe as indifferent, or what a non-indifferent universe would be like. I suggest that the relevant contrast isn't simply that between God and His absence, nor is the complaint about indifference focused on the lack of a kind of cosmic concern. At its heart is the idea of a mismatch between world and value. Although the causal forces governing our world are 'blind', they nevertheless do partly align with value. Still, our world is so arranged that senseless suffering is depressingly common, and the rosy non-indifferent counterfactual won't contain such evil. I argue, however, that it is a mistake to long for such an alternative: it must either involve an upside-down moral order, or would be a world from which we, and those who senselessly suffer, will be absent.

Kahane, G. (2022b) Optimism without theism? Nagasawa on atheism, evolution, and evil. *Religious Studies* 58: 701-714.

Abstract: Nagasawa has argued that the suffering associated with evolution presents a greater challenge to atheism than to theism because that evil is incompatible with 'existential optimism' about the world – with seeing the world as an overall good place, and being thankful that we exist. I argue that even if atheism was incompatible with existential optimism in this way, this presents no threat to atheism. Moreover, it is unclear how the suffering associated with evolution could on its own undermine existential optimism. Links between Nagasawa's argument and the current debate about the axiology of (a)theism are also explored.

Kraay, K.J. (2013) Method and madness in contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. *Toronto Journal of Theology* 29: 245-264.

Abstract: After briefly outlining the history of contemporary analytic philosophy of religion and saying something about its practitioners' beliefs, I describe and evaluate four recent meta-philosophical analyses of this subdiscipline. (These four analyses each identify

problems with this subfield and propose solutions.) Then I introduce a framework for a research program in the philosophy of religion that I think these authors should all welcome.

Kraay, K.J. (2014) Perspectives and positions in contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. *Toronto Journal of Theology* 30: 132-140.

Abstract: This essay discusses two issues. The first is whether the “insider’s” or “outsider’s” perspective is more truth-conducive in the study of religion. I do not attempt to settle this very thorny question: I merely attempt to identify some aspects of what it might mean to be an insider with respect to one kind of investigation—the investigation into whether God exists. The second issue is how best to characterize certain philosophical positions on the axiology of ultimate reality. Here I argue that it can be useful to group together certain axiological positions under one heading, while leaving their details open to interpretation. For example, two philosophers might agree that God’s existence would—or does—make the world far better than it would otherwise be, even though they have incompatible notions of what constitutes “far” and “better.” In my view, it makes sense to call both thinkers pro-theists, despite their differences. In discussing these issues, I engage the work of Myron A. Penner and Paul Moser, both of whom published replies to an article of mine in the most recent issue of the *Toronto Journal of Theology*.

Kraay, K.J. (2016a) God and gratuitous evil (Part I). *Philosophy Compass* 11: 905-912.

Abstract: In contemporary analytic philosophy, the problem of evil refers to a family of arguments that attempt to show, by appeal to evil, that God does not (or probably does not) exist. Some very important arguments in this family focus on gratuitous evil. Most participants in the relevant discussions, including theists and atheists, agree that God is able to prevent all gratuitous evil and that God would do so. On this view, of course, the occurrence of even a single instance of gratuitous evil falsifies theism. The most common response to such arguments attempts to cast doubt on the claim that gratuitous evil really occurs. The focus of these two survey papers will be a different response—one that has received less attention in the literature. This response attempts to show that God and gratuitous evil are compatible. If it succeeds, then the occurrence of gratuitous evil does not, after all, count against theism. After introducing some key terms, I survey the literature surrounding the attempts by Michael Peterson and John Hick to execute this strategy. In a follow-up paper, I discuss the attempts of William Hasker, Peter van Inwagen, and Michael Almeida, respectively.

Kraay, K.J. (2016b) God and gratuitous evil (Part II). *Philosophy Compass* 11: 913-922.

Abstract: In contemporary analytic philosophy, the problem of evil refers to a family of arguments that attempt to show, by appeal to evil, that God does not (or probably does not) exist. Some very important arguments in this family focus on gratuitous evil. Most participants in the relevant discussions, including theists and atheists, agree that God is able to prevent all gratuitous evil, and that God would do so. On this view, of course, the occurrence of even a single instance of gratuitous evil falsifies theism. The most common response to such arguments attempts to cast doubt on the claim that gratuitous evil really occurs. The focus of these two survey papers will be a different response – one that has received less attention in the literature. This response attempts to show that God and

gratuitous evil are compatible. If it succeeds, then the occurrence of gratuitous evil does not, after all, count against theism. In the prequel to this paper, I surveyed the literature surrounding the attempts by Michael Peterson and John Hick to execute this strategy. Here, I survey the attempts due to William Hasker, Peter van Inwagen, and Michael Almeida, respectively.

Kraay, K.J. (2019) Theism, pro-theism, Hasker, and gratuitous evil. *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* 9: 31-53.

Abstract: Consider this claim: (1) If God exists, no gratuitous evil occurs. This claim enjoys widespread assent in contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. It could be harnessed into an argument for pro-theism: it certainly looks like a reason for thinking that God's existence would make the world better than it would otherwise be, at least if there is an appropriate causal connection between the antecedent and the consequent. But (1) is also the first premise of a widely discussed argument for atheism that continues as follows: (2) Gratuitous evil occurs. Therefore, (3) God does not exist. In recent decades, much of the debate about this argument (and probabilistic variants of it) has concerned the claim expressed in premise (2). Critics of this claim have defended accounts of our epistemic circumstances and capacities according to which this premise cannot reasonably be asserted. This controversial position has become known as skeptical theism, and it has generated a large and very technical literature. A few authors, however, have attempted to resist (1). One such strategy is developed in a series of important publications by William Hasker (1992, 2004b, 2008). If Hasker's argument were to succeed, this would be an important result for the overall debate about whether God exists, since it would count against a prominent kind of argument for atheism. While Hasker does not explicitly consider the question of the axiological consequences of God's existence, his argument, if sound, would also be an important result for this debate, since it would count against one line of apparent support for pro-theism. In section 2, I discuss certain restrictions on God's permission of evil in order to illuminate claim (1), and in section 3, I set out Hasker's case against it. In section 4, I clarify an important point about Hasker's argument: I show that it does not require Hasker to maintain that God's plan for creation requires the actual occurrence of gratuitous evil. In section 5, I set out and evaluate four criticisms of Hasker's argument. Finally, in an Appendix, I consider the merits of a successor argument for atheism – one that is compatible with Hasker's view.

Kraay, K.J. and Dragos, C. (2013) On preferring God's non-existence. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 43: 157-178.

Abstract: For many centuries, philosophers have debated this question: 'Does God exist?' Surprisingly, they have paid rather less attention to this distinct – but also very important – question: 'Would God's existence be a good thing?' The latter is an axiological question about the difference in value that God's existence would make (or does make) in the actual world. Perhaps the most natural position to take, whether or not one believes in God, is to hold that it would be a very good thing if such a being were to exist. After all, God is traditionally thought to be perfectly powerful and good, and it might seem obvious that such a being's existence would make things better than they would otherwise be. But this judgment has been contested: some philosophers have held that God's existence would make things worse, and that, on this basis, one can reasonably prefer God's non-existence.

We first distinguish a wide array of axiological positions concerning the value of God's existence which might be held by theists, atheists, and agnostics alike. We next construe these positions as comparative judgments about the axiological status of various possible worlds. We then criticize an important recent attempt to show that God's existence would make things worse, in various ways, than they would otherwise be.

Lancaster-Thomas, A. (2023) Picking wholes: the axiology of pantheism." In K. Lougheed, ed., *Value Beyond Monotheism: The Axiology of the Divine*. New York: Routledge, pp. 20-45.

Abstract: In this chapter, I explore the axiological weight of pantheism by asking two fundamental questions: "In which ways can we approach the axiology of pantheism?" and "Is it better that pantheism is true or not?" I consider three pro-pantheism arguments from empathy, physical primacy, and the afterlife. The empathy consideration contends that empathy is an instrumental and final good of pantheism. The physical primacy consideration asserts that a naturalistic pantheistic god is axiologically stronger than a supernatural god. The afterlife consideration maintains that pantheism suffers no axiological drawbacks from its eschatological elements. I conclude that pantheism offers attractive upshots over other theisms. I also examine three anti-pantheism arguments and suggest that one is potentially very damaging to the pro-pantheism perspective. Additionally, I offer a framework that maps out strategies for tackling axiological questions such as these.

Lebens, S. (2023) Hassidic idealism and the meaning of life. In K. Lougheed, ed., *Value Beyond Monotheism: The Axiology of the Divine*. New York: Routledge, pp. 83-95.

Abstract: In this chapter, I distinguish different meanings of the word "meaning." I argue that the truth of theism isn't a necessary condition for our living meaningful lives (if what we mean by "meaning" is a certain sort of value). By contrast, I argue that the truth of a very specific form of theism (which I call "Hassidic Idealism") is a necessary condition for our living meaningful lives (if what we mean by "meaning" is a certain sort of significance). If Hassidic Idealism is true, then our entire lives, from moment to moment, and in every situation, take on a particular form of cosmic significance. This in turn entails that our lives are, at least potentially, much more valuable under the assumption of Hassidic idealism.

Licon, J.A. (2021) Aspirational theism and gratuitous suffering. *Religious Studies* 57: 287-300.

Abstract: Philosophers have long wondered whether God exists; and yet, they have ignored the question of whether we should hope that He exists – call this stance aspirational theism. In this article, I argue that we have a weighty pro tanto reason to adopt this stance: theism offers a metaphysical guarantee against gratuitous suffering (i.e. God would not permit gratuitous suffering). On the other hand, few atheist alternatives offer such a guarantee – and even then, there are reasons to worry that they are inferior to the theistic alternative. Given this difference, we have a strong pro tanto, but not all-things-considered, reason to adopt aspirational theism.

Licon, J. A. (2023) Should we hope apparent atrocities are illusory? Exploring a puzzle in moral axiology. *dialectica* 77: 229-247.

Abstract: Philosophers have recently turned to axiological questions related to God and, to a minor extent, related to morality. This paper contributes to the latter project. The world contains atrocities such as famine and war. Can we rationally hope that these atrocities are merely moral illusions? First, we have good reason to hope that moral atrocities are only apparent because our world would be morally worse if they were real. Some critics argue that they know atrocities are real. However, setting aside whether we have such moral knowledge, perhaps we shouldn't hope that atrocities are morally illusory because that outcome would undercut our moral reliability, imply that we have false and unjustified moral beliefs, result in moral opportunity costs, and potentially deny the dignity of victims of (even only apparent) atrocities.

Licon, J.A. (2026) Only God knows best: aspirational theism and epistemic value. *TheoLogica* **need volume and pages**.

Abstract: This paper develops an epistemic argument for aspirational theism, the view that for agents who regard theism as a live epistemic possibility, there exist defeasible reasons to rationally hope that God exists. The argument begins from the fact that finite epistemic agents must economize their cognitive resources, and thus should seek sources of substantive, rather than trivial, epistemic goods. If God exists, He would be uniquely well-positioned—given His omniscience and moral perfection—to deliver epistemic goods that are personally fitting and epistemically valuable. The paper distinguishes aspirational theism from pro- and anti-theism and aspirational atheism, situating the favored view within broader debates concerning rational hope, epistemic value, and the ethics of belief. And it engages with several objections from divine hiddenness, privacy, and pessimistic meta-induction, concluding that even under skeptical theist constraints, theistic hope remains epistemically appropriate for many.

Linford, D. and Megill, J. (2018) Cognitive bias, the axiological question, and the epistemic probability of theistic belief. In M. Szatkowski, ed. *Ontology of Theistic Beliefs: Meta-Ontological Perspectives*, Berlin: de Gruyter, pp.77-92.

Abstract:

Lougheed, K. (2017) Anti-theism and the objective meaningful life argument. *Dialogue* 56: 337-355.

Abstract: Philosophers of religion have begun to explore the value question of whether God's existence would add to, detract from, or have no impact on the value of our world. The Meaningful Life Argument is one of the most promising arguments in support of the view that God's existence would make the world worse, at least for certain individuals. I offer an objectivized version of the Meaningful Life Argument and show why recent objections leveled against it by Myron A. Penner do not apply to this version.

Lougheed, K. (2018a) On the axiology of a hidden god. *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 10: 79-95.

Abstract: One axiological question in the philosophy of religion is the question of what impact, if any, God's existence does (or would) make to the value of our world. Elsewhere I argue that we should prefer a theistic world where God is hidden to an atheistic world or a

theistic world where God isn't hidden. This is because in a hidden theistic world all of the theistic goods obtain in addition to the experience of atheistic goods. I attempt to complete this line of argument by showing that theistic goods do (or could) indeed obtain in a world where God hides. However, I also suggest that the experience of theistic goods in a world where God doesn't hide and a world where God hides are likely so different that there is a difference in value between the two worlds, despite them having the same goods. Given this, I conclude that we can't tell the difference between the value of a world where God doesn't hide and a world with a hidden God. The axiological solution to divine hiddenness remains incomplete.

Lougheed, K. (2018b) The axiological solution to divine hiddenness. *Ratio* 31: 331-341.

Abstract: Philosophers have recently wondered whether the value impact of the existence of God on the world would be positive, negative, or neutral. Thus far discussions have distinguished between the value God's impact would have overall, in certain respects, and/or for particular individuals. A commonality amongst the various positions that have been taken up is to focus on the goods and drawbacks associated with both theism and atheism. Goods associated with atheism include things like privacy, independence, and autonomy. I argue that it is better overall and for everyone to prefer a hidden God to no God. This is because it is possible to experience many of the goods attributed to atheism if God is hidden even if they do not really obtain, while also gaining many of the additional goods connected to theism. This amounts to a new solution to the problem of divine hiddenness: God might hide in order to increase or maximize the axiological value of the world.

Lougheed, K. (2019a) Anti-theism, pro-theism, and gratuitous evil. *Philosophia Christi* 21: 101-115.

Abstract: Ebrahim Azadegan recently argues that personal anti-theism, the view that it's rational for a particular individual to prefer that God not exist, is a form of gratuitous evil. He justifies this evil by arguing that the anti-theist is uniquely positioned to bargain, implore, and plea to God. I argue that Azadegan faces a paradox. Once the anti-theist recognizes that God plus anti-theism makes the world better, she should convert to pro-theism. But then there can be no reflective anti-theists who could add value to the world. Ignorance is a requirement of the anti-theist who can offer these unique goods.

Lougheed, K. (2019b) On how (not) to argue for preferring God's non-existence. *Dialogue* 58: 677-699.

Abstract: Consider two epistemically possible worlds that are as similar as can be, except that atheism is true in one world and theism is true in the other world. Which world is it rational to prefer? I explore the strongest defence of the somewhat counterintuitive claim that it is rational to prefer the atheistic world. I also discuss the opposite conclusion, namely, that it's rational to prefer the theistic world. Surprisingly, my conclusion is that it's difficult to tell whether to prefer theism or atheism overall.

Lougheed, K. (2019c) On the will not to believe and axiological atheism: reply to Cockayne and Warman. *Sophia* 58: 743-751.

Abstract: In a recent article in *Sophia*, Joshua Cockayne and Jack Warman (2019) defend a view they call supra-evidential atheistic fideism. This is the idea that considerations similar to William James's defence of theistic belief can be used to justify atheistic belief. If an individual evaluates the evidence for atheism and theism as roughly the same (i.e. either can be epistemically rational), then she can rationally believe in atheism if her passions lean in that direction, provided the belief in atheism is forced, live and momentous. After outlining their defence of atheistic fideism, I offer some friendly amendments to their position. Cockayne and Warman claim that when the existential question of God's existence is undecided for someone, she is rational to let her passions answer the existential question. This is a version of Rowe's friendly atheism because it can explain the existence of religious disagreement, even in cases where an atheist and theist give the same assessment of the evidence for God's (non)existence; they disagree at the passional level, not at the evidential level. I argue for a different version of friendly atheism: a mere passion need not settle the existential question about God when the evidence cannot decide it. For one might be rational in preferring that God not exist if God's existence would make things worse. For certain individuals, this is reason enough to accept and act as if atheism is true, even if it is not epistemically rational to believe that it's true.

Lougheed, K. (2022) Are atheist worlds really the best? *Religious Studies* 58: 345-358.

Abstract: Anti-theism is the view that God's existence would (or does) detract from the value of the world. A distinctive argument for anti-theism says that the very best atheist worlds are better than the best theist worlds. The reason for this is that it's possible to gain most or all of the benefits associated with theism in Godless worlds. For instance, worlds with a lesser god or several lesser gods can provide many of the benefits of theism without the associated disadvantages. While some work has been done to show that the advantages of theism can be had in atheist worlds, very little has been said regarding whether the disadvantages can simultaneously be avoided in such worlds. I aim to show that it is difficult to describe a possible atheist world where the benefits of theism obtain but the harms do not. I thus problematize this particular argument for anti-theism.

Lougheed, K. (2023) Completing the complete understanding argument: a rejoinder to Roberto Di Ceglie. *Philosophia* 51: 811-819.

Abstract: In *The Axiological Status of Theism and Other Worldviews* (2020), I defend the Complete Understanding Argument for anti-theism, which says that God's existence makes the world worse with respect to our ability to understand it. In a recent article, Roberto Di Ceglie offers three objections to my argument. I seek to rescue my argument by showing (1) that understanding can come in degrees; (2) that I'm not a consequentialist about the value of understanding; and (3) that my argument is consistent with God providing us with sufficient knowledge of important spiritual matters. Di Ceglie's objections point to future areas for fruitful exploration but do not defeat my argument.

Lougheed, K. (2024) The axiology of the African limited-God. In A. Agada, E. Ofuasia, and B. Y. Ikuli. *Contemporary African Metaphysical Thought*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland. pp. 157-176.

Abstract: African Traditional Religion is a major world religion typically thought to be monotheistic with millions of adherents below the Sahara on the African continent. However, it has been sorely neglected by Anglo-American philosophers of religion, and thus far none of the axiological questions in what has come to be known as the axiology of theism literature have been applied to it. I will break new ground by applying axiological analysis to an important metaphysical position in African Traditional Religion known as the limited-God thesis. This conception of God denies that God is any of omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. This has important implications when thinking about the axiological status of monotheism. While it might be thought obvious that it would be worse if the limited-God existed compared to the Anselmian God, I will argue that such a conclusion is not so straightforward for two reasons. First, many exponents of African Traditional Religion deny that the problem of evil applies to the limited-God. A world where the problem of evil does not arise may well be better than a world where it does. Second, and even if this first reason fails, I appeal to recent claims by Guy Kahane suggesting that a world without gratuitous evil is actually worse than a world with gratuitous evil. I conclude that not only does this imply the limited-God is axiologically superior to the Anselmian God, but it also avoids many of the pitfalls typically associated with anti-theism and therefore may also be better than metaphysical naturalism.

Luck, M. (2026) Does a world created by God have more bestowed worth? *Religious Studies* **need volume and pages**.

Abstract: This paper examines Ballard's narrow pro-theistic argument for the claim that a world created by God would possess more bestowed worth than a world not created by God. I argue that not only could the world have just as much bestowed worth were it not created by God, but it could possibly have more.

Luck, M. and Ellerby, N. (2012) Should we want God not to exist? *Philo* 15: 193–99.

Abstract: In his book, *The Last Word*, Thomas Nagel expresses the hope that there exists no God. Guy Kahane, in his paper 'Should We Want God to Exist?', attempts to defend Nagel from an argument that concludes such a hope may be impermissible. In this paper we present a new defence for the hope that God does not exist.

Maitzen, S. (2018) The problem of magic. In K. Kraay, ed. *Does God Matter? Essays on the Axiological Consequences of Theism*. New York: Routledge, pp. 132-146.

Abstract: Various philosophers and theologians, including Aquinas, Leibniz, Bernard Lonergan, and Hugo Meynell, see evidence for the existence of God in the fact that the universe is intelligible to us. This chapter makes clear what "intelligibility" means in this context and in particular, what it had better not mean. It examines and rejects some reasons philosophers have given for thinking that the intelligibility of the universe requires or suggests supernatural and more particularly, theistic backing. The chapter argues that supernaturalism, including theism, would in fact threaten the complete intelligibility of the universe. It argues that supernaturalism, including theism, would impose non-epistemic costs as well. Admittedly, intuitionistic logicians do claim to accept all of the laws of classical logic except for excluded middle and double-negation elimination. The chapter also argues that supernaturalism, including theism, is worse than unnecessary for human

knowledge: it positively threatens human knowledge. It concludes by describing some more broadly axiological threats posed by supernaturalism, including theism.

Mawson, T.J. (2012). On determining how important it is whether or not there is a God. *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 4: 95-105.

Abstract: Can the issue of how important it is whether or not there is a God be decided prior to deciding whether or not there is a God? In this paper, I explore some difficulties that stand in the way of answering this question in the affirmative and some of the implications of these difficulties for that part of the Philosophy of Religion which concerns itself with assessing arguments for and against the existence of God, the implications for how its importance may best be defended within secular academe.

Mawson, T.J. (2016) What God could (and couldn't) do to make life meaningful. In J. Seachris and S. Goetz, eds. *God and Meaning: New Essays*. London: Bloomsbury, pp. 37-58.

Abstract: Some philosophers have thought that life could only be meaningful if there is no God. For Sartre and Nagel, for example, a God of the traditional classical theistic sort would constrain our powers of self-creative autonomy in ways that would severely detract from the meaning of our lives, possibly even evacuate our lives of all meaning. Some philosophers, by contrast, have thought that life could only be meaningful if there is a God. *God and the Meanings of Life* is interested in exploring the truth in both these schools of thought, seeking to discover what God could and couldn't do to make life meaningful (as well as what he would and wouldn't do). Mawson espouses a version of the 'amalgam' or 'pluralism' thesis about the issue of life's meaning – in essence, that there are a number of different legitimate meanings of 'meaning' (and indeed 'life') in the question of life's meaning. According to Mawson, God, were he to exist, would help make life meaningful in some of these senses and hinder in some others. He argues that whilst there could be meaning in a Godless universe, there could be other sorts of meaning in a Godly one and that these would be deeper.

Mawson, T.J. (2018) An agreeable answer to a pro-theism / anti-theism question. In K. Kraay, ed., *Does God Matter? Essays on the Axiological Consequences of Theism*. New York: Routledge, pp. 70-92.

Abstract: In this chapter, I address some difficulties that stand in the way of reaching an answer that will be agreeable across the Theist/Atheist divide to a particular Pro-theism/Anti-theism question, the question I call 'the' comparative Pro-theism/Anti-theism question. Really, one might say, 'the' comparative Pro-theism/Anti-theism question is two questions, one for the theist and one for the atheist. For the theist: would God's not existing have been better or worse than is His existing? For the atheist: would God's existing have been better or worse than is His not existing? Assuming that theist and atheist alike should agree that the issue of whether or not there's a God concerns a metaphysical necessity and thus that each should think of themselves as involved in counter-possible reasoning when addressing their variant of 'the' comparative Pro-theism/Anti-theism question, I shall argue that the difficulties they face in reaching an agreement on its answer, whilst not insignificant, can be overcome, at least to an extent. I shall tentatively suggest that an answer that I shall call 'Weak Pro-Theism' emerges as one that is agreeable across the Theist/Atheist divide,

agreeable as what I shall call the ‘lower epistemic bound’ to ‘the’ correct answer to ‘the’ comparative question. More specifically, the theist should answer his variant of the question by saying that it would have been somewhat worse (or at least no better) were God not to have existed. The atheist should answer his variant by saying that it would have been somewhat better (or at least no worse) were God to have existed. I shall argue that arguments for a stronger Pro-theistic conclusion to this question largely wait on a resolution to the Theism/Atheism question.

McDougal, A. (2025) Squeezing God into fitting-response theories of value. *Southwest Philosophy Review* 41: 139-148.

Abstract: What is the value of God? Recent work in the “axiology of theism” tends to approach this question from a Moorean angle: what would God (or God’s existence) contribute to the overall value of the world (see Kraay, 2018 for an introduction to such work)? A complete answer involves tallying up the discrete values and disvalues that God would contribute. God’s moral goodness, for one, would go in the value column; so too, God’s administration of justice in the final account. I propose, however, a different approach to the question of God’s value: namely, that looking to the range of responses that are fitting or appropriate toward an object helps us to understand its value.

McLean, G. R. (2015) Antipathy to God. *Sophia* 54: 13–24

Abstract: Antipathy towards the possibility that God exists is a common attitude, which has recently been clearly expressed by Thomas Nagel. This attitude is presumably irrelevant to the question whether God does exist. But it raises two other interesting philosophical issues. First, to what extent does this attitude motivate irrational belief? And secondly, how should the attitude be evaluated? This paper investigates that latter issue. Is the hope that God does not exist a morally proper hope? I simplify this question by interpreting the relevant attitude as an aversion towards the Christian picture of the world coupled with a preference for the naturalist atheistic picture. And comparing the content of those two world pictures, I argue that the attitude, though partly explicable, is morally unjustifiable, for clearly recognisable reasons. Regardless, then, of further concerns about the doxastic influence of this attitude, we ought to be ashamed of our antipathy to God, which reflects badly upon us.

Metz, T. (2023) How African conceptions of God bear on life’s meaning. *Religious Studies* 59: 340-354.

Abstract: Up to now, a very large majority of work in the religious philosophy of life’s meaning has presumed a conception of God that is Abrahamic. In contrast, in this article I critically discuss some of the desirable and undesirable facets of Traditional African Religion’s salient conceptions of God as they bear on meaning in life. Given an interest in a maximally meaningful life, and supposing meaning would come from fulfilling God’s purpose for us, would it be reasonable to prefer God as characteristically conceived by African philosophers of religion to exist instead of the Abrahamic conception of God? At this stage of enquiry, I answer that, in respect of the range of people to whom God’s purpose would apply, a more African view of God would plausibly offer a greater meaning, but that, concerning what the content of God’s purpose would be, the Abrahamic view appears to offer a greater one. I conclude by reflecting on this mixed verdict and by suggesting respects in which non-

purposive facets of the African and Abrahamic conceptions of God could also have implications for life's meaning.

Miksa, R. (2026) Becoming perfect and other axiological advantages of theism. *TheoLogica* need volume and pages.

Abstract: The axiology of theism focuses on whether living in a theistic or non-theistic reality is best for worlds or the lives of persons. Some argue that supernatural-atheism—the view that God does not exist, but things like karma or souls do—is best because, on that view, worlds or persons could possess all the goods of theism without its disadvantages. However, I argue that certain forms of theism offer persons several unique goods: namely, partaking in the divine nature, becoming perfected, having an intimate mutual relationship with Perfection, and knowing that one has been perfected. I further argue that many of the allegedly unique goods of anti-theism are either available on theism or that anti-theism has the same disadvantages as theism concerning those goods. Pro-theism is thus a stronger position than is currently assessed in the axiology of theism literature.

Moser, P. (2013) On the axiology of theism: reply to Klaas J. Kraay. *Toronto Journal of Theology* 29: 271-276.

Abstract: In “Method and Madness in Contemporary Analytic Philosophy of Religion” Klaas Kraay offers some methodological considerations that lead to a taxonomy and a larger research project for an axiology of theism. This reply identifies some crucial vagueness and ambiguity in the taxonomy and project, and makes three constructive recommendations for improving the project. It also illustrates how the removal of ambiguity can enable the project to proceed in a straightforward and compelling manner.

Mugg, J. (2016) The quietest challenge to the axiology of God: a cognitive approach to counterpossibles. *Faith and Philosophy* 33: 441–60.

Abstract: Guy Kahane asks an axiological question: what value would (or does) God's existence bestow on the world? Supposing God's existence is a matter of necessity, this axiological question faces a problem because answering it will require assessing the truth-value of counterpossibles. I argue that Kahane, Paul Moser, and Richard Davis and Paul Franks fail in their attempts to render the axiological question substantive. I then offer my own solution by bringing work in cognitive psychology and philosophy of mind to bear on the possibility of assessing counterpossibles. I argue that humans can engage in counterpossible reasoning by “accepting” or “supposing” that the antecedent is true and “screening out” those beliefs that would result in contradictions when combined in inferences with the acceptance or supposition. These screened out propositions are not treated as false, but are ignored. I offer a three-valued logic for counterpossible reasoning. I conclude by outlining some implications for the axiological question.

Mullins. R.T. (2023) The axiology of pantheism. In K. Loughheed, ed., *Value Beyond Monotheism: The Axiology of the Divine*. New York: Routledge, pp. 64-82.

Abstract: What difference would a panentheist God make to the axiological status of the world? In order to answer this question, I will first need to distinguish panentheism from other

models of God. This is a notoriously difficult task. I briefly articulate the major models of God being debated today. In particular, these models are classical theism, neoclassical theism, open theism, panentheism, and pantheism. I seek to demarcate panentheism from its rivals, and discuss the potential axiological advantages that panentheism has over its rivals.

Murphy, M. (2025) Imperfection, sinfulness, and holiness: a reply to Vicens. *Faith and Philosophy* 41: 398-411.

Abstract: In “Divine Holiness and the Axiology of Theism,” Leigh Vicens criticizes the account of God’s reasons for action offered in my Divine Holiness and Divine Action. She argues that my account has implications that are incompatible with Christian witness regarding the goodness of our being in union with God, but that it can be corrected simply by holding that it is only sin from which God has reason to keep distance. In this response, I show that Vicens is mistaken about the implications of my view regarding the goodness of being in intimate relationship with God and that her view, unlike my own, lacks an explanation of why God has reason to respond to sin by keeping distance from it.

Oppy, G. (2020) Naturalistic axiology. In K. Loughheed, ed., *Four Views on the Axiology of Theism: What Difference Does God Make?* London: Bloomsbury, pp. 137-156. (See also the subsequent commentaries on this piece by the other three contributors, followed by Oppy’s reply – pp.137-172.)

Abstract:

Penner, M.A. (2015) Personal anti-theism and the meaningful life argument. *Faith and Philosophy* 32: 325-337.

Abstract: In a recent paper, Guy Kahane asks whether God’s existence is something we should want to be true. Expanding on some cryptic remarks from Thomas Nagel, Kahane’s informative and wide-ranging piece eventually addresses whether personal anti-theism is justified, where personal anti-theism is the view that God’s existence would make things worse overall for oneself. In what follows, I develop, defend, but ultimately reject the Meaningful Life Argument, according to which if God’s existence precludes the realization of certain goods that seem to an agent to constitute a meaningful life, it is rational for an agent both to believe that personal anti-theism is true and to prefer that God not exist.

Penner, M.A. (2018) On the objective meaningful life argument: a response to Kirk Loughheed. *Dialogue* 57: 173-182.

Abstract: Kirk Loughheed has argued that the Objective Meaningful Life Argument establishes a type of anti-theism, the view that a theistic God’s existence would make things worse and thus it’s rational to prefer that God not exist. The objective version of this argument is said to be an improvement over my subjective version of the Meaningful Life Argument. I argue that Loughheed’s version fares no better than the subjective version.

Penner, M.A. and Arbour, B. (2018) Arguments from evil and evidence for pro-theism. In Kraay, K., ed., *Does God Matter? Essays on the Axiological Consequences of Theism*. New York: Routledge, pp. 192-202.

Abstract: Recently, philosophers of religion have been paying increased attention to the axiological implications of the existence of God.¹ Rather than focussing on the epistemic requirements for rational belief in theism or atheism, these philosophers address questions related to the difference that God's existence would make to the value of a world. For example, if God were to exist, would God's existence, all else being equal, make things better or worse? But suppose the distribution of goods in a God-inclusive world is not equal: Is it plausible to think that God's existence could make things worse in some ways, but better in others, such that the overall value contribution God's existence would make is determinate one way or the other? And while the impetus for this emerging literature is axiological and not epistemological, interesting epistemic issues lurk nearby. For example, how could one acquire knowledge or justified belief about these sorts of axiological judgements? Do one's views on the axiological contribution (positive or negative) of God's existence support the rationality of certain preferences about what is (or might have been) the case? And so on. Following Guy Kahane, we identify pro-theism as the belief that God's existence would be good in that it increases the value of a world, whereas anti-theism is the belief that God's existence would decrease the value of a world (2011, 694).³ In this paper, we develop an argument for pro-theism that takes into account the structure of certain arguments from evil. More specifically, we argue that if one accepts a crucial premise in certain arguments from evil—namely, that certain observed features of the world are deficiencies that count as evidence against God's existence—then one ought to be a pro-theist.

Penner, M.A. and Loughheed, K. (2015). Pro-theism and the added value of morally good agents. *Philosophia Christi* 17: 53-69.

Abstract: Pro-theism is the view that God's existence would be good in that God's existence increases the value of a world. Anti-theism is the view that God's existence would decrease the value of a world. We develop and defend the morally good agent argument for pro-theism. The basic idea is that morally good agents tend to add value to states of affairs, and God, moral agent par excellence is no exception. Thus, we argue that the existence of God would be, on balance, a good thing and therefore something that one can rationally desire to be true.

Rescher, N. (1990) On faith and belief. In *Human Interests*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 166-78.

Abstract:

Rickabaugh, B. (2023). Normative reasons, epistemic autonomy, and accountability to God. *Religions* 14: 1-14.

Abstract: According to many, human autonomy is necessary for moral action and yet incompatible with being morally accountable to God's divine commands. By issuing commands that ground normative facts, God demands our accountability without understanding our normative reasons for moral action, which crushes human autonomy. Call this the Autonomy Objection to Theism (AOT). There is an unexplored connection between models of normative reason and AOT. I argue that any plausible AOT must be stated in terms of an adequate model of normative reason. There are two broad metaethical

categories for models of normative reason: anti-realist or realist views. I defend the thesis that both anti-realism and realism about normative reasons fail to support AOT by means of a dilemma. If the AOT defender adopts anti-realism about normative reasons (subjectivism and constructivism), AOT loses its force. However, if the AOT defender adopts moral realism, they face the same problem as the theist, as normative fact constrains autonomy. Consequently, AOT is a problem for all moral realists, including non-theists, such as Russ Shafer-Landau, David Enoch, and Erik Wielenberg, among others.

Schellenberg, J.L. (2018) Triple transcendence, the value of God's existence, and a new route to atheism. In Kraay, K., ed., *Does God Matter? Essays on the Axiological Consequences of Theism*. New York: Routledge, pp.181-191.

Abstract: It is generally assumed that existential and axiological issues—questions about whether God exists and questions about the value of God's existence—can be kept apart in the debate that is the catalyst for this book. The stance most discomfiting for theists in that debate is supposed to be anti-theism, not atheism. And anti-theism, so it is held, does not entail or collapse into atheism. The line of inquiry I want to develop challenges this view. After exposing the challenge, I will build on it in an attempt to determine whether there is anything new about the anti-theistic route to atheism.

Schellenberg, J.L. (2023). What eye hath not seen, nor ear heard: critical religious axiology and the forgotten future. In K. Loughheed, ed., *Value Beyond Monotheism: The Axiology of the Divine*. New York: Routledge, pp. 129-144.

Abstract: In this chapter, I urge a new and broader mandate for what I call critical religious axiology, an area of study preoccupied with whether certain common religious views, whatever their factual credentials, might be axiologically inadequate. Cultural evolution is responsible for insights about unhappy axiological consequences of religious claims, but it may also spur improvements in the future, leading us to new understandings of religious claims or to new religious claims, and critical religious axiology should be examining them. I illustrate this claim and defend its importance by reference to three examples. First, I show how a fictionalist form of religious life could evolve to replace religious forms of life that cultural evolution leads us to view as axiologically inadequate. Second, I show how one might remain fictionalist about Christian propositions while adding another level or layer to one's religiousness through a nondoxastic faith directed to a more general religious proposition such as ultimism. Third, in conversation with the views of Ronald Dworkin, I display the interest of a rather different new religious option, which realises the status of axiological purity by focusing on value alone and making it transcendent.

Steinhart, E. (2023) Some deities are better than others. In K. Loughheed, ed., *Value Beyond Monotheism: The Axiology of the Divine*. New York: Routledge, pp. 46-63.

Abstract: A deity is a superhuman person. Since deities are persons, they are axiologically comparable with each other. They are comparable in terms of their moral, political, and other axiological qualities. I regard all deities as contingent concrete worldbound particulars. To compare deities is to compare possible objects across worlds. I aim to compare the axiological qualities of deities taken from the entire Western ecosystem of deities. I will compare deities in terms of their moral and political qualities (this deity is a morally better

person than that deity). I will compare them in terms of their relations with non-divine persons (this deity is better for humans than that deity). I will compare the worlds in which the deities occur (a world with this type of deity is a better world than a world with that type of deity). I will compare types of deities and use specific deities to illustrate those types. The deities of some popular theologies are very bad; but the deities of some less popular theologies are very good.

Strand, J. (2026) On making a difference. In K. Loughheed and T. Myers, eds., *Religious Faith and Meaning-Making: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 247-278.

Abstract: People often express a desire to “make a difference.” They express admiration for people who make a difference. And such difference-making seems to be a major factor people have in mind when they speak of “meaning” in life. They speak of meaning in the sense of significance, that in the sense of “mattering,” and that in the sense of making a difference. The primary aim of this paper is to progress toward a careful and detailed analysis of this property of difference-making. The paper begins with a concise argument that difference-making is one of the things people have in mind when speaking of meaning in life. It then presents a simple analysis of when this property is exemplified and argues for basic properties that this property seems to have. It explores in detail what sorts of things make a difference, in what ways, under what circumstances, and to what extents.

Swinburne, R. (2016) How God makes life a lot more meaningful. In J. Seachris and S. Goetz, eds. *God and Meaning: New Essays*. London: Bloomsbury, pp. 149-168.

Abstract: My concern in this chapter will be with the meaning of the lives of humans on earth before death; if, as I believe, there is life after death, that will be relevant to my discussion only insofar as its character affects the meaning of life before death. The question of what is the meaning of life can be understood in many ways, the most obvious of which are: “What purpose did anyone have in making humans?” “Which states of affairs or actions would give meaning to human lives?” and “Which states of affairs or actions do humans believe would give meaning to their lives?” I shall ignore the third question, as it is clearly one for social psychologists to answer. The first question would take us into the whole issue of whether there is a God who created and sustains us and what he is like; and I shall not seek to answer that question here. But I shall argue here that the answer to it is relevant to the second question which is surely the one being asked by most of those who wonder about whether life has a meaning. And what the question seems to be getting at is: “What would make a life worthwhile, or good to have lived?” I shall understand it thus. I shall answer the question by appealing to intuitions which I believe almost all of us already have. I shall consider initially what would be worthwhile in our life on earth if we ignore the possible existence of God and a life after death; and then proceed to consider what difference would be made to the worthwhileness of our life on earth if there is a God and life after death.

Tooley, M. (2018) Axiology: theism versus widely accepted monotheisms. In K. Kraay, ed., *Does God Matter? Essays on the Axiological Consequences of Theism*. New York: Routledge, pp. 46-69.

Abstract: The structure of this paper is as follows. First, I start off by briefly explaining the concepts of pro-theism and anti-theism, and by distinguishing both between personal and

impersonal versions of those views, and also between a more modest and a less modest claim connected with the impersonal version of pro-theism. I then introduce a distinction that is itself quite trivial, namely, that between pro-theism (and anti-theism), on the one hand, and pro-monotheism (and anti-monotheism), on the other, where the latter are defined in terms of the deity of some particular religion. The triviality notwithstanding, I shall argue at various points in the subsequent discussion that even the best discussions of the pro-theism versus anti-theism issue are vitiated to some extent by a failure to keep that distinction clearly in mind. Next, I consider how the pro-theism versus anti-theism question is related to the theism versus atheism question. These questions are often thought to be quite independent of each other, but I shall argue that that is not so. In particular, I shall argue that these two issues are neither logically nor evidentially independent of one another. The rest of the essay is then devoted to discussing the strength of the case for pro-theism, and there my basic claims are as follows. First, the case for the impersonal pro-theistic thesis—the thesis that, all things considered, the existence of God is better than the non-existence of God—is very strong relative to facts about which there is no dispute. Second, and contrary to the views of many philosophers, there is no respect in which the world is better if God does not exist than if God exists. Third, the case for the personal pro-theistic view that it is better for every person if God exists than it is if God does not exist is also very strong. Fourth, however, it is not clear that these pro-theistic conclusions remain justified if one thinks that one can take one's evidence as including not just facts about which there is no dispute, but also the proposition that God exists, and I shall argue that if one does assume that theism is true, the support that can otherwise be offered for some pro-theistic claims is seriously weakened, perhaps even to the point where those claims can no longer be sustained. My general conclusion, accordingly, might be put as follows: While there is no significant anti-theistic thesis that can be sustained if one is an atheist, some pro-theistic theses may become problematic if one is a theist.

Vicens, L. (2025) Divine holiness and the axiology of theism. *Faith and Philosophy* 41: 27-42.

Abstract: If the characterization of God that Mark Murphy offers in *Divine Holiness and Divine Action* (2021) were correct, then it would not be good for us if God existed. Since this anti-theistic consequent is itself antithetical to biblical theism, Murphy's conception of God ought to be rejected on biblical grounds. However, a single change to Murphy's account of divine holiness would avoid its anti-theistic implication and has ample biblical warrant. Rather than saying that God's holiness gives God reason to avoid relations with all things creaturely, divine holiness should be understood only in opposition to sin.

Wielenberg, E. (2018) The absurdity of life in a Christian universe as a reason to prefer that God not exist. In K. Kraay, ed., *Does God Matter? Essays on the Axiological Consequences of Theism*. New York: Routledge, pp. 147-163.

Abstract: It is sometimes claimed that life in a godless universe is absurd. That claim has been the subject of considerable philosophical debate. More recently, Thomas Nagel's remark that he doesn't want God to exist has triggered a debate about whether it is rational to prefer God's non-existence to His existence. Much of the literature on that issue concerns the axiological impact that God's existence or non-existence would have. Here, I make the case that the existence of the Christian God who has commanded us to love our neighbours as we love ourselves makes life absurd in the sense that a universe in which such a God

exists includes truths that most human beings would find it difficult to accept and live happily. I then connect that result with the debate about the rationality of desiring that God not exist. I argue that the fact that the existence of the Christian God makes life absurd in the sense just explained is a reason to prefer that such a God not exist.

Woodward, P. (2024) "Devotion and well-being: a Platonic personalist perfectionist account." *Journal of Value Inquiry* 58: 403-423.

Abstract: According to the traditional Christian understanding, being devoted to God is partly constitutive of human welfare. I explicate this tradition view, in three stages. First, I sketch a general theory of well-being which I call 'Platonic Personalist Perfectionism.' Second, I show how being devoted to God is uniquely perfective. I discuss three different components of the posture of devotion: abnegation (surrender of one's will to God), adoration (responding to God's goodness with attention, love and praise), and existential dependence (receiving one's self-worth as an unmerited gift from God). All three components of devotion are perfective in a dual way: they are salvific (they remediate a great harm) and consummative (they confer a great benefit). Third, I respond to the objection that devotion involves subjugating oneself, and thus amounts to an all-things-considered harm, notwithstanding whatever benefits it confers. I argue that so long as one's acts of abnegating, adoring, and existentially depending are acts of one's own, then subjugation is not essential to devotion. However, devotion does diminish one if the object of one's devotion is unsuitable. I argue that the only suitable object of devotion is the God of traditional theism.

Yeter-Chappell, H. (2023) What does God add to an Idealistic World? In K. Loughheed, ed., *Value Beyond Monotheism: The Axiology of the Divine*. New York: Routledge, pp. 96-113.

Abstract: There has been increasing interest among contemporary philosophers in nontheistic forms of ontological idealism, in contrast to the canonical theistic idealism of Berkeley. Given the ontological role that God plays in Berkeley's metaphysics, it's natural to think that questions of the value-impact of God will be greater in an idealistic context. Thus, it seems fruitful to ask: What does God add to (or detract from) an idealist world? This paper assesses the benefits and costs that come from moving to an idealism which is not (essentially) theistic. I explicate various dimensions along which theistic and nontheistic idealisms differ. Most of these metaphysical differences are surprisingly value-neutral. The one respect in which God's (in)existence makes a distinctive value-impact within an idealistic context is in the intelligibility of reality. This is a variant of what Loughheed (2020) calls the Complete Understanding Argument. But the argument takes on a new significance within the idealistic context. Here, the inability to fully comprehend God doesn't merely pose a challenge for understanding the God-part of reality, or the occasions on which God interferes with the naturalistic causal order. It presents a challenge to understanding the very nature of reality, itself. Finally, I consider what sort of value difference this is, distinguishing between two sorts of value that God's existence might confer: value for a world (including its inhabitants) and value for a theory.

Zangwill, N. (2023) God, so what? The significance of God's existence or non-existence. *Faith and Philosophy* 40: 561-580.

Abstract: The question of whether or not God exists matters a great deal to billions of people. The question is taken to be an important question. Theists and atheists agree on this. And the question generates much heat. Much is thought to turn on it. But there is a puzzle about why this should be. First, I clarify the question at issue, distinguishing it from various other issues. Then I reject a number of familiar ideas for addressing this question. Having cleared the ground, I offer a positive suggestion according to which theism is committed to shared essences between human beings and God, plus a dependence relation between those essences. The debate turns out to be one about human nature, in such a way as to make sense of heat generated. After that, a familiar Aristotelian theist view is contrasted with Platonist shared essentialism to the advantage of the latter. Lastly, I consider some religious consequences of the shared essentialism.