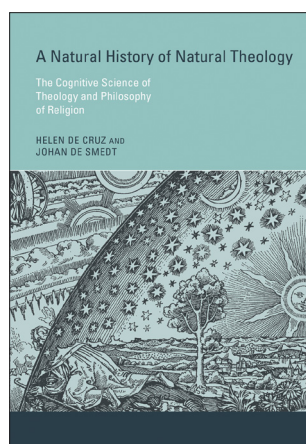


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A Natural History of Natural Theology

The Cognitive Science of Theology and
Philosophy of Religion

**Helen De Cruz and
Johan De Smedt**



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Questions about the existence and attributes of God form the subject matter of natural theology, which seeks to gain knowledge of the divine by relying on reason and experience of the world. Arguments in natural theology rely largely on intuitions and inferences that seem natural to us, occurring spontaneously—at the sight of a beautiful landscape, perhaps, or in wonderment at the complexity of the cosmos—even to a nonphilosopher. In this book, Helen De Cruz and Johan De Smedt examine the cognitive origins of arguments in natural theology. They find that although natural theological arguments can be very sophisticated, they are rooted in everyday intuitions about purpose, causation, agency, and morality. Using evidence and theories from disciplines including the cognitive science of religion, evolutionary ethics, evolutionary aesthetics, and the cognitive science of testimony, they show that these intuitions emerge early in development and are a stable part of human cognition.

De Cruz and De Smedt analyze the cognitive underpinnings of five well-known arguments for the existence of God: the argument from design, the cosmological argument, the moral argument, the argument from beauty, and the argument from miracles. Finally, they consider whether the cognitive origins of these natural theological arguments should affect their rationality.

Helen De Cruz is Assistant Professor at the VU University Amsterdam.

Johan De Smedt is a postdoctoral fellow at Ghent University.

“In A Natural History of Natural Theology the enduring tradition of natural theology meets an academic newcomer, the cognitive science of religion. In this unique meeting, De Cruz and De Smedt offer a bold, fascinating, and remarkably clear account of the cognitive basis of theological arguments. A Natural History of Natural Theology will not only be appreciated by cognitive scientists and theologians, but will be of interest to anyone who has ever considered arguments for or against the existence of God.”

—**Richard Sosis**, James Barnett Professor of Humanistic Anthropology, University of Connecticut; cofounder and coeditor of *Religion, Brain & Behavior*

“Science has long forced theological thinkers to respond to new evidence about the nature of the world. De Cruz and De Smedt go a step further: what happens to theology when the science in question is the science of theological thought itself? This ambitious book represents an exciting new chapter in the science–theology dialogue.”

—**Justin L. Barrett**, Thrive Professor of Developmental Science, Fuller Graduate School of Psychology; author of *Born Believers: The Science of Children’s Religious Belief*

“Why is religion culturally universal? Why do our senses of order, design, and beauty lead us to infer a Designer? De Cruz and De Smedt lucidly and seamlessly join philosophy with cognitive science to provide accessible, empirically based answers. Their huge achievement greatly advances religious studies.”

—**Stewart Elliott Guthrie**, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology, Fordham University; author of *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion*

“A new and illuminating look at arguments for the existence of God. Brings to bear up-to-date knowledge of cognitive science to show that the staying power of the traditional proofs is no accident; they are deeply rooted in the ways we cognize the world.”

—**Howard Wettstein**, Professor of Philosophy, University of California, Riverside; author of *The Significance of Religious Experience*

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