Editorial preface

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I want to thank Rebekah Rice, Daniel McKaughan, and Daniel Howard-Snyder who served admirably as guest editors in our last double issue on "Approaches to Faith." I am sure that this special issue will serve the needs of colleagues in the philosophy of religion for many years to come.

On one other note, I welcome Scott Davison as our new Book Review Editor. See the inside cover for his address and contact information.

Given that our last double issue was devoted to a single topic, it is fitting that we turn in this issue to an array of several articles on a variety of issues. I think you will find much that will interest you. I continue to be impressed by the high quality of our accepted articles. For your orientation, I will say just a brief word about each of the articles. Enjoy.

The first article, jointly authored by Raphael Lataster and Herman Phillipse, shakes the foundational assumption widely accepted among western analytic philosophers, namely, that ontological naturalism and classical theism (monotheistic) exhaust our options. Using some sophisticated Bayesian calculations, the authors conclude that the totality of evidence shows that monotheism (classical theism) is improbable compared to polytheism. The authors take these calculations that favor polytheism to constitute a threat to classical theism and extend an invitation to classical theistic colleagues to come to its defense.

In any philosophy of religion course, the "argument" for god's existence from religious experience is one that often grips students with a plausibility not found in more formal such arguments. So naturally the question arises as to how plausible it is to try to justify one's belief in god on the basis of religious experiences. Aaran Burns argues for a positive answer to this question, while raising a related question that does not have such a clear positive answer. That second question, an important

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one, is whether such religious experiences carry any justification for those who have not had these experiences. The nuanced answer that he gives to this second question is based on his denial of Swinburne's principle of credibility. His own approach, what he calls a phenomenal conservative perspective, leads to a suggested replacement of this principle. This in turn leads to the conclusion that the answer to the second question is simply that such experiences may or may not carry weight with the person who has not had such experiences. This leaves room for skepticism and disagreement without having to deny that appeals to religious experiences have zero effect on the person who has not had such experiences.

In the next article, we turn to a critique of Bergman's version of skeptical theism. A key premise of his, and every position of skeptical theism, is that given our cognitive limitations we can never get to an omniscient perspective where all things are considered. Jonathan Rutledge charges Bergmann with a kind of double-mindedness that undermines epistemic propriety. There is a major difference between saying (a) there is there is no good state of affairs that we know of that would justify the divine permission of gratuitous evil and saying (b) there is no such state of affairs. The argument against gratuitous evil requires that the inference from (a) to (b) goes through (a strong version of skeptical theism). But this inference goes through only if our moral intuitions are sound. But since we are not morally omniscient, we are forced by the same arguments of skeptical theism into moral skepticism. To avoid this, Bergmann argues for a weaker version of skeptical theism that does not lead to moral skepticism. But the price of this is to allow that the argument form evil can succeed in some cases. But he does not want to accept this. So he is forced into the double-minded epistemic impropriety of defending the strong version to defeat the argument from evil and the weak version in order to avoid moral skepticism. But as Rutledge claims, he cannot have it both ways.

We continue this discussion of the problem of evil in the next article by Daniel Lim. In the vast literature on the problem evil, there is a widespread assumption that there is a major difference between the claim that God does something evil (inflicts gratuitous suffering) and the claim that God allows such evil to occur. I am reminded of discussions of active and passive euthanasia where the latter is sometimes thought less morally blameworthy than the former. But as Lim argues, there is little difference in terms of moral significance between God's active infliction of, and God's allowance of, gratuitous suffering. Even though he does not want to abandon the doing/allowing distinction altogether at the human level, he prefers to filter it through the Kantian distinction between treating a person as merely a means and treating the person as an end. This "allows" us to keep the following principle of moral significance: treating someone as a mere means is never morally permissible. Lim concludes that inflicting and allowing gratuitous suffering are equally morally impermissible because they both treat the sufferer as a means to a further end (greater good?). Clearly God never treats a person merely as a means. So God is just as much on the hook of moral responsibility for allowing evil as He would be for inflicting it.

The next article has a quite different agenda. Hanoch Ben-Pazi argues that Emmanuel Levinas was deeply influenced by Talmudic messianic principles. He sees clearly that religious faith cannot deliver us from violence. Three messianic

principles are discussed, fraternity, hospitality and neutrality. In the current climate in America, the issue of hospitality is especially interesting in opening us to the ethical concept of welcome. More generally, as Levinas teaches us, "Ethical consideration is necessary…because our culture, as a matter of fact, encourages belligerency and wars…If the political horizon can be transformed from the 'art of the possible' toward 'eschatological hope' it changes our patterns of ethical thought….The horizon required for this purpose is the horizon of eschatological messianic thought."

And once again, we take a shift. This time to justifying divine command theory. Denis Plaisted addresses Kai Nielsen's claim that one can accept divine command theory only if one abandons it. Nielsen's argument is that moral judgments are required in order to accept the theory of divine commands and yet these moral judgments cannot be grounded in divine commands. Plaisted argues that Nielsen makes a questionable foundationalist assumption about theory justification. If this assumption were replaced with a coherentist view, the divine command theory can survive Nielsen's critique.

Finally, we come to our last essay by Erkki Vesa Rope Kojonen in which the debate about intelligent design is discussed. The argument turns on a distinction between methodological naturalism and metaphysical naturalism. The author points out that it was Paul de Vries who introduced the distinction, and goes on to say that the term 'methodological naturalism' is used "…to describe the convention that the natural sciences are limited to the study of natural causes and natural laws, and that no references to supernatural factors should be made within science. De Vries argued that methodological naturalism is distinct from metaphysical naturalism which is a philosophical belief that nothing supernatural (such as God, gods, spirits or souls) exists. De Vries' point was that it is both possible and reasonable to hold to methodological naturalism within the natural sciences without believing in metaphysical naturalism." The author calls metaphysical naturalism scientism and defines it as follows: "…the belief that science is our only reliable guide to reality." When methodological naturalism is coupled with scientism the position is subject to what the author calls the truth seeking objection. Decoupling scientism from methodological naturalism can avoid this criticism and open it to a defense on pragmatic grounds. Adopting this understanding of methodological naturalism suggests new ways for evaluating arguments for intelligent design.