

“If this book contained only David Bradshaw’s marvelous introduction, it would still be well worth the cover price. But the stellar essays that follow are a goldmine for anyone who cares about the things of God. Drawing upon oft-neglected sources as well as the Church Fathers and St. Gregory Palamas, the authors showcase the extraordinary richness of Orthodox reflection upon the existence of God—while also addressing the standard charges against natural theology. Refreshing, stimulating, and utterly timely, this book marks a brilliant start for the IOTA series.”

— **MATTHEW LEVERING**

James N. and Mary D. Perry Jr. Chair of Theology,
Mundelein Seminary, Mundelein, Illinois

“This is an exciting, superb collection of insightful essays on natural theology in the Orthodox tradition. Its publication should radically alter the current canon of natural theology as limited to the West from Aquinas to Paley to the current revival of natural theology in Anglo-American philosophy. This volume is fascinating both in terms of the history of ideas and religious practice, and in its challenge to both religious and secular skeptics of the power and promise of natural theology.”

— **CHARLES TALIAFERRO**

Overby Distinguished Chair and Professor of Philosophy,
St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota

“Anyone acquainted with the Fathers of the Church is well aware of the fact that natural theology is an intrinsic, albeit secondary and subordinate, component of their theology. In the twentieth century, however, many Orthodox theologians, including Vladimir Lossky and Christos Yannaras, rejected natural theology for the sake of a one-sided emphasis on experience and apophaticism. This book is an admirable effort to reopen the discussion in a nuanced and balanced way that will hopefully make a distinct contribution to the wider debates of our times.”

— **FR. DEMETRIOS BATHRELLOS**

Visiting Professor, Institute for
Orthodox Christian Studies, Cambridge, UK

“Natural theology has been rather neglected and indeed often dismissed within modern Orthodox theology. This splendid volume stands to change that. Assembling an impressive range of contributors, this book amply demonstrates natural theology’s long patristic pedigree and ongoing vital importance while also bringing in perspectives from the medieval and early modern West. This *tour de force* will generate considerable theological discussion and, one hopes, further work on the topic. It should also serve to underline further the indispensability of the Orthodox witness within contemporary academic theology and philosophy.”

— **MARCUS PLESTED**

Professor of Greek Patristic and Byzantine Theology and
Henri de Lubac Chair, Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

“A must-read for philosophers of religion and very beneficial for other scholars of religion, this volume makes a distinctively Orthodox contribution to contemporary natural theology. It brings into the discussion both well-known patristic authors and some who may be unknown to a broader audience—Fiodor Golubinskii, Viktor Kudriavtsev-Platonov, Panayiotis Nellas, and Fr. Dumitru Staniloae. It is without question a very insightful book.”

— **KIRILL KARPOV**

Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Philosophy,
Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia

“The idea that Orthodoxy has nothing to do with natural theology and the use of discursive reason is widespread. The present collected volume offers a careful survey of the patristic tradition and contemporary Orthodox theology, suggesting that a certain role is preserved for reason in discussing the existence of God. As the essays of the volume demonstrate, reason is part of the Incarnation, and as such is capable of knowing and participating in God. Hence, natural theology is still a valuable means of doing Orthodox theology.”

— **PANTELIS KALAITZIDIS**

Director, Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Volos, Greece

Natural Theology *in*
the Eastern Orthodox Tradition

DAVID BRADSHAW & RICHARD SWINBURNE

editors



I O T A
P U B L I C A T I O N S
S T . P A U L , M I N N E S O T A



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Contents

CONTRIBUTORS	vii
PREFACE	ix
ABBREVIATIONS	xii
Introduction	1
<i>David Bradshaw</i>	
1. Natural Theology in Patristic Thought: Arguments for the Existence of God	23
<i>Alexey Fokin</i>	
2. Natural Theology in St. Gregory Palamas	51
<i>David Bradshaw</i>	
3. Medieval and Early Modern Natural Theology in the West	65
<i>Richard Cross</i>	
4. Natural Theology in Modern Russian Religious Thought	89
<i>Paul L. Gavrilyuk</i>	

CONTENTS

5. Reactions of Modern Greek Theologians to Natural Theology	125
<i>Dionysios Skliris</i>	
6. Experiential Objections against Natural Theology in Some Recent Orthodox Thinkers	149
<i>Travis Dumsday</i>	
7. Natural Theology for Today	175
<i>Richard Swinburne</i>	
INDEX	197

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Preface

Founded in 2017, the International Orthodox Theological Association (IOTA) is a global network of over one thousand scholars, church leaders, and professionals dedicated to the worldwide exchange of knowledge within the context of the Orthodox Christian tradition. An important aspect of IOTA's mission is the engagement of contemporary culture in light of the Orthodox tradition with a view to contributing to the growth and renewal of the Church. To advance its mission, IOTA established a publishing house in 2020. IOTA Publications seeks to bring out Orthodox Christian scholarship of the highest caliber, which speaks to the contemporary situation out of the depth of the Church's historical and theological heritage. The Advisory Board of IOTA Publications consists of fifty prominent Orthodox scholars who also serve as group chairs. This collection of essays is co-edited by two internationally renowned Orthodox philosophers, David Bradshaw and Richard Swinburne, who co-chair IOTA's Philosophy of Religion Group. For many years they have dedicated much effort to bringing the worlds of Eastern European and Anglo-American Christian philosophy together. Reflecting IOTA's pan-Orthodox orientation, the volume includes contributions from an international group of philosophers from six countries: Canada, Greece, Russia, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States. We hope that this publication will inspire other worthwhile research and book projects within IOTA. Following this pattern of international cooperation, IOTA Publications aspires to become the gold standard of Orthodox scholarship worldwide.

The present volume makes a case for the rich history and contemporary relevance of natural theology in Eastern Orthodoxy. Natural theology has had a checkered history in modernity and, despite some groundbreaking

work in the last decades, its epistemological credentials continue to be contested. In the ongoing debate about natural theology, with some notable exceptions, Orthodox theologians have most often joined on the side of its detractors rather than the supporters. The primary motivations for this attitude are twofold. The first one is historical: patristic authorities are typically represented as sanctioning an experiential rather than speculative paradigm of religious knowledge. Patristic theology is then contrasted with Western scholasticism, which allegedly privileged the operation of unaided reason, detached the supernatural from the natural, and created other dichotomies that were detrimental to Christian theology in the second millennium. By contrast, Eastern Orthodox theology is represented as successfully eschewing the pitfalls of Western scholasticism, especially its overreliance on the powers of reason unaided by revelation.

The second motivation is related to the first and comes from the fields of theological anthropology and religious epistemology: there is a tendency in twentieth-century Orthodox theology to insist on the unknowability of God and then to assert (following Vladimir Lossky or Christos Yannaras) that only the deified human *nous* is capable of apprehending that which is knowable in God. Among Orthodox believers, it is not uncommon to hear negative remarks about the role of discursive reasoning in theology, especially when it attempts to prove the existence of God or to provide an account of divine action and attributes. Such attempts are dismissed as obsolete, presumptuous, futile, and misguided, or worse still, clear signs of Orthodoxy's continuing Western captivity. Since God's existence is a matter of direct experience rather than rational investigation, to involve discursive reasoning in the attempt to establish the existence of God is a category mistake.

The essays in this volume mount a serious challenge to both motivations and invite us to think of natural theology less superficially and more constructively. Historically, the appeals to general features of the world as evidence for the existence of God and as a justification of various divine attributes are an integral part of the patristic tradition. Thus, contrary to a common misconception, the Church Fathers did not disparage discursive reasoning, even if some held the contemplative agency of the deified *nous* in higher regard. Furthermore, the appeals to revelation, religious experience, and the testimony of the Church Fathers, should not be understood as displacing reason or rendering it superfluous, but as presupposing reason's auxiliary role. Discursive reasoning has a modest, yet indispensable role to play in the human quest for the knowledge of God.

In sum, the contributors show that from the Fathers to present-day

Orthodox philosophers, there is an abiding tradition of natural theology in Eastern Orthodoxy. Contrary to a widespread misrepresentation, this tradition has not been entirely eclipsed in modernity, but in fact has had some outstanding if largely overlooked and underappreciated proponents. Moreover, as the present volume demonstrates, this tradition has been creatively revived by a number of contemporary Orthodox theologians and philosophers. When this legacy is fully acknowledged, recovered, and appropriated, it will bear much fruit in the Church's mission of bringing the message of Christ to the spiritually confused and religiously doubting contemporary world.

PAUL L. GAVRILYUK
Founding President of IOTA
Feast of the Annunciation, March 2021

Abbreviations

- ANF *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885)
- GCS *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller* (Leipzig)
- GNO Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, ed. Werner Jaeger (Leiden: Brill, 1952–98)
- NPNF *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894)
- PG *Patrologia graeca*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1857–66)
- PL *Patrologia latina*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1857–66)
- SC *Sources chrétiennes* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1941–)
- ST Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*

Introduction

DAVID BRADSHAW

Natural theology is the attempt to support the existence of God, and to investigate the divine attributes, through philosophical reasoning. More specifically, it seeks to do so starting (as Richard Swinburne observes later in this volume) “from propositions which theist and atheist alike can recognize as obviously true.” In this it differs from philosophical theology, which allows theological teachings and other beliefs based on revelation to figure among its premises. Natural theology does engage with historical evidence, such as that for miracles and for various forms of religious experience, but it does so based on the publicly accessible historical record. It bears a close relation to apologetics, and indeed natural theological arguments are often used within apologetic strategies. However, apologetics is not limited to philosophical reasoning (embracing, for example, historical arguments for the veracity of Scripture) and it explicitly seeks to convert, whereas natural theology merely seeks to elucidate a line of philosophical reasoning.¹

The term “natural theology” (*theologia naturalis*) is first attested in St. Augustine’s report of the views of the first-century B.C. Roman scholar, Varro.² For Varro, natural theology was the kind of theology taught by the philosophers, as opposed to the mythical theology of the poets and the civil theology of the state. Varro himself refers to it as *physicon*, indicating that the

1. There is also a hybrid form of reasoning known as “ramified natural theology” which seeks to argue, not just for a general form of theism, but for the specific doctrines of a particular religion or denomination. Anselm’s philosophical arguments for the necessity of the Incarnation and substitutionary atonement are a prominent example. Although our main focus here is on simple natural theology, the boundaries between the simple and ramified forms are fluid, and many arguments used in the former lend themselves to the latter as well.

2. See Augustine, *City of God* 6.5–7.

term (and probably the three-fold distinction) had a Greek origin, although it is no longer found in surviving sources. However that may be, the practice of natural theology goes back to Xenophanes and Anaximander and was developed in elaborate detail by Plato and Aristotle. It has a long and complex history stretching from antiquity through the Middle Ages and modern philosophy, one that was by no means brought to an end (as is sometimes supposed) by Hume and Kant. Although it went into eclipse in the first half of the twentieth century, owing to the dominance of phenomenology on the Continent and of positivism and ordinary language philosophy in the Anglophone world, it came roaring back with the revival of metaphysics that began in the 1960s.³ Today natural theology is a flourishing enterprise that includes a wide range of argument types and strategies, some of them drawn from classical sources and many others of more recent vintage.

Despite its prominence in the ancient world, natural theology has from the beginning evoked varied responses within Christianity. St. Paul's sweeping dismissal in 1 Corinthians of the "wisdom of this world" (1:20), and his warning in Colossians against "philosophy and vain deceit" (2:8), certainly offer grounds for caution. As regards belief in the existence of God, the author of the book of Hebrews states in his encomium of faith that "by faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear" (Heb 11:3).⁴ A few verses later he brings divine goodness within the scope of the act of faith: "Without faith it is impossible to please him; for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who diligently seek him" (11:6). There is no reason to assume that the author wishes thereby to exclude an important role for reason—and indeed, the book of Hebrews offers careful and elaborate reasoning on many points. Nonetheless, these passages make plain that effectual and salvific belief in God only comes through faith, and whatever role reason plays must in some way be complementary to that.

Another important passage was St. Paul's discussion of the natural knowledge of God in Romans 1. There we read that "ever since the creation of the world the invisible things of God, namely his eternal power and deity, are clearly perceived, being understood from the things that are made" (v. 20). This is a classic proof text on behalf of the possibility of some form of

3. See on these developments *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), particularly the Introduction by the editors. See also the chapter by Travis Dumsday in this volume.

4. Biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version, slightly modified in some cases.

natural theology.⁵ It must be admitted that St. Paul probably did not have philosophical arguments in mind, however, for he goes on to add, “so that they [that is, pagan idolators] are without excuse.” Evidently he is thinking of a kind of knowledge that is available even to the unlearned and those who lived prior to the rise of philosophy. Nonetheless, his statement does imply that it is possible to reason from the facts of creation to the existence of an eternal and mighty Creator. We also know from his speech at the Areopagus that he was quite willing to draw upon pagan philosophy when he saw it as convergent with the truth.⁶ Hence it seems likely that, despite his dismissal of the “wisdom of this world,” Paul would have welcomed the use of arguments drawn from natural theology in a limited and subordinate role.

At any rate, early Christian authors—beginning with the Greek Apologists and continuing with St. Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and others—readily drew from existing philosophical arguments in their efforts to articulate and defend Christian belief. They did so not only in apologetic works like Athanasius’s *Contra Gentes* and philosophical works like St. Gregory of Nyssa’s *On the Soul and Resurrection*, but in works aimed at systematically presenting Christian belief to a Christian audience, such as Gregory’s *Great Catechism* and St. John of Damascus’s *On the Orthodox Faith*. The use of natural theological arguments was thus a firmly entrenched element of patristic thought, and such arguments continued to be repeated and elaborated throughout the Byzantine era.

Despite this patristic consensus, however, modern Orthodox thought has been markedly cool in its attitude toward natural theology. A number of leading Orthodox thinkers, such as Sergius Bulgakov, Vladimir Lossky, Christos Yannaras, and Metropolitan John Zizioulas, have criticized it sharply. Their arguments are varied, but in general they view natural theology as at best religiously useless, in that it does not lead to a true knowledge of or encounter with God; and at worst positively harmful, in that it can be a kind of substitute for faith (Lossky) and has contributed through its overreach to the rise of modern atheism (Yannaras). These are important concerns that deserve to be taken seriously. Our hope is that the present

5. See also the critique of idolatry in Wisdom of Solomon 13:1–9, especially the statement, “from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator” (v. 5).

6. Paul’s allusion, “as even some of your poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring’” (Acts 17:28), is probably a reference to the Stoic Cleanthes of Assos and the Stoic-influenced Aratus of Soli, who both make this statement. (I presume, in common with the patristic and Orthodox tradition, that Acts correctly represents the teaching of the Apostle.)

volume will give them a fair hearing while at the same time doing justice to the varied and important roles that natural theology has played within the Orthodox tradition.

Faith and reason in patristic thought

Before proceeding to a description of the contents of this volume, I would like to offer some context to help situate the role that natural theology played during the patristic era. I choose this period in part because of its intrinsic interest and in part because of its importance for the Orthodox tradition as a whole. My aim is not to offer a survey of the uses of natural theology among the Church Fathers (ably provided in Chapter 1 by Alexey Fokin), but to attempt to situate natural theology in relation to the broad contours of the patristic understanding of faith and reason. This is an important preamble to any attempt to assess its role today.

The first sustained discussion of faith in Christian literature is in the *Stromata* of Clement of Alexandria. One is surprised to find there not an analysis of the pertinent biblical passages (which would be complex enough), but instead a philosophical discussion drawing eclectically from Aristotle, Epicurus, and the Stoics. Clement begins by offering the sweeping statement, “Now the ways of wisdom are various that lead right to the way of truth. Faith is the way.”⁷ Faith (πίστις) is here a comprehensive term for all the ways that lead to knowledge, whatever they may be. After briefly discussing the ways to wisdom as they are taught in Proverbs, Clement adds: “Such is the way of wisdom (‘for whom the Lord loves he chastens’ [Prov. 3:12]), causing pain in order to produce understanding, and restoring to peace and immortality.”⁸ The reference here to pain and chastening indicates that Clement means his initial definition seriously: faith is not solely a matter of confidence or belief, but a way of growing into knowledge that necessarily requires pain and struggle. Indeed, to come to see in one’s suffering the tutelage of God is itself an act of faith. Clement’s reference to the verse from Proverbs is a reminder to the reader of this important biblical theme.

After this initial orientation, Clement goes on to offer a number of definitions of faith drawn from various sources. In light of his initial sweeping definition, these are best seen not as rivals but as descriptions of the var-

7. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 2.2.4 (GCS 2:114–15; trans. ANF 2:348).

8. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 2.2.4 (GCS 2:115; ANF 2:348).

ious forms faith may take in the growth to wisdom. The first is that it is a “voluntary preconception (πρόληψις ἐκούσιος), the assent of piety—‘the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen’ [Heb. 11:1].”⁹ He continues in a terse and complex passage:

Others have defined faith as a thoughtful assent (έννοητικὴν συγκατάθεσιν) to an unseen object, as indeed demonstration is the manifest assent to an object that was previously unknown. If then it is choice, being desirous of something, the desire is in this instance intellectual (ἡ ὄρεξις νῦν διανοητική). And since choice is the beginning of action, faith is discovered to be the beginning of action, being the foundation of rational choice for anyone who exhibits the demonstration to himself in a preliminary way through faith.¹⁰

Faith is here the ability to grasp beforehand that which may later be demonstrated. Clement highlights that as a *voluntary* preconception, faith is a choice. Yet it is hardly an arbitrary choice, for it is “thoughtful,” “intellectual,” the “beginning of action,” and the “foundation of rational choice.” In some way, then, faith both exhibits and enables rationality. We gain further insight into this a bit later when Clement cites Epicurus on what it means that faith is a preconception:

Epicurus, too, who very greatly preferred pleasure to truth, supposes faith to be a preconception of the mind (πρόληψιν διανοίας); and defines preconception to be a grasping at something evident (ἐπιβολὴν ἐπί τι ἐναργές) and at the clear understanding of the thing; and asserts that, without preconception, no one can either inquire, or doubt, or judge, or even argue.¹¹

Although Clement is our only surviving source for Epicurus’s identification of faith as a preconception, the general Epicurean doctrine of preconception is attested by Diogenes Laertius. There a preconception is defined as a “universal idea stored in the mind; that is, a recollection of an external object

9. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 2.2.8 (GCS 2:117; ANF 2:349).

10. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 2.2.9 (GCS 2:117; ANF 2:349, modified). Clement’s use of the term συγκατάθεσις here suggests a Stoic source, to which he welds an Aristotelian element in the understanding of choice as ὄρεξις διανοητική (drawn from *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.2 1139b4).

11. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 2.4.16–17 (GCS 2:121; ANF 2:350).

often presented,” and the point is made that without such preconceptions (for example, of man, or horse, or cow) we would not be able to inquire what something is.¹² One can see here the inspiration for Clement’s point that preconceptions are, in general, necessary for action and rational choice. But to define faith as a *voluntary* preconception, and thereby itself a kind of choice, seems to be Clement’s own innovation.

Although Clement’s terminology is new, one need not look far to find a philosophical antecedent for the idea that some sort of voluntary preconception is necessary if there is to be rational thought and action. This is a prominent theme in two of Plato’s best-known dialogues, the *Apology* and *Phaedo*. Socrates is presented there as a model of one who has faith in the sense of a persistent voluntary determination to live, think, and act as one who trusts in reason. We can distinguish two aspects of this Socratic faith, one subjective and one objective.¹³ From a subjective standpoint, it is Socrates’s response to the repeated call issued to him by “the god” (*Apology* 33c). As the Delphic oracle mentioned in the *Apology* illustrates, that call did not come with its meaning written on its face. Socrates’s faith consisted precisely in seeking to ferret out its meaning by heeding the call daily, in an ongoing practice of seeking truth and virtue and urging others to do the same, regardless of the consequences. That is what his faith consisted in for him from the standpoint of his own experience. Considered objectively, in terms of its propositional content, it was above all a faith in the value of reason. Nothing that Socrates did makes sense unless there was at his core the conviction that reason is a precious gift that is to be honored at all costs. As he explains at length in the *Phaedo*, it is a gift from the gods for which we are responsible, and the gods will welcome us if we use it well. Seen in that light, Socrates’s faith was not only in the gods, but in the goodness of the cosmos and the justice of the cosmic order. He saw reason as precious because it enables us to apprehend and, to the extent possible, conform ourselves to that order.

Far from being opposed to reason, faith is here its essential complement and presupposition. This point has sometimes been lost on commentators because Plato does not explicitly identify the attitude adopted by Socrates

12. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 10.33; ed. and trans. R. D. Hicks, *Diogenes Laertius: Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 2:563. See further Valerie Tsouna, “Epicurean Preconceptions,” *Phronesis* 61 (2016): 160–221.

13. See my “God as the Good: A Critique of H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr.’s *After God*,” *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 43 (2018): 650–66, from which I draw in the remainder of this paragraph.

as one of faith (πίστις). This is hardly surprising, for *pistis* did not bear the meaning of “voluntary preconception” in Plato’s time; indeed, it acquired such a meaning only in these very passages from Clement.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the idea is there already in Plato’s portrayal of Socrates. It may well have been partly for this reason that many early Christians ardently admired Socrates and readily associated his cause with their own. In the Gospels as well, faith is very much a voluntary preconception or (less technically) orientation of the soul, one that is open to the divine call and responds with alacrity to what God requires. Clement found in the general concept of a voluntary preconception that is necessary for rational thought and action a way of translating this biblical notion into a recognizable philosophical idiom.

Clement proceeds to offer two further definitions—again, not as rivals to the preceding, but as ways of explicating the forms faith may take in various aspects of life. One is that faith is “the judgment which follows knowledge,” and accordingly “something superior to knowledge, and its criterion.”¹⁵ Faith is here certainty or conviction, which is a “criterion” of knowledge in that we do not think we know something until we have confidence in it.¹⁶ The other definition is that faith is a sort of “natural art” that contributes to learning, one that involves docility and receptivity to sound teaching.¹⁷ Faith in this sense leads to repentance, for it is open to acknowledging an act to be sin. And beyond repentance it leads to hope, for Scripture promises good things to one who is faithful.¹⁸

With these fruits we enter into recognizably Christian territory. Unfortunately, Clement does not explain explicitly how faith in the sense he has defined leads to Christian belief, nor how it relates to the use of reason. For insight on these points we must turn to another great Alexandrian, St. Athanasius. Athanasius in his *Contra Gentes* offers a sweeping account of the nature of human cognition of God. He begins by positing that God, in

14. Clement does near the end of 2.4 offer a few passages where Plato takes a positive view of *pistis*, but they seem to be about faith only in the sense of confidence or conviction. A closer precedent would be *Phaedo* 70a–b, where Cebes asserts (and Socrates accepts) that belief in the immortality of the soul requires *pistis*.

15. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 2.4.15 (GCS 2:120; ANF 2:350).

16. Clement attributes this definition to Aristotle. The nearest source among Aristotle’s surviving works would seem to be the teaching that one must believe more firmly (πιστεύειν μᾶλλον) the premises of a syllogism than the conclusion in order for the conclusion to count as knowledge (*Post. Anal.* 1.2 72a25–33).

17. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 2.6.25–26 (GCS 2:126; ANF 2:353).

18. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 2.6.26–27 (GCS 2:127; ANF 2:353).

creating man in his image and likeness, “made man perceptive and understanding of reality through his similarity to him, giving him also a conception and knowledge of his own eternity, so that as long as he kept this likeness he might never abandon his concept of God or leave the company of the saints.”¹⁹ In this original and fully natural state, man “is filled with admiration when he grasps God’s providence towards the universe. He is superior to sensual things and all bodily impressions, and by the power of his mind clings to the divine and intelligible realities in heaven.”²⁰ Yet although Adam perceived God within the natural world, he had no need for any intermediary, for he also knew God directly within his own soul: “The purity of the soul makes it able to behold God as in a mirror (τὸν θεὸν κατοπτρίζεσθαι), as the Lord himself said, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’”²¹

Returning to this subject later, Athanasius explains that the original paradisaical state is still available even now:

The road to God is not as far from us or as extraneous to us as God himself is high above all, but it is within us and we ourselves can find its beginning, as Moses taught: “The word of faith is within your heart” [Deut. 30:14]. This the Savior also indicated and confirmed, saying: “The kingdom of God is within you” [Luke 17:21]. So since we have faith and the kingdom of God within us, we can quickly come to contemplate and apprehend the King of all, the saving Word of the Father.²²

Faith is here the essential means by which we can recover the knowledge of God. It is both something innate, a kind of residuum from our state of primeval bliss, and something that must be cultivated in order to come to full realization. This is much like the view of Clement that faith begins as an essential (but voluntary) preconception and grows through time into a living relationship with God.

19. Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 2; ed. and trans. Robert W. Thompson, *Athanasius: Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 6–7. Athanasius may have in mind here Wisdom 2:23, “For God created man for incorruption, and made him the image of his own eternity.”

20. Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 2; ed. and trans. Thompson, *Athanasius*, 6–7.

21. Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 2; ed. and trans. Thompson, *Athanasius*, 6–9 (modified).

22. Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 30; ed. and trans. Thompson, *Athanasius*, 82–82. Athanasius adds the words “of faith” to the quotation of Deuteronomy.

The place of natural theology

What role does rational argument play in this process? Athanasius goes on to explain that, although it is possible to behold the divine image directly within the soul when it is cleansed, many remain tied to earthly and sensual attachments. In that case God can still be known indirectly through creation:

If this instruction on the part of the soul itself is not adequate because of external influences which disturb its mind and prevent it from seeing the better course, it is still possible to grasp knowledge about God from visible phenomena, since creation through its order and harmony, as it were in writing, indicates and proclaims its master and maker.²³

This is the preface to a long presentation of what today would be considered a version of the argument from design. Much of the argument is framed, not as an inference, but as a description of what can be immediately perceived by one who is attentive. Just as someone hearing a lyre without seeing the player can perceive that there is a musician playing, so we can perceive from the harmony of the world that it has a single Ruler and King.²⁴ This perceptually-framed form of the argument is interestingly different from one that frames it as an inference.²⁵ Nonetheless, the argument is sufficiently rich that it can readily be translated into inferential form, as Richard Swinburne suggests later in this volume.

Although it takes center stage in *Contra Gentes*, the argument from design is only one among several ways that God can be known indirectly even in our current fallen state. In *On the Incarnation* Athanasius lists it as one of three ways God has provided for those who fail to come to know him through the divine image within. This passage is worth quoting at length, for it provides a classic description of the place of natural theology within the broader divine economy.

The grace of God was sufficient for one to know God the Word and through him the Father. But because God knew the weakness of men

23. Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 34; ed. and trans. Thompson, *Athanasius*, 94–95.

24. Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 38; ed. and trans. Thompson, *Athanasius*, 104–07.

25. For discussion of the difference between perceiving and inferring design see Del Ratzsch, “Perceiving Design,” in *God and Design*, ed. Neil Manson (New York: Routledge, 2003), 124–44; C. Stephen Evans, *Natural Signs and the Knowledge of God: A New Look at Theistic Arguments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

he anticipated their negligence, so that if they failed to recognize God by themselves, through the works of creation they might be able to know the Creator. Because the negligence of men sank gradually to the worse, God again provided for such weakness of theirs and sent the law and the prophets, who were known to them, so that if they were reluctant to raise their eyes to heaven and know the Creator, they would have schooling from those close by. For men can learn more directly from other men about more advanced things. So they could lift their eyes to the immensity of heaven, and discerning the harmony of creation know its ruler, the Word of the Father, who by his providence in the universe makes the Father known to all men, and for that reason moves the universe, in order that by him all men should know God. Or if they were reluctant to do this, they could meet the saints and through them learn of God the Creator of the universe, the Father of Christ, and that the worship of idols was godless and full of all impiety. They could also, by knowing the law, desist from all wickedness and lead lives of virtue. For the law was not for the Jews only, nor on their account only were the prophets sent—though they were sent to the Jews and persecuted by the Jews—but they provided holy instruction to the whole world about the knowledge of God and the conduct of one’s soul.²⁶

Natural theology—represented here by coming to know God through the “works of creation”—is only the first of the ways God has provided to know him within the sensible world. There are also the prophets and saints, whose holiness is such that in merely meeting them, one can come to know God.²⁷ And there is the law which they teach; this too can be a way of knowing God, in that it leads away from godlessness and impiety toward a life of virtue.

For the full completion of this line of thought we must turn to a third of Athanasius’s works, the *Life of Antony*. The *Life* is the literary portrayal of a saint in a way that enables the reader to experience, to the extent possible through the written word, what it is like to encounter someone holy. Its immense influence through the centuries is a testament to its success.²⁸ Much as in the *Contra Gentes*, Athanasius emphasizes that the direct knowledge

26. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 12; ed. and trans. Thompson, *Athanasius*, 162–63.

27. Thompson states in a footnote that “the saints” (οἱ ἅγιοι) here are solely the Old Testament prophets, but that seems unlikely inasmuch as meeting them is supposed to be widely available to all of humanity.

28. See in particular the story of its effect on the two friends of Ponticianus, and thereby on Augustine, in Augustine’s *Confessions* 8.6–7.

of God Antony has achieved is not something alien to his humanity, but is simply the restoration of his natural state. When Antony emerges from the desert fortress where he has spent twenty years in battling demons, Athanasius describes him as “altogether guided by reason and abiding in a natural state (ἐν τῷ κατὰ φύσιν ἔστώς).”²⁹ Shortly thereafter, in his discourse to his disciples, Antony explains that virtue itself is something natural and innate.

Fear not to hear of virtue, nor be astonished at the name. For it is not far from us, nor is it outside of us, but its work is within us and the performance is easy if only we are willing. . . . For when the soul has its spiritual faculty (τὸ νοερόν) in a natural state, virtue is formed. And it is in a natural state when it remains as it was made—and it was made beautiful and perfectly straight.³⁰

We can see in these passages the connection between Athanasius’s second way of coming to the knowledge of God, the encounter with holiness, and the third, the moral law. Both are ways of recalling the soul to its natural state—the one by external example and inspiration, and the other by internal transformation. To the extent that the soul returns to its natural state, it has a direct knowledge of and communion with God, much as does Antony himself.

Can something similar be said for the first of the three ways of knowing God, natural theology? Although Athanasius does not address this question explicitly, an answer emerges near the end of the *Life* in the famous conversation between Antony and some visiting philosophers. The philosophers begin by mocking the Gospel, to which Antony replies by pointing out its superiority to pagan myths.³¹ He then continues:

But as you prefer to lean upon demonstrative arguments, and as you, having this art, wish us not to worship God until after such proof, tell me first how things in general and especially the recognition of God are accurately known. Is it through demonstrative knowledge or the working of faith (δι’ ἐνεργείας πίστεως)? And which is better, faith which comes through such inworking (ἢ δι’ ἐνεργείας πίστις) or demonstration by arguments?³²

29. Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 14 (PG 26, 865A; trans. H. Ellershaw, NPNF 2/4:200).

30. Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 20 (PG 26, 872C–873A; NPNF 2/4:201, modified).

31. Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 74–76 (PG 26, 945B–949B; NPNF 2/4:215–16).

32. Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 77 (PG 26, 949B–952A; NPNF 2/4:216).

Perhaps surprisingly, the philosophers answer that faith (or perhaps merely “confidence,” πίστις) that comes through inworking is superior to demonstrative knowledge. Antony replies:

You have answered well, for faith arises from disposition of soul, but dialectic from the skill of its inventors. Wherefore to those in whom the inworking through faith (ἡ διὰ πίστεως ἐνέργεια) is present, demonstrative argument is needless, or even superfluous. For what we know through faith this you attempt to prove through words, and often you are not even able to express what we understand. So the inworking through faith is better and stronger than your sophistical arguments.³³

It might seem that Antony here decisively rejects any important role for rational argument. Such a conclusion would be premature, however, for he immediately continues:

We Christians therefore hold the mystery not in the wisdom of Greek arguments, but in the power of faith richly supplied to us by God through Jesus Christ. And to show that this statement is true, behold now, without having learned letters, we believe in God, knowing through his works his providence over all things. And for evidence that our faith is effective, see now that we are supported by faith in Christ, but you by sophistical logomachies.³⁴

The reference to knowing God’s providence through his works shows that we are here not far from the design argument.³⁵ Antony goes on to list a whole series of evidences that Christian faith is effective: the decline of paganism and the rise of Christianity, the power of the Cross over demons, the virtue and self-control exhibited by Christians, the courage of the martyrs. This appeal to evidence makes it clear that he is not rejecting rational argument in general, but only the specific role given to demonstrative reasoning by the philosophers.

Much depends, in reading this episode, on what is meant by the faith that comes by divine inworking (ἡ δι’ ἐνεργείας πίστις) and the inworking

33. Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 77 (PG 26, 952A; NPNF 2/4:216, modified).

34. Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 78 (PG 26, 952B; NPNF 2/4:216, modified).

35. More specifically, this is true of the form the argument takes in the *Contra Gentes*, where God’s providence can be immediately perceived in his works; there is no hint of an attempt to recast the argument in deductive form.

that is through faith (ἡ διὰ πίστεως ἐνέργεια). It is tempting to see in these a mere passive receptivity to divine enlightenment. Read in that way, Antony would be saying that God gives faith to some and not to others, and for those to whom He does give it, it is a sufficient warrant for belief. But that cannot be right, for Antony's whole purpose is to persuade the philosophers to embrace faith, and indeed to do so on rational grounds.

It is crucial to recognize that for the Greek Fathers, faith is never simply a divine gift; rather, it is an active and freely chosen response to God's continual presentation of the good. This is a view based largely on the Pauline usage of *energeia*, *energein*, and related terms.³⁶ Antony invokes it earlier in the *Life*, alluding to Romans 8:28 (in a minority reading): "Wherefore, children, let us hold fast our discipline, and let us not be careless. For in it the Lord is our fellow-worker (συνεργόν), as it is written, 'to all that choose the good, God works with them for the good (συνεργεῖ ὁ θεὸς εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν).'"³⁷ The faith that comes by divine inworking is thus not something imparted by God to a passive recipient, but requires active cooperation. This is significant for our purposes because it shows that the choice Antony puts before the philosophers is not one between reason and blind faith. Both alternatives require reason, although exercised in different ways. Indeed it is the choice of faith that enables reason properly understood—that is, as the correct apprehension of reality—to come to full fruition.

Yet it remains true that Athanasius nowhere attributes to philosophical reasoning a capacity to restore and vivify the soul like that of the encounter with holiness or obedience to the divine law. Its role remains that which it has in the *Contra Gentes*: that of clearing away error and establishing an initial basis for belief in God. And even in that work, as noted earlier, Athanasius is less concerned to present a demonstrative argument (although his argument can be construed in that way) than to awaken the perception of the reader to what should already be obvious.

This Athanasian understanding of the respective roles of faith and reason became prevalent in the Christian East. We recognize it in the frequent assertions that virtue in general, and faith in particular, are innate to the human

36. See David Bradshaw, "The Divine Energies in the New Testament," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 50 (2006): 189–223, and "St. John Chrysostom on Grace and Free Will," *Common Ground Journal* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 30–36, <http://www.commongroundjournal.org/volnum/v12no2.pdf>.

37. Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 19 (PG 26, 872A; NPNF 2/4:201). Athanasius substitutes "all that choose the good" for "those that love God" found in all surviving witnesses, and also inserts ὁ θεὸς after συνεργεῖ in accordance with a relatively well attested minority reading.

soul.³⁸ We recognize it also in the way that Eastern authors tend to approach arguments for the existence of God as a matter of spiritual instruction, the first step to be taken by one who is presumed to be fundamentally open and receptive to learning. St. Maximus the Confessor, introducing what today would be considered a version of the design argument, explains his task as that of describing how “the saints learned of the Creator’s existence from the things created by Him.”³⁹ Equally telling is the way St. John of Damascus carefully introduces his arguments for the existence of God in *On the Orthodox Faith*. This passage illustrates well the fundamental orientation toward natural theology found among the Greek Fathers:

The knowledge of the existence of God is implanted in us by nature. But since the wickedness of the Evil One has prevailed so mightily against man’s nature as even to drive some into denying the existence of God, that most foolish and woeful pit of destruction (whose folly David, revealer of the divine meaning, exposed when he said, “The fool has said in his heart, there is no God” [Ps. 13:1, LXX]), so the disciples of the Lord and his apostles, made wise by the Holy Spirit and working wonders in his power and grace, took them captive in the net of miracles and drew them up out of the depths of ignorance to the light of the knowledge of God. In the same way their successors in grace and worth, both pastors and teachers, having received the enlightening grace of the Spirit, by the power of miracles and the word of grace enlightened those walking in darkness and brought back the wanderers into the way. But as for us who are not recipients either of the gift of miracles or the gift of teaching (for indeed we have rendered ourselves unworthy of these by our passion for pleasure), come, let us discuss a few of those things that have been delivered to us on this subject by the expounders of grace, calling on the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁴⁰

38. See Basil, *Hexaemeron* 9.4; Evagrius, *Praktikos* 81, *On Thoughts* 31; Pseudo-Macarius, *Homilies* 8.2; Maximus the Confessor, *Dispute with Pyrrhus* (PG 91, 309B–312A); John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* 58 (= 3.14).

39. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 10.35; ed. and trans. Nicholas Constas, *Maximos the Confessor: On Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 1:285.

40. John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* 3 (= 1.3); ed. P. Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, 8 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1969–1988), 2:10–11; trans. S. D. F. Salmond, NPNF 2/9:2 (modified).

John then proceeds to give a form of the cosmological argument (based on identifying the mutable with the created) and a form of the design argument. Although he shows no sign of doubting the soundness of these arguments, they are plainly for him a kind of second-best, necessary only because the personal witness of the apostles and saints has not been available to all.

In sum, although the Greek Fathers certainly recognized a distinction between faith and reason, they tended to think of them as mutually supportive and interpenetrating. Faith begins as an innate orientation toward the good, and reason, which depends on faith, is the attempt to bring this innate orientation to its full realization. No point in this process is autonomous and self-directed, for God *is* the Good and he is constantly active presenting the good to us in various forms, so that every choice we make is always in some way a response to him.⁴¹ It is this doubly synergistic view—involving the synergy of human faith and reason and of both with God—which determines the definite but subordinate role that the Greek Fathers gave to natural theology.

We may note in passing that natural theology is not to be confused with another way of coming to know God through nature that was richly developed in the Greek patristic tradition. This is natural contemplation (θεωρία φυσική), the second of the three stages of the spiritual life distinguished by Evagrius and the tradition that followed him.⁴² Natural contemplation is the direct perception of the divine *logoi*—essences, meanings, intentions—within nature. It constitutes a much richer form of the knowledge of God than is sought by natural theology, one that comes about only through ascetic discipline (πρακτική) and is in turn oriented toward the yet higher state of pure prayer (θεολογία). Although natural contemplation is an important topic in its own right, it lies beyond our scope here.

41. See in particular John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Philipians* 8.1 (commenting on Phil 2:12–13), with discussion in Bradshaw, “St. John Chrysostom on Grace and Free Will.” For God as the Good to whom we are innately drawn see Basil the Great, *Long Rules*, Q. 2; Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 11; Dionysius the Areopagite, *Divine Names* 4; Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 7.11–13.

42. See Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 102–13; Julia Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Making of a Gnostic* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 47–66.

Contents of the present volume

As mentioned earlier, natural theology has undergone a remarkable renaissance in recent years. Some of the best minds of contemporary philosophy have given it their attention, producing arguments and counter-arguments at a dizzying pace. Many of these discussions pertain to the traditional arguments for the existence of God (ontological, cosmological, teleological, and moral) or against it (the problem of evil as well as various concerns about the coherence of theism). Many others address new topics, ranging from the so-called problem of “divine hiddenness,” to the evidentiary value of religious experience, to new approaches to understanding divine attributes such as omnipotence, eternity, and foreknowledge.

The present volume is presented in the hope that it will initiate a vigorous discussion about whether and how Orthodoxy should draw upon these contemporary developments; as well as, conversely, what distinctive insights Orthodoxy can contribute to this rich and growing discipline. Although the coverage of Orthodox perspectives on natural theology offered here is far from complete—whether from a historical, geographical, or systematic standpoint—we believe that it offers enough to provide a helpful starting point for further investigation.

The first essay, by Alexey Fokin, offers an overview of patristic arguments for the existence of God. As Fokin observes, the Fathers commonly hold that we can know “that” the divine nature or essence exists, but not what it is. This element of negative theology establishes the context for their appropriation of the classical arguments for the existence of God. Fokin divides these arguments under six headings: (1) the argument from the innate conception of God, (2) the design (or teleological) argument, (3) the cosmological argument, (4) the argument from an ideal or formal cause, (5) the argument from degrees of perfection, and (6) moral arguments. Of these, (4)–(6) are found only in Augustine and Boethius and so had little influence within the Orthodox tradition. The most popular among the Greek Fathers were (1) and (2), although (1) was scarcely developed beyond a simple appeal to the *consensus omnium*. The design argument, by contrast, was developed in some detail and typically bore the weight of establishing belief in God, whether for apologetic or systematic purposes. The cosmological argument appears in a few of the more philosophical authors (Augustine, Maximus, John of Damascus) although it too was not developed in much detail. Notably, arguments for the existence of God never became a subject of controversy among the Church Fathers of either East or West, and so were

not subjected to detailed critique and analysis as occurred later among the scholastics.

The next article is my own short contribution on natural theology in the work of St. Gregory Palamas. Palamas is of course best known for his teaching about the vision of the uncreated light and the essence–energies distinction. Nonetheless, there are at least three passages in his work that show a favorable attitude toward natural theology. One of these, a statement of the design argument in the *Triads*, is very much in keeping with earlier patristic tradition. The others are somewhat more innovative. One of them, found in his early correspondence with Akindynos, speaks of how it is possible to take in together in a single glance (συνοπᾶν) God with creatures when the latter are seen rightly, as evincing divine forethought, goodness, and wisdom. The other, from the *Chapters*, identifies God as the ongoing, sustaining cause of all things in their mere existence out of nothing. I argue that these latter two passages are best read in light of that on the design argument, and that the three together offer a way of educating one’s perception so as to “see together” creatures with their divine cause.

The next article, by Richard Cross (the sole non-Orthodox contributor), shifts attention to the West. It offers a concise and richly informative survey of the course of natural theology from Anselm to Kant. Cross describes some of the sharp disagreements over arguments for the existence of God within medieval scholasticism, including over questions such as the validity of the ontological argument, the possibility of an *a priori* argument for the Trinity, and even (with Ockham) whether God can be shown to be single rather than many. Luther and Calvin introduced a new form of skepticism, questioning whether the God of natural theology can be known as the true God apart from revelation; and, if not, whether natural theology itself constitutes a kind of idolatry. Calvin also introduced (or revived) the idea that to recognize God in creation is less an act of inference than an act of immediate perception, one that he famously dubbed the *sensus divinitatis*.⁴³ The Reformation and the Scientific Revolution, with their accompanying intellectual and cultural turmoil, led to new motivations for natural theology, both epistemological (Descartes) and metaphysical (Leibniz). In these efforts natural theology was invoked as a way of resolving systematic philosophical problems. Kant sought to cut the ground out from under all such attempts by denying the possibility of a necessarily existing being. As

43. Calvin was a major influence on Thomas Reid, who is a primary inspiration for those who adopt this view today (see above, n. 25).

Cross notes in conclusion, the contemporary revival of natural theology has been predicated upon a widespread rejection of Kant's view on this point.

Paul Gavriilyuk offers a groundbreaking study of the place of natural theology in modern Russian Orthodoxy, including both the Russian theological academies of the nineteenth century and the religious philosophers of the early twentieth century. His story begins with Fiodor Golubinskii, a professor at the Moscow Theological Academy who drew upon the natural theology of Anselm, Leibniz, Wolff, and others as a counter to the materialism of the *philosophes*. He gave an emphasis to religious experience that is not found in these authors, however, and indeed regarded it as the strongest of the "empirical proofs" of the existence of God. This theme was developed more fully by his successor, Viktor Kudriavtsev-Platonov. For Kudriavtsev, the belief in God formed through immediate experience is "basic" in the sense that it "undergirds our beliefs about the general features of the world." Viktor Nesmelov of the Kazan Theological Academy offered an interesting twist on this idea, denying that the innate awareness of God is a distinct conscious event and seeing it rather as "given in the nature of personality." A similar emphasis on the all-pervasive awareness of God is found in his contemporary, the religious philosopher Vladimir Solovyov. Solovyov built upon the work of the German philosopher Friedrich Jacobi to argue that the unity of subject and object within experience is itself an act of faith. (Students of early modern philosophy will recognize much in common here with Hume, save that Jacobi and Solovyov substitute faith for Hume's "habit and custom.") For Solovyov, God can be directly experienced both as the condition of the possibility of this unity and, more specifically, in feelings of religious awe. Solovyov's follower Sergius Bulgakov similarly gave priority to spiritual perception, but insisted that true faith must involve trust and a receptivity to divine revelation. For him, the awareness of God is not a concomitant to all experience, but the operation of a distinct faculty which he associates with the heart. The last philosopher Gavriilyuk discusses is Semen Frank, who offers a sophisticated reprise of the ontological argument as not an inference but simply a "recognition of the self-evidence of the Absolute." This bare summary scarcely does justice to Gavriilyuk's complex essay; anyone interested in the rational foundations of belief in God, or the reception of modern philosophy within Orthodoxy, will want to give it a close reading.

The next two papers turn to modern Orthodox criticisms of natural theology. Dionysios Skliris examines attitudes toward natural theology among modern Greek Orthodox theologians, particularly those of the so-called "generation of the Sixties." These attitudes have been mixed. Panagiotis Nel-

las and Fr. Dumitru Staniloae (a Romanian who was influential in Greece) were generally positive, although without developing natural theological arguments in detail. Better known are the criticisms offered by Christos Yannaras and Metropolitan John Zizioulas. Yannaras does not deny the possibility of knowing God through “natural contemplation” of the divine *logoi* in beings, but objects strongly to natural theology as it has been practiced in the mainstream of Western philosophy. He finds in the quest for rational necessity an implicit denial of personal freedom, as well as a tendency to “conquer and objectify God” so as to diminish the threat he poses (or seems to pose) to rational autonomy. Zizioulas similarly sees in natural theology a mistaken focus on establishing “that” God exists, while ignoring the far more important question of “how” God exists—namely, as a Trinity of divine persons who can be experienced in the life of the Church. Zizioulas sees natural theology as having contributed to the rise of atheism precisely by ignoring God’s Trinitarian mode of being, thus reducing God to a mere substance. Skliris concludes his essay with a comparison between the thought of Zizioulas and that of Richard Swinburne. Despite their opposing stances toward natural theology, both defend a form of Social Trinitarianism on rational (and not only scriptural) grounds. Skliris also observes that Swinburne’s probabilism and his emphasis on the crucial importance of the appeal to religious experience go at least some distance, if not all the way, toward addressing the concerns of Yannaras.

Travis Dumsday considers objections to natural theology in a range of modern Orthodox thinkers, including Sergius Bulgakov, Olivier Clément, H. Tristram Engelhardt Jr., and Vladimir Lossky, as well as Yannaras. Dumsday identifies three major themes in their criticisms. The first is that arguments for the existence of God are, in general, objectively unsound. The second is that such arguments are counterproductive from a religious standpoint, either because they fail to provide an actual experiential encounter with God or because, by their overreach, they indirectly contribute to atheism. The third is that such arguments are rhetorically ineffective in that they fail to persuade nonbelievers. Dumsday observes that the third claim is debatable, since many nonbelievers have in fact been persuaded by such arguments and even many believers have found them helpful in strengthening and clarifying their faith. The first claim, if true, would be more decisive, but it is also harder to establish and the authors in question do not make any serious effort to do so. Their central concern lies with the second point. To this Dumsday observes that, from the standpoint of a nonbeliever, there has to be some reason to seek to experience God within Christianity (and

especially Orthodox Christianity), as opposed to doing so within some other religion or simply not at all. For this one needs at least some grounds for thinking that Christian beliefs about God are true. Such grounds need not be apodictic, and in fact are more likely to be convincing if they are advanced with some sense of epistemic humility; but that does not make them in any way less important.

The volume concludes with a paper by Richard Swinburne presenting in summary form a version of the design argument. This is an important element of the cumulative case for Christian theism that Swinburne has elaborated in a number of publications.⁴⁴ His view is that, given the preeminence of science in modern society, the most broadly persuasive argument will be one in which “the pattern of argument is just the same as that of science.” Accordingly he first explains the criteria that are used to evaluate causal explanations in science (as well as elsewhere, for example, in criminal investigations). These include: (1) the simplicity of the hypothesis posited, (2) if the hypothesis is true, it is likely that the phenomena to be explained will occur, and (3) if the hypothesis is false, it is much less likely that they will occur. In the case of theism, the hypothesis posited is the existence of a God who has the traditional divine attributes such as perfect goodness, omnipotence, omniscience, and eternity. Swinburne first argues that (owing to the absence of any posited constraints or limitations on this being) such a hypothesis is highly simple. He then evaluates its explanatory success in relation to the existence of an orderly universe that includes creatures like us who are capable of choosing good and evil. He argues that the existence of such a God would make these phenomena at least fairly likely and the absence of such a God would make them highly unlikely. His conclusion is that the design argument, so construed, provides a “strong cogent” argument for the existence of God. It is important to note that this is not tantamount to claiming that the argument makes the existence of God likely, all things considered. To draw such a conclusion one must consider all the relevant evidence. That includes not only apparently countervailing evidence such as the existence of great human suffering, but also further confirmatory evidence such as religious experience and the historical evidence for the life and resurrection of Jesus. Swinburne’s view is that, when this additional evidence is taken into account, the existence of God is “significantly more

44. See Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), and *Was Jesus God?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

probable than not.” However, he does not argue for that stronger conclusion here. Here his purpose is only to illustrate how the design argument can be stated in contemporary terms and the contribution it can make to a cumulative case for theism.

None of these essays is, or could be, the final word on its subject. The question of what role reason should play in the human quest for God is one that will not be finally settled as long as we “see through a glass darkly.” Yet it is one that no reflective person can avoid. We offer these papers in the hope that they will help facilitate positive and constructive reflection on natural theology from within the Orthodox tradition.