

The Case Against Theism: Why the Evidence Disproves God's Existence, by Raphael Lataster. Springer Verlag, 2018. Hb. 322pp. £79.99. ISBN-13: 9783319907925

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My previous research and article on 'Atheism and Free Thought: Some Modern Italian Philosophical Contributions' (in *Literature & Aesthetics*, 2021), tracing philosophical scepticism from ancient Greece through modern thinkers like Emilia and Giuseppe Rensi, is linked to Raphael Lataster's work. *The Case Against Theism* builds directly on this historical foundation, applying a similar critical approach to contemporary arguments. This monograph, structured in five comprehensive chapters, analyses the theistic hypotheses of William Lane Craig (b. 1949), a prominent Christian philosopher. By examining Craig's arguments for the existence of God through the lens of sceptical tradition, this work not only critiques modern theistic claims but also demonstrates the enduring relevance of irreligious thought from antiquity to the present day. Lataster embarks on a multidisciplinary exploration, embedding philosophical, mathematical, scientific, historical, and sociological perspectives to assess the case for Christian theism.

In Chapter 1, Lataster states that this examination is not an attack on religion or Christianity *per se* but rather a critical analysis of the various arguments presented in support of Christian theism. In his work, he points out that 'Christian Philosophers' endorse and advocate for Christianity (p. 3), a proselytizing religion. As an exclusivist and monotheistic religion, adherents view their faith as the only or exclusively true religion. Richard Swinburne has also rigorously supported Craig's theistic hypotheses and 'a priori or inductive arguments' (p. 6). Conversely, Lataster emphasizes a posteriori argument versus theistic perspectives. He continues with the definition of theism given by Craig but in this case from a sceptical theist.

In Chapter 2, 'The Case of Theism', Lataster argues that Craig does not describe God using a comprehensive or 'cumulative' case approach, unlike Swinburne, who defines God with the theistic attributes of being

Keywords: atheism, theism, critique of theism, analytical philosophy, religion and naturalism

omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good. Both theorists, however, rely on the explanatory hypothesis of God (p. 26). Craig speculates that every entity requires an explanation for its existence, which may either be uncaused or caused by an external factor. In contrast, Lataster criticizes these explanations or arguments as integrally flawed assertions (p. 29). According to Lataster, theism does not necessarily suggest that the first cause of the universe is the ultimate cause. He argues that just because there is a first cause it does not automatically mean that this cause is God. Consequently, the existence of a first cause does not inherently prove the existence of God (p. 46). Likewise, Lataster echoes Richard Dawkins in his influential book, *The God Delusion* (2006), asserting that God cannot be considered an 'Intelligent Designer' because this argument implores the question of who designed the designer—an aspect that lacks credibility as evidence for theism itself (p. 97).

In 'The Case of A-Theism' (Chapter 3), Lataster challenges Craig's theistic arguments, arguing that they are not sound or valid. Craig discusses God's existence primarily through a teleological hypothesis, suggesting God as a designer without specifying the identity of this designer (p. 149). His reliance on Big Bang cosmology in his argument fails to provide evidence for God's existence and, instead, can be seen as evidence against it. Moreover, not everyone experiences the supernatural world, and those who do cannot necessarily attribute their experiences to God. Therefore, Craig's ideas appear to be more 'probabilistic' than plausible due to their reliance on incomplete evidence (p. 148). Lataster's statement, 'God is the answer that answers everything but answers nothing' (p. 158), serves as a persuasive strategy aimed at convincing atheists of the truth of theism. However, Craig may not realize that this underscores the importance of addressing non-theistic beliefs within the theological framework, particularly in the Christian context where thinkers like Craig emphasize divine purpose and see non-belief as opening Pandora's box. In the later chapter, Lataster argues that other monotheistic alternatives within theistic perspectives seek to demonstrate the existence of a God perceived as wholly good (such as Yahweh) while acknowledging the existence of evil as the opposing force. However, these hypotheses face inconsistencies, such as the challenge that an omnibenevolent God should not allow or tolerate the existence of suffering and evil (p. 169).

Chapter 4 focuses on Craig's argument based on Jesus of Nazareth, whose very existence is debated. This Christological argument, rooted in Christian thinking, claims that God exists because Jesus was resurrected.

However, the chapter questions both the historical accuracy of Jesus's life and the logic of using his supposed resurrection as proof of God's existence (p. 218). The chapter raises doubts about whether Jesus of Nazareth was a real historical figure. There are no writings by Jesus who wrote himself. We do not have any firsthand records of Jesus saying things like 'I am the son of Yahweh' (p. 223).

In Chapter 5, titled 'Craig in the Sociological Context', the author explores William Lane Craig's unique position as a celebrity figure in religious and philosophical circles. Craig has cultivated a wide-ranging appeal that extends beyond just believers to include some non-believers as well. His popularity stems from several factors: he offers his content at affordable prices, maintains an active online presence through blogs and videos, and writes books that are accessible to a general audience (p. 271). This approach has made sophisticated theological and philosophical doctrines more digestible to the average person. The author notes that Craig's influence is so significant that many readers and intellectuals tend to accept his presentations of Christian ideas as authoritative. This widespread acceptance has positioned Craig as a leading voice in theistic thought, with his arguments often being treated as factual rather than just one perspective among many.

Lataster's work recognizes that scholars have debated the merits of theism and naturalism for centuries. While acknowledging the depth of these historical arguments, the author argues that the discussion is often constrained by a false dichotomy between theism and naturalism. Likewise, as the psychoanalyst Karen Horney suggests in *Our Inner Conflicts* (1945), rationalization and reasoning can result in self-deception. By adopting a probabilistic approach, Lataster advances the discourse beyond this binary framework. What sets this work apart is its inclusion of both naturalistic and supernaturalistic hypotheses to argue against theism, thereby challenging the special status often afforded to Christian theism by philosophers of religion.

One of the most convincing aspects of this critique is its consideration of alternative God conceptions, such as polytheism and pantheism. This broadens the scope of the debate and encourages readers to question the privileged position of Christian theism within philosophical discourse. By doing so, the author invites a re-evaluation of the plausibility of various divine realities, suggesting that some alternative conceptions may even be more plausible than traditional Christian theism. Lataster's approach is meticulous and evidence-based, aiming to leave no doubt

that theism, as traditionally conceived, is almost certainly false. However, this conclusion does not necessarily negate the existence of some form of divine reality. Instead, it challenges the evidential claims made by Christian apologists and highlights the potential validity of alternative supernatural hypotheses.

This monograph offers a thought-provoking and comprehensive critique of the evidential case for Christian theism and is useful for students. Its multidisciplinary approach, combined with a probabilistic framework, provides a fresh perspective on an age-old debate. By challenging the privileged status or *status quo* of Christian theism and considering alternative divine realities, the author makes a significant contribution to the ongoing discourse on theism and naturalism. This work is an essential read for anyone interested in the philosophy of religion and the evidential arguments surrounding the existence of God.