

Gregory E. Ganssle. *A Reasonable God: Engaging the New Face of Atheism*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009. 191 pages. \$21.

Does God exist? How can we prove the existence of God? This book revisits these age-old questions with a fresh look and tries to offer readers a relevant philosophical reasoning for the existence of God. In the seven chapters of the book, the author deals with complex philosophical issues related to this topic in Western philosophy and engages in arguments with four so-called “New Atheists”—Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins, and Christopher Hitchens. The author takes into account the New Atheists’ intellectual challenges to faith and reason from multifaceted angles and defends his theistic point of view.

The first four chapters focus on arguments concerning such specific philosophical topics as the relationship between religion and science (Chapter 1), the role of reason in religious belief (Chapter 2), the cosmological, ontological, and moral views in the understanding of the existence of God (Chapter 3), and “the design argument” for God’s existence (Chapter 4). The following two chapters, respectively, critically evaluate the New Atheists’ understandings of the origin and nature of religious belief and practice based on “Darwinian stories” (Chapter 5), and investigate three arguments for atheistic claims that God does not exist (Chapter 6). The last chapter concentrates on Dawkins’ “fittingness argument” that the author considers the strongest argument for atheism. In conclusion, he asserts that the New Atheists’ arguments are not strong enough to make people doubt the existence of God and convinces readers that belief in the God of traditional religions is “belief in a Reasonable God” (178).

For pastors and preachers, the issue of the existence of God is crucial. If the God they believe in does not exist, their ministry would be of little value. Yet, Christians and other theistic believers, both clergy and laity, live in modern scientific and secular environments that often challenge them to question the existence of God, and they want to confirm their belief in God through sermons and other theological and philosophical materials. For them, this book may be a resource to reaffirm their faith in God, considering that the author intends to defend a theistic view on the existence of God in the book.

It is, however, necessary to rethink whether the defensive mode of argument in the book is ultimately helpful for the reader to become a mature thinker. The author intentionally takes “a defensive role” in arguing with the New Atheists to warrant his conservative patriarchal view of theism: “I take God to be a being who is the creator of the universe. He has unlimited intellect and power, and he is a being that wills. That is, he knows all things that can be known, he can do whatever is logically possible to do, and he acts for reasons. I take it also that God has a moral nature that is wholly good (10).” Standing on this position, the author engages in philosophical argument with metaphysical speculation to uphold his religious and philosophical view, rather than seeking critical understanding of his own position. Such a defensive form of philosophical argument might still be of interest to philosophers. But, it is not useful if the reader wants to be challenged by philosophical discourse constructively to transform his or her theistic view.

Contemporary readers live in the postmodern world, in which they are exposed to diversity in knowledge, experience, worldview, and religious claim. How, then, can philosophical discourse contribute to creating more engaging conversation with those who have different views? What kind of rhetorical or communicational modes of philosophical discourse, rather than that of defensive argument, could be effective to help readers critically evaluate their own views beyond the boundary of their limited understanding of God? Concerning these questions, Ronald Thiemann’s book, *Revelation and Theology*, may be helpful. Thiemann says in this book that during the modern era, Descartes and other Enlightenment thinkers approached the

subject of God's existence as that it must be demonstrated by argument for conviction but they failed to prove that. Therefore, Thiemann proposes, revelation or the existence of God should not be truth to be proved through logical argument but to be described through stories and experiences.¹ To preachers, as well as philosophers, who want to have constructive conversation with those who have different views, Thiemann's proposal sounds insightful.

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¹ Ronald F. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 72-91.