

BOOK REVIEW

of

Peter A. Angeles,

The Problem of God: A Short Introduction,
Prometheus Books, 1980.

January 2012

This review is by Larry D. Paarmann.

Peter A. Angeles was the Chairman of the Philosophy Department at Santa Barbara City College prior to his retirement in 1990. This book was intended to serve as a college textbook, and as such the attempt was made to be unbiased in the presentation. The title is not as explicit as it could be as to the content, it being an analysis of classical proofs for the existence of God. Although it is not stated as such, it appears that the purpose of the book is to present the classical arguments for the existence of God, and then, one by one, debunk them, and thereby, presumably leaving us with the conclusion, or at least perception, that belief in God is without warrant. In addition to the book itself, I have reasons to suggest that such must be the case. Angeles is the editor of the book *Critiques of God: Making the Case Against the Belief in God*, and also the publisher of both books, Prometheus, is a known publisher of atheistic publications. Yet the book is well written and an interesting read. I think, however, that Angeles misses the point. I don't think many, if any, will believe in God, or disbelieve in Him, based on philosophical arguments for God's existence. I doubt that many, if any, Christians who developed arguments for the existence of God would have thought such. It is more, it seems to me, of those with faith in God, and especially the Christian God of the Bible, simply demonstrating that such faith is consistent with intellectual thought, and that it also perhaps sheds additional light on the excellencies of God. The book is a concise presentation of arguments for the existence of God all in one book, which is convenient, and especially since it does seem that he accurately represents those arguments. However, the moral argument for the existence of God, such as developed by C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*, and by others, is missing. That is unfortunate, as I think it is one of the more interesting and relevant arguments.

The book under review contains a Preface, and eight chapters:

Chapter 1 is titled *God as Completely Perfect*.

Chapter 2 is titled *God as the First Mover: The*

Unmoved Mover.

Chapter 3 is titled *God as the Temporal First Cause: The Uncaused Cause*.

Chapter 4 is *God as the Creator Ex Nihilo*.

Chapter 5 is *God as the Necessary Being: The Sustaining Cause for Existence*.

Chapter 6 is *God as the Necessary Being: The Sufficient Reason for Existence*.

Chapter 7 is *God as the Cosmic Mind*.

And Chapter 8 is *God as All-Good and Omnipotent: The Problem of Evil*.

As mentioned above, the moral argument for the existence of God is missing from this book. We can only guess as to why. The reason why I think it is one of the better arguments is because it is something we are personally familiar with, and is therefore not as philosophically abstract as most arguments for the existence of God are. Moreover, it can also be a persuasive argument as to why we need the atonement of Jesus Christ, given that we are guilty before the moral Law. In my opinion, C. S. Lewis makes a very good case for the existence of a moral Law outside of ourselves that we are all, more or less, acquainted with, and that we are conscious of being a failure before this Law. The first book of *Mere Christianity* is concerned with this moral Law. The title of this Book 1 in *Mere Christianity* has always intrigued me: "Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe." Lewis' presentation is popular, but other scholarly works deal with the same subject matter, usually being called "Natural Theology" by theologians. J. Budziszewski is professor of government at the University of Texas, Austin, and specializes in ethics and political philosophy. Three of his books that are concerned with moral Law are *Written on the Heart: The case for Natural Law*, *The Revenge of Conscience: Politics and the Fall of Man*, and *What We Can't Not Know: A Guide*. Our legal system of justice is based on the assumption of moral Law. In fact, the legal definition of insanity, used where an argument is given for "not guilty" by reason of insanity, is that the person being tried does not know

the difference between right and wrong. It would seem that Angeles should have included the moral argument in his book.

Another weakness in this book that I would like to comment on, is his presentation in Chapter 4, *God as the Creator Ex Nihilo*. To most of us, the question of why is there something rather than nothing seems like a good question. The universe and everything in it, including ourselves, just doesn't seem like something that could occur all by itself. Yet, Angeles seems to think that is the answer. On page 69 he writes: "The universe does not come from Nothingness either on its own or by God's power. If the Universe did come from Nothingness, there would be no previous time and no previous space for it to come from. If we ask 'Where did the Universe come from?', our answer can only be: 'It doesn't come from anywhere.'" He goes on to say that the Universe just is: it has always existed. To most of us, that seems like way too simple of an answer with no supporting evidence.

In Chapter 7, *God as the Cosmic Mind*, Angeles deals with the teleological argument for the existence of God. On page 104 he complains that "The teleological argument leaves open the question 'What Kind of God?'" Similarly, on page 106 he states the "The teleological argument does not justify any insistence that that Being is Jewish, Christian, Moslem, Hindu, or Buddhist. It establishes no God of any particular sect or religion." His point is well taken. This is well known to Christians, and is one of the complaints by Christians against philosophical proofs of the existence of God: even if the argument is successful, it tells you nothing about this God. Referring to C. S. Lewis again, after arguing for the existence of the Moral Law, that it is something outside of ourselves, and something we are being held accountable to, he writes near the end of Chapter 4 of Book 1 of *Mere Christianity*: "Do not think I am going faster than I really am. I am not yet within a hundred miles of the God of Christian theology." The intellectual arguments for the existence of God, it seems to me, simply demonstrates to someone who already believes in God that his belief is consistent with intellectual arguments. Such arguments will never, in and of themselves, convince anyone that God exists.

Also in Chapter 7, Angeles writes that "Another problem is that the teleological argument confuses the existence of an effect with the existence of that effect as an *intended end purposed* by some Being. Our earth has oxygen which provides for life. The earth has a protective shield of ozone which prevents

hazardous radiation from outer space from killing us off. The earth is just in the proper orbit around the sun for life to occur – a few hundred miles closer to the sun or away from the sun would have made our planet uninhabitable. If we argue that oxygen, the ozone layer, and the earth's orbit were ordered that way to produce an end or purpose (life, man) we are putting the cart before the horse. These are effects. Life and man are developments that occurred in adaptation to these conditions but are not ends *intended* by these conditions or by a Being." Again, proof of such intentions may be difficult to obtain, as proof of anything is, but the evidence that this universe was designed with us in mind increasingly accumulates. With the rise of modern intelligent design ideas, the evidence for intelligent design in the universe has increased to remarkable levels. To the extent that Antony Flew, long-time champion of atheism, converted from atheism to theism, or at least deism, and stated that part of what contributed to his conversion was the evidence put forth by intelligent design advocates: see his book *There Is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*, and also the Antony Flew entry in Wikipedia. Granted, the modern intelligent design movement has occurred after the publication of Angeles' book, but much of it was already in place well before and is what many people simply intuit. Therefore, Angeles' treatment of it seems a bit juvenile.

Basically, it seems that the approach of Angeles is that if, when arguments for the existence of God are given, that if problems can be brought against a given argument, that then, having claimed that the arguments are unconvincing, then there must not be a God. No doubt it is Angeles that is the arbitrator of what constitutes convincing evidence. I would suggest that the best philosophical reasons possible, presented by the most intelligent and articulate person on earth, whether it be for the existence of God or any other argument, would still have his detractors. Compelling proof for anything is more a function of the person hearing the argument than it is a function of the validity of the argument.

Obviously, I don't find Angeles' arguments compelling! Others may, but I believe that they are seriously wrong in their judgment. On the other hand, at least Angeles does present arguments against theism: most atheists do not, they just assume their position. Therefore, I do find this to be a valuable book, and one that is well written.