Eastern Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers
Concurrent Paper Abstracts

Majid Amini, Virginia State University
From Absolute to Maximal God: Would that Solve the Problem?

The classical monotheistic concept of God has been bedeviled by a plethora of logical and metaphysical paradoxes. Recently there have been a number of attempts claiming that by reforming the traditional concept of God as an omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent being to a concept of God as the being with maximal consistent set of knowledge, power and benevolence, the monotheistic concept of God can be rescued from contradictions and thereby reinstating a viable version of Anselmian theism. By focusing on omnipotence specifically, the purpose of this paper is therefore twofold: (1) to show the logical impossibility of maintaining an absolute or infinite conception of divine attributes, and (2) to show that even a maximal conception of divine attributes is plagued with the problem of uniqueness of God and a variant of the paradox of omnipotence thus indicating that such reformulations are still beset with dilemmas and paradoxes.

Greg Bassham, King's College
A Critique of C. S. Lewis's Argument from Desire

In various places, C. S. Lewis offers an argument for God and/or a heavenly afterlife that is now widely called the argument from desire. Lewis appears to give at least two versions of the argument, one inductive and the other deductive. Both versions focus on a special form of spiritual or transcendental longing that Lewis calls "Joy." The gist of his deductive argument is this: Joy is an innate, natural desire. All innate, natural desires have possible satisfactions. So, Joy must have a possible satisfaction. But Joy does not have a possible satisfaction in this world. Therefore, Joy must have a possible satisfaction in the next world. In this paper, I examine both the inductive and deductive versions of Lewis's argument from desire, and argue that neither version succeeds.

Anthony Bolos , Virginia Commonwealth University
Re-Imagining the Imago Dei

I offer a compatible account of understanding the theology of the imago Dei in conjunction with contemporary views in evolutionary biology. I discuss two related problems: First, there is the theological challenge to explain—or even merely to describe—the special nature of humankind in the face of evolutionary science. Second, there is the challenge to provide an account of exactly when humans became God's image bearers. In response to the first challenge I argue that the special nature of humans is that we are uniquely equipped to be God's image bearers. In response to the second challenge I argue that humans became God's image bearers at the moment they were apt to serve in this unique role. I also claim that my account does not come with any theological disadvantages when considering the evolutionary origins of modern humans and further provides an important philosophical insight: namely, humans, in this environment as God's image bearers, couldn't have been significantly different than they currently are.

Kenneth Boyce, University of Missouri
Andrew Moon, Rutgers University

In Defense of Proper Functionalism: Cognitive Science Takes on Swampman

According to proper functionalist theories of warrant, a belief is warranted only if it is formed by cognitive faculties that are properly functioning according to a good, truth-aimed design plan. A formidable challenge to proper functionalism is the *Swampman objection*, according to which there are possible scenarios involving creatures who have warranted beliefs but whose cognitive faculties are not properly functioning. In this paper, we draw lessons from cognitive science to argue that the Swampman objection fails by showing that the underlying, central intuition motivating it is false.

Aaron Brooks, Florida State University
Science, Religion, and Incompatibility: Can Philosophy of Science Help?

Attempts to discredit religion by using science seem to assume the rationale of two major, heavily-critiqued philosophies of science: logical positivism and critical rationalism. As a case study, this essay will show the correlation between these two philosophies and the writing of philosopher of science Alex Rosenberg. Rather than critiquing Rosenberg via critiques of these philosophies, I will attempt to show the compatibility of science and religion when these philosophies are assumed. The essay will proceed by first explicating logical positivism, especially as evidenced in the thought of Moritz Schlick and the young Ludwig Wittgenstein. In the second section, the essay will explore the critical rationalism of Karl Popper. At the end of each section, it will be argued that if something like the logic of these two respective schools is being employed by critics like Rosenberg, religious claims can still function compatibly with science.

Donald Bungum, Saint Louis University
Revealed to the Little Ones: Love, Presence, and Hiddenness

In the debate over divine hiddenness, one crucial question concerns whether explicit belief in God's existence is required for relationship with God. In this paper, I argue that explicit belief in God's existence is not required, and I contend that one can hold this view without positing a defective relationship between God and human beings. Following Eleonore Stump, I first argue that love is fulfilled between lovers just when they are fully and personally present to one another. I then use results from developmental psychology to argue that the capacity to be mutually personally present does not require the capacity for propositional thought. These claims support a model of divine-human relationship on which the following analogy holds: just as infants can have meaningful relationships with their caregivers while lacking explicit beliefs about them, so adult human beings can have meaningful relationships with God while lacking explicit belief in His existence.

Laura Frances Callahan, Rutgers University
Evil: Only Sometimes Evidence against God

Benton, Hawthorne, and Isaacs (forthcoming) claim, contra sceptical theism, that evil must be evidence against God's existence, because the absence of evil would be (presumably excellent) evidence for it. Their argument is an interesting one, and valid. But even if we accept its somewhat controversial premises, its implications are far more limited than they suggest. Seeing this requires no endorsement of sceptical theism but just a more natural way of drawing

distinctions between epistemic possibilities. If one could learn simply 'that there was evil,' perhaps via an oracle, one would gain evidence against God. But when we commonly observe that there is evil in the world, we learn a proposition much stronger. And determining the evidential impact of that much stronger proposition, about the specific amount and types of evil as well as good there are in the world, remains a complex affair.

Eddy Keming Chen, Rutgers University
Daniel Rubio, Rutgers University
Pascal's Wager Meets Surreal Numbers

Although expected utility theory has proven a fruitful and elegant theory in the finite realm, attempts to generalize it to include infinite utilities have resulted in many para- doxes. Nevertheless, one of the most venerable decision problems—Pascal's Wager— employ exactly these things. In this paper, we argue that the use of John Conway's surreal numbers
shall provide a firm mathematical foundation for transfinite decision theory. To that end, we prove a surreal representation theorem and show that our surreal decision theory respects dominance reasoning even in the infinite case. We apply our theory to bear on Pascal's Wager and two objections against it: Mixed Strategies and Many Gods.After formulating the two objections in the framework of surreal utilities and probabilities, our theory correctly predicts
that (1) the pure "Christian" strategy beats all mixed strategies, and (2) what one should do in a Pascalian decision problem depends on what one's credence function is like. Our analysis therefore suggests that although Pascal's Wager is mathematically coherent, it does not deliver what it purports to do, i.e. convince people that they should lead a Christian life regardless of how confident they are in theism and its alternatives.

Nevin Climenhaga, University of Notre Dame
Epistemic Probabilities: A Guide for the Perplexed

The epistemic probability of A given B – notated $P(A|B)$ – is the degree to which B supports, or makes plausible, A. In general, if $P(A|B) = n$, then someone with B as their evidence ought to be confident in A to degree n.
A persistently difficult question in epistemology is how to determine the values of epistemic probabilities, so characterized. The project of answering this question has two parts: a formal part and a substantive part. The formal part breaks down the probabilities in question to their most "epistemically accessible" components, via identities like Bayes' Theorem. The substantive part tells us how to calculate these "atomic" or "direct" probabilities. In this paper I undertake the formal part of this project. I argue that direct probabilities are ones given to propositions by their causes or explanations, and that given plausible assumptions about the structure of explanation, we can combine direct probabilities so characterized to obtain indirect probabilities.

Dustin Crummet, University of Notre Dame
Theodicy for Creeping Things

Philosophers of religion, even those working on the problem of animal suffering, have largely ignored "lower animals" such as arthropods (insects, crustaceans, millipedes, spiders, and the like). This is a mistake. It is not obvious that creatures like arthropods can't suffer, and if they do suffer, the

problem of evil is made much harder in several ways: the amount of evil in the world is drastically increased, the proportion of evil to good in the world is drastically increased, and many theodicies including ones specifically addressed to nonhuman suffering cannot be applied to the suffering of creatures like arthropods or can applied only with great difficulty. Accordingly, philosophers working on the problem of evil should investigate more thoroughly whether creatures like arthropods can suffer in morally disvaluable ways and, if they do, what might justify God in allowing as much.

Justin J. Daeley, University of Northwestern—St. Paul
Divine Source Compatibilism and Divine Thankworthiness

It is typical to argue that if the alternative possibilities condition is denied with respect to freedom, then some agent, such as God, could not be thanked for performing some token act necessarily, such as creating the best possible world. As intuitive as this argument may appear, this paper argues for the consistency of divine thankworthiness and a view of divine freedom which I will call Divine Source Compatibilism, where God's freedom is compatible with necessity so long as the necessity in question finds its source within God's nature. The argument is founded upon what I call the "gracious-even-if-necessary" condition (i.e. that God can be gracious with respect to some token act he performs even if he does it necessarily) and the "thankworthy-if-gracious" condition (i.e. that God is thankworthy with respect to performing a token act so long as the act he performed is a gracious act).

Anthony J. DeBonis, Yale Divinity School
The Moral Ups and Downs of Skeptical Theism

A major challenge posed to skeptical theists is the "moral objection." This line of reasoning contends that moral skepticism flows from skeptical theism. I rehearse some of the stronger arguments against skeptical theism on moral grounds, and concede that the skeptical theist position does not harbor very good responses to the moral objection. I then propose, in brief outline, an alternative stance to this objection and attempt to show how such a position resists the charge of moral skepticism in a way that the skeptical theist position cannot. Hence, the paper falls under the category of the "ethics of belief," as it is concerned with the intelligible and moral character of action insofar as it logically proceeds from and coheres with a belief in the existence of God. I do not defend the sure existence of God, but provide a (possibly) theistic-friendly account of the existence of evil that does not fall prey to moral skepticism. Whereas skeptical theism and moral objectivity are mutually exclusive, my position, I believe, promotes a decent degree of coherence between theory and commonsense moral practice.

Ian Deweese-Boyd, Gordon College
Lyric and Lamentation: Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Problem of Existential Hiddenness

The nineteenth century English Jesuit poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins struggled throughout his life with desolation over what he saw as a spiritually, intellectually and artistically unproductive life. During these periods, he experienced God's absence in a particularly intense way. As he wrote in one sonnet, "my lament / Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent / To dearest him that lives alas! away." What Hopkins faced was the existential problem of suffering and hiddenness, a problem widely recognized to be left relatively untouched by conceptual explanations. In this essay, I argue that Hopkins' poems themselves fill this gap left by conceptual approaches by articulating the

existential crisis faced by those who feel the searing pain of suffering and the numbing, leaden echo of silence. His lyric speaks into existential suffering in ways akin to biblical laments and, as such, creates a space in which those who suffer can meet God, even if only to contend.

Evan Fales , University of Iowa
Hallucinating God

A major source of putative evidence for the existence and nature of God is religious experience – especially mystical experiences in which God or other supernatural beings appear to be present. The variability of such experiences is large; however, there is strong evidence that all of them supervene on or are proximately caused by brain events of identifiable kinds. This presents us with a puzzle: why would God have chosen to communicate via such a physical medium? Why not directly, without mediating physical processes? The puzzle arises because, as I show, the existing modus operandi makes mystical experiences vulnerable to non-veridical, illusory content. God, it seems, would not choose such a vulnerable means of communication. I explore how a non-vulnerable, secure channel could have been established, and the implications of vulnerability for the evidential force of mystical experiences.

Scott R. Fennema, Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary
Circumnavigating the Heideggerian Snare of Ontotheology: An Areopagitian Approach

The essay acknowledges the direly pernicious effects of the death of God, as foretold by Nietzsche and elaborated upon by Heidegger in his ontotheological critique. Towards safeguarding against this unwanted conclusion, I utilize the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite, a Byzantine philosopher (c. 500 CE), to promulgate a non-entitative conception of divinity. Here, God is characterized as both beyond-Being (ὑπερούσιος)—thus, transcendently above the strictures imposed by the categories of Being (οὐσία)—and energetic (ἐνέργεια)—thus, imminently related to beings (ὄντα) and Being. Such a conception is able to simultaneously justify the traditional uses of God as causa prima of metaphysics and personal caritas, while avoiding lapsing into a "reasoning from beings to beings", which Heidegger believes entails God to be a mere being; in effect, a subtly disguised anthropomorphization. Thus, ontotheology will be found to be inapplicable to at least an Areopagitian account of non-entitative divinity.

Bryan Frances
The Islamic and Cumulative Versions of the 'Mad, Bad, or God' Argument

C. S. Lewis's 'Mad, Bad, or God' argument is a failure, but in this essay I present closely analogous arguments that are far superior. One comes from the life of Muhammad, while the others are cumulative ones, grounded in the fact that there have been many thousands of people who (i) claimed that they have received some kind of communication from God and (ii) didn't show any signs of insanity, deception, excessive stupidity or gullibility, etc.

Megan J. Fritts, University of Wisconsin
Robert P. Reed, Texas A&M University
The Moral Significance of Pain in Draper's Argument from Evil

Draper's argument is only as strong as its normative commitments. We identify these commitments and how they work in his argument, offering considerations against each. Draper's argument succeeds only if these normative claims are true:

1) Pain is intrinsically bad, pleasure is intrinsically good.
2) The moral significance of pain is distinct from its biological role.
3) God could use another mechanism to perform the role of pain

In Section I, we show that considerations of pain's representational content/motivational import reveal that pain's significance is drawn from something outside of itself, undermining the claim of intrinsic badness. In Section II, we deny that the moral significance of pain is distinct from its biological role. In Section III, we argue that anything playing the role of pain must have the same features as pain. The contested nature of these moral commitments significantly undermines the strength of his argument.

Logan Paul Gage, Franciscan University of Steubenville
Two Forms of Teleological Argument? Paley, Aquinas, & Modern Thomism

For some time, Thomists have considered the teleological arguments of William Paley and St. Thomas Aquinas to be radically different, if not utterly opposed. In this paper I defend the (surprising) view that they are structurally very similar.

Gregory E. Ganssle, Talbot School of Theology—BIOLA University
Starting points in Atheistic Arguments

Many atheistic arguments are a posteriori in nature. Thus they begin with observations about the world that are taken to be uncontroversial. In this paper, I argue that in many cases these starting points are not neutral. They include assumptions about the nature of the universe or even about the nature of human beings that are much less probable on atheism than they are on theism. There are two issues this raises. First, these kinds of arguments argue from an expanded atheism and argue against a minimal theism. Second, the atheism involved in the argument suffers from what Robin Collins calls "probabilistic tension." A hypothesis that suffers from a high degree of probabilistic tension is unlikely. As a result, its prior probability is fairly low. Both of these implications show that the atheistic arguments are weaker than is often supposed.

Joshua Harris, Institute for Christian Studies
Onto-theology: What it is and Why it's a Problem

This paper attempts to offer a clear, concise response to two questions: (1) What is "onto-theology"?; and (2) Why is it a problem? With respect to the first, I argue that onto-theology is the mistake of conceiving of "being" or "existence" as a highest class or genus. With respect to the second, I argue that this mistake leads to the inevitable conclusion that some conceptual apparatus (in the [TT]'s case, the apparatus of quantity) is logically and explanatorily prior to God. That is, something that is foreign to the concept of God limits the concept of God conceptually. This is conceptual idolatry, which is inadmissible for the responsible theist.

Joshua Hershey, The King's College
A Statistical Defense against the Argument from Evil

This paper develops a rebuttal to the argument from evil. My rebuttal is inspired by skeptical theism, and is similar in some respects to that defense, at least insofar as it emphasizes the "cognitive distance" between us and God: we lack the cognitive wherewithal to comprehend many of God's reasons for permitting evil. However, the defense developed here does not rest on claims about the knowledge we lack; my argument instead relies on the limited evidence that we do have concerning the reasons for which God might permit evil. (It's like skeptical theism, but without the skepticism. Just the theism.)

Liz Jackson, University of Notre Dame
Epistemic Oughts and Pascal's Wager

I argue that a popular objection to Pascal's Wager is not as prima facie plausible as it might seem. Pascal contends that the stakes involved in theistic questions give one a good reason to believe in God. One issue with this is that it seems impermissible to try to induce belief for non-epistemic reasons. In this paper, I first consider a few statements of the objection and attempt to clarify how it is supposed to create a problem for a wager. Then, I argue that this version of the objection fails because it relies on a false premise; I give several counterexamples to the premise. Finally, I consider a weaker version of the objection and offer a response on behalf of Pascal.

Alexander Jech, University of Notre Dame
Pascal and the Voiceless Inarticulacy of Despair

If God does not exist, can life be meaningful? Much recent discussion of the topic treats "meaning" as if it can be considered like any other topic, by consulting our intuitions and other standard methods. But it is not clear that this allows for the special kind of despair that gives rise to the sense of meaninglessness, or that way that such despair seems to rule out appeals to commonsense reasons. I examine meaninglessness as this appears in Pascal's conception of despair by sketching his conception of the human condition, the dynamic of disorientation by which meaninglessness takes hold, and the way that such meaninglessness is canceled by God. Grounding meaning by appeals to intuitions and apparent meaning in human life would be undermined by Pascalian disorientation, and so I conclude that those considering these questions ought to take more care in how they approach this question.

Joseph Jedwab, Kutztown University
God is Aspatial

I outline four ways for a spatial substance to be located at a spatial region. I apply this discussion to say how God is located if God is spatial. Finally, I give two arguments for the claim that God is strictly aspatial: one from the claim, for which I argue, that every spatial substance is material, and the other from the claim, for which I also argue, that no spatial substance is located at different regions at once.

Daniel M. Johnson, Shawnee State University
Three Kinds of Competitiveness

We seem to be of two minds about the trait of competitiveness. We admire great competitors, but we also can't seem to escape moral concerns about competitiveness. Why are we so ambivalent? The answer I will defend is that there are at least three distinct traits which all have something of a claim to the name "competitiveness." Two of those traits are virtues. The third is a virtue only if we consider only the narrow world of competitive athletics, abstracting away from the broader purposes and functions of human life; once we broaden our perspective to include all of the purposes and functions of human life, this third trait turns out to be a vice. So there are two virtues, and one vice, of competitiveness. And, interestingly, it is the vice which perhaps has the best claim to be called "competitiveness." This accounts for our deep ambivalence about competitiveness.

John A. Keller, Niagara University
Compositional Compatibilism

David Lewis and Peter van Inwagen defend seemingly revisionary ontologies. Van Inwagen's ontology does not include ordinary objects like cars, and Lewis's ontology includes unordinary objects like in-cars. These ontologies are surprising enough, but even more surprising is Lewis and van Inwagen's insistence that those ontologies are compatible with ordinary talk and thought about what exists. This paper defends that surprising claim. If this is correct, Lewis and van Inwagen's theories are not (in an important sense) revisionary at all, thus undermining one of the most important arguments for rejecting them—their conflict with a "common sense" ontology of ordinary objects. (This argument has been forcefully pressed by, e.g., Dan Korman and Eli Hirsch.) I call the thesis of this paper Compositional Compatibilism, since it entails that highly restricted or completely unrestricted theories of composition may be compatible with ordinary beliefs about what there is.

Lorraine Juliano Keller, Niagara University
A Controversial Premise of the Theistic Argument from Intentionality

This paper examines a controversial premise from a venerable argument for the existence of God, which Alvin Plantinga has dubbed 'The Theistic Argument from Intentionality' (hereafter 'TAI'). In essence, the TAI is an argument for the existence of God from the existence of propositions. The controversial premise states that propositions must be thoughts or at least be mind-dependent (i.e. thought of). This premise conflicts with the dominant conception of propositions in the analytic tradition—call it 'the Fregean conception'—according to which propositions are mind-independent. If the Fregean conception is correct, then an essential premise of the TAI is false, and the argument is not sound. However, in a recent monograph on propositions, Peter Hanks mounts a formidable attack on the Fregean conception. I evaluate Hanks' argument and discuss the impact of its success on the controversial premise of the TAI.

James S. Kintz, Saint Louis University
Forgiveness Then Satisfaction: Why the Order Matters For a Theory of the Atonement

The doctrine of the atonement is often understood as the satisfaction of Christ whereby our relation to God is restored after having been damaged by sin. Yet Scripture is not entirely clear as to what exactly Christ's satisfaction was or why his life, passion, death, and resurrection (hereafter referred to as the "atonement") accomplished this. Many commentators agree that the atonement involves forgiveness and satisfaction, but there is much disagreement as to which comes first: forgiveness or

satisfaction? Specifically, did Christ's atonement pay the moral debt of human sin, thereby permitting God to justly forgive humankind, or had God already forgiven us prior to Christ's atonement? Richard Swinburne argues that satisfaction must precede forgiveness, but, arguing with Thomas Aquinas, I will suggest that forgiveness is a species of love, and as such satisfaction is not required for the sake of earning forgiveness; instead, forgiveness can and should precede satisfaction. While this study will leave many issues surrounding the nature of Christ's atonement unaddressed, determining the correct order of forgiveness and satisfaction will help to reveal what the true nature of forgiveness is (as well as its relationship to works of satisfaction), and will put us on the right path to formulating a clear understanding of what Christ's atonement accomplished.

Elmar J. Kremer, University of Toronto
Divine Simplicity and Free Human Action: Barry Miller's Solution

The doctrine of divine simplicity, as Aquinas points out, implies that God causes everything that exists in any way. But does that implication leave any room for creaturely action, and, more specifically, free human action? This paper expounds and defends a solution developed by Barry Miller, based on the claim that God and creatures are causes in different senses of the word: God's simple causal action brings about its effect ex nihilo and never by acting on anything, whereas creatures never cause ex nihilo and always cause by acting on something. Consequently the causal action of God never interferes with or encroaches on human action, whether unfree or free.

Dan Linford, Christopher Newport University
An Incompatibility in William Lane Craig's Moral Argument and Anti-Platonism

William Lane Craig argues objective moral values and duties can only be explained if God exists. Meanwhile, Craig alleges platonism and Christian theism are incompatible and rejects platonism. Nonetheless, as I show in this paper, how Craig can simultaneously defend the moral argument and his antiplatonism is difficult to understand. For example, Craig argues we can know objective moral values and duties because they are self-evident, but maintains our mathematical discourse should be seen as figurative or fictional in order to avoid mathematical platonism. Aren't some mathematical statements at least as self-evidently literally true as some moral statements? Craig argues theistic activism that God necessarily creates abstracta undermines divine freedom, but maintains God necessarily creates some moral duties. I conclude Craig should give up his moral argument or his antiplatonism, find new defenses of either, or reject both platonism and the moral argument.

Caleb Miller, Messiah College
Why Same-Sex Marriage is not Christian Marriage

The Christian case for same-sex marriage has typically affirmed, but largely ignored, much of the Christian understanding of marriage. According to the Christian faith, marriage is extremely important. Sexual relationships that count as marriages are good and noble, while other sexual relationships are morally deficient. Most Christian advocates of same-sex marriage offer a case for including same-sex relationships among the good and noble relationships, but have largely ignored the issues of what, given the expanded view of marriage, makes marriage morally important and why, given that view, other non-marital relationships are morally deficient. The historic Christian understanding of marriage between a man and a woman supports good explanations of the importance of marriage and the moral distinction

between marriage and non-marriage. I argue further that accepting same-sex marriage deprives one of any good reasons for thinking that marriage is very important and that other consensual sexual relationships should be excluded from marriage as morally deficient. Any reasons for including same-sex relationships in marriage are also reasons for including other consensual sexual relationships. Any reasons good enough to justify excluding other consensual sexual relationships from marriage, are rationally committed to better reasons for excluding same-sex relationships from marriage. But if marriage were such that nothing could be rationally excluded from it, it couldn't be very important whether a consensual relationship is a marriage or not. Indeed, "marriage" with that feature is not plausibly regarded as marriage, and any sexual ethic based on it is not plausibly regarded as Christian.

Andrew Moon, Rutgers University
The Independence Principle and a New Way to Remain Steadfast in Disagreements about Theism

An important principle in the epistemology of disagreement is Independence, which states, "In evaluating the epistemic credentials of another's expressed belief about P, in order to determine how (or whether) to modify my own belief about P, I should do so in a way that doesn't rely on the reasoning behind my initial belief about P" (Christensen 2011, 1-2). Although I agree with the general spirit behind Independence, I believe that it requires some revision. In this paper, I present new counterexamples to Independence, draw some lessons from those counterexamples, and develop a more plausible and widely applicable version of Independence. Lastly, I apply one of those lessons to showing a new way to remain steadfast in the face of two disagreements about belief in God.

Joshua Mugg, Indiana University Kokomo
How to think of a Circle with Corners: Assessing the Value of God's Existence

Guy Kahane (2011, 2012) asks an axiological question: what value would (or does) God's existence bestow on the world? Supposing God's existence is a matter of necessity, this axiological question faces a problem because answering it will require assessing the truth-value of counterpossibles. I argue that Kahane, van Inwagen, Moser, and Davis and Franks fail in their attempts to render the axiological question substantive. I then offer my own solution by bringing work in cognitive psychology and philosophy of mind to bear on the possibility of assessing counterpossibles. I argue that humans can engage in counterpossible reasoning by 'accepting' or 'supposing' that the antecedent is true and 'screening out' those beliefs that would result in contradiction when combined in inferencing with the acceptance or supposition. I conclude by outlining some implications for the axiological question.

John Pittard, Yale University
Evil and God's Toxin Puzzle

I argue that Kavka's toxin puzzle raises a problem for the "Responsibility Theodicy," which holds that the reason God typically does not intervene to stop the evil effects of our actions is that such intervention would undermine the possibility of our being responsible for overcoming and averting evil. This theodicy seems to require that God be able to do what the agent in Kavka's toxin story cannot do: stick by a plan to do some action at a future time even though when that time comes, there will be no good reason for performing that action (and very good reason not to). I consider "metaphysical," "moral," and "decisiontheoretic"

approaches to solving this problem, and discuss some of the limitations faced by each approach.

Joshua Rasmussen, Azusa Pacific University
Could God Fail to Exist?

I use developments in modal reasoning to promote progress in our thinking about the nature of God's existence. I divide my project into two parts. First, I assess reasons to think that God is not a metaphysically necessary being. I consider Hume's conceivability-based argument, and then I pay attention to Swinburne's neo-Humean argument for the conclusion that no existential sentence, such as the sentence, "God exists," could express a necessary truth. I aim to show that such arguments fall prey to a fatal "parity" objection. In part two, I give an argument schema designed to illustrate a general strategy for motivating the necessary existence of God using modal logic.

Michael Rota, University of St. Thomas (MN)
God and the Multiverse

In this paper I present a novel reply to the multiverse objection to the fine-tuning argument. Suppose that our universe exists within a multiverse. Even so, the multiverse itself might be the product of intelligent design. If we exist in an atheistic multiverse, then the proportion of life-permitting universes will be very small. But if we exist in a multiverse created by an intelligent agent, it should be expected that the proportion of life-permitting universes will not be nearly so small. So the proportion of life-permitting universes will be much higher in a theistic multiverse than in an atheistic multiverse. This in turn implies that the epistemic probability that our universe would be life-permitting is much higher on a theistic version of the multiverse hypothesis than on an atheistic version. Thus, even if there are many universes, the evidence of fine-tuning favors theism over atheism.

Jonathan Rutledge, University of Oklahoma
The Parent Analogy: A Response to Dougherty

In a 2012 article, Trent Dougherty argues that a common motivation for skeptical theism, known as the Parent Analogy (PA), fails. PA states, roughly, that the relationship between God and human persons is analogous to the relationship between parents and their young children. And moreover, just as many evils are permitted by parents for the sake of goods which are obscure to their children, so too many evils are permitted by God for goods which are likewise obscure. Dougherty criticizes this analogy for failing to account for the fact that God's great ability, intelligence and goodness will increase the likelihood that he would make such goods transparent to us. In response to Dougherty, I demonstrate that his argument rests on two mistakes: first, an incorrect assessment of the conclusion's strength in PA and second, a failure to see how a simple modification to PA can render it much more plausible.

Philip Shadd, Institute for Christian Studies and Redeemer University College
The Ineliminable God of Romans 13

Romans 13 declares that human governments "have been instituted by God". In The Mighty and the Almighty (Cambridge UP, 2012), Nicholas Wolterstorff suggests this means simply that unjust

governments wrong God in addition to citizens. It does not mean that political authority cannot be explained without God.

But this is too weak a reading of Romans 13, and Wolterstorff's mistake is based on an impoverished understanding of political authority. It does not consist solely in the right to issue commands. It also involves a right to be obeyed even when commands are unjust; a right to be reformed within existing structures; and a right to be viewed deferentially by citizens. These are aspects of authority that Wolterstorff, and authority theorists generally, overlook. They undermine Wolterstorff's claim that political authority can be equally well explained "from below" as "from above". God may be needed after all.

Jarod Sickler, University of Rochester
Old Fashioned Metaphysics

Jonathan Schaer has led a resurgence of what he calls "traditional metaphysics." Specifically in his "On What Grounds What," he argues that Quinean-style existence questions are trivial and uninteresting while questions of grounding and fundamentality are non-trivial and interesting. Thus, the metaphysician should be focused not on existence questions, but on questions of grounding, fundamentality, and grounding relations. In this paper I argue that, far from being uninteresting and trivial, Quinean-style existence questions are central to metaphysics. In order to do this, I first argue that the Aristotle, a paradigm traditional metaphysician, did not trivialize existence questions. Then, I argue that Schaer's "triviality arguments" are anything but, using the debate over fictional characters as an illustration. Lastly, I respond to the principle objection to my argument, namely that I have smuggled in grounding notions into the description of the entities in question.

Nicholas Sooy, Messiah College
Cosmological Argument for the Trinity

The cosmological argument is one of the most famous arguments for the existence of God, especially among Christians, and yet it concludes with a deity which is not distinctly Trinitarian, but is most plausibly Unitarian. I argue that the cosmological argument, when properly understood, implies a Trinitarian source for the cosmos. The cosmological argument proposes one necessary condition for the existence of the cosmos; however, this condition is not sufficient, and two more conditions are required. The paper's argument is first given informally by way of analogy. The argument is then given formally using modal logic. The goal of the paper is not to defend the cosmological argument, but to argue that those who accept it should be Trinitarian. I argue that the Trinitarian doctrine is logically consistent, and entailed by the notion of a divine source for the cosmos. The argument also answers several theological questions unrelated to creation.

Peter A. Sutton, Virginia Union University
Biting Gaunilo's Bullet

Gaunilo assumes that there is no greatest conceivable island, and Anselm seems to follow him in this assumption. But the option was open for Anselm (and remains open for us) to bite the bullet and 'give him his island.' I argue that such a response is perfectly reasonable for a Platonist like Anselm, and that even a theist who isn't a Platonist can tolerate the island as a fairly minor addition his or her ontology. I also argue against Plantinga that 'the greatest conceivable island' is just as sensible a concept

as 'the greatest conceivable being,' and make some suggestions about what objective greatness for an island consists in.

Philip Swenson, Rutgers University
Normative Principles for No-Best-World

In this paper I will discuss the following question: Assuming there is no best possible world, which moral principles govern God's creation of a world? Along the way I explore some implications that potential answers might have for the problem of evil.

A.P. Taylor, North Dakota State University
Theism Without Modal or Moral Collapse

In response to the Modal Problem of Evil, Klaus Kraay (2011) sets up a dilemma: either the theist must maintain that even an Anselmian God is incapable of preventing the existence of very bad worlds (thus embracing what we might call moral collapse) as Almeida (2011) does; or she must embrace modal collapse, and accept that some of the things she thought were genuinely possible, such as the existence of bad worlds, are not strictly possible (as Morris 1987 does). Drawing on the resources of the Hybrid Modal Realism (HMR) view of Francesco Berto (2010), I develop Theistic Modal Hybridism, a no collapse, theistic, account of modality according to which bad worlds are to be as ersatz constructs with no underlying concrete ontology. This allows us to save our intuitions about modal discourse, and the embrace Anselmian theism, while not worrying that there are worlds of objectionable suffering.

Jim Taylor, Westmont College
Can Faith be Knowledge?

In the preface to the second edition of the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant states, "I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith." The obvious implication is that knowledge and faith are mutually exclusive. I'll call this the "exclusivity thesis." The exclusivity thesis is widely presupposed among both Christians and non-Christians. But I will argue that the biblical position on faith, at least as expressed in such key verses as Hebrews 11:1, entails that the exclusivity thesis is false. On the biblical view of faith, faith and knowledge are not mutually exclusive attitudes. Rather, what the Bible says about faith implies that faith can be a kind of propositional knowledge. Or so I will argue. I will also argue that there have been actual instances of faith as propositional knowledge: Some people have had faith that p that is also knowledge that p.

Micah D. Tillman, George Washington University
How a Flaw in Augustine's Proof of God's Existence Forced Descartes to Write the Meditations

Descartes' Meditations on First Philosophy is a rewriting or "adaptation" of Augustine's On Free Choice of the Will, Book II. The present paper offers a novel analysis of the texts' parallel structures to defend this thesis, then employs that analysis to explain why the parallel has been overlooked. Fixing a serious flaw in Augustine's first proof of God's existence required Descartes to move the proof of external objects to the end of the argument. In spite of this change, however, the two texts are strikingly similar, and thus we must rethink both the nature and mission of modern philosophy.

Kevin Vandergriff, BIOLA University
The World Is Not Enough…Neither Are Levels I-IV

Several properties of our universe have to be fine-tuned in order for embodied moral agents to exist somewhere. The evidence for fine-tuning is comprised of: the laws of nature, the constants of nature, and the initial conditions. One scientific explanation of the fine-tuning data on offer today invokes chance, and an explanatory entity known as the multiverse, which can have up to four levels. In general, each level postulates that the observable universe is not the only one there is, that in fact there are countless other types of universes out there. Currently, our best scientific theories only support the existence of Level I. Even if we assume that any level from I-IV exists, no one level would fully explain the fine-tuning data by chance. This implies that the fine-tuning data will not be demystified by any potential future evidence for the existence of any level of the multiverse.

Sungwon Woo, University of Maryland
Laws of Nature and Benevolent Dictatorship

In this paper I show an impossibility result for the Best System Analysis (BSA), the most popular regularist account of laws of nature. According to the BSA, laws are regularities in the best system maximizing scientific virtues such as simplicity, strength, and accuracy. Drawing on formal tools in social choice theory, I will argue that the procedure of determining the best system is susceptible to the well-known impossibility theorem in social choice. This will pose a serious threat to the BSA. On the one hand, to avoid the impossibility result the BSA needs to invoke the notion of benevolent dictatorship, which however is inconsistent with the BSA's metaphysical framework. On the other hand, if the BSA advocates accommodate benevolent dictatorship in laws of nature, it will render their account less coherent than the theistic view. There seems no way out of this problem for the BSA.

David Wood
Flourishing, Fine-Tuning, and the Bayesian Balancing Game: A Tale of Two Drapers

Various versions of Paul Draper's "Bayesian" arguments from evil attempt to show that certain evidence statements about pain and pleasure are much more surprising on theism than on serious alternative hypotheses. These evidence statements thus favor rival hypotheses over theism, and, all else held equal, theism is probably false. Draper applies a similar challenge to naturalism, arguing that moral agency and cosmological fine-tuning are much more surprising on naturalism than on a serious alternative hypothesis (theism). Since theism and naturalism face similar evidential challenges, Draper concludes that, in the absence of a tiebreaker, an agnostic stance is warranted. However, via internal balancing, the two bodies of evidence can be shown to offset one another and to undermine his prima facie reason for rejecting theism. Without this prima facie reason, we are left with a trivial appeal to evidentialism. According to Draper, theists should only believe in God if there's good evidence