

GUEST EDITORIAL: THE RETURN OF NATURAL THEOLOGY

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It is customary for philosophical ideas to ebb and flow. Often philosophical views (assuming they are any good) do not get refuted, they merely get run over by other ideas. But reducing philosophy to mere changes in sociological winds and people's tastes would obviously be unreasonable. Arguments count and the progress in philosophy is slow, but possible. Natural theology is a good example of how philosophical ideas are treated by history. There have been times when natural theology has been popular, and times when it has been perceived as obsolete, confused, and even heretical. The reasons for these changes are legion. Acknowledging that other traditions of enquiry have each an interesting story to tell, it is ultimately a task of philosophy to fathom when an argument was in fact refuted and when it was just disregarded for other reasons.

This issue of the *European Journal of Philosophy of Religion* collects together the papers delivered at the 2nd Helsinki Analytic Theology Workshop (HEAT) that was held in the Faculty of Theology, Helsinki in January 2016 with the support of Areiopagi – project funded by the John Templeton Foundation and the Reason and Religious Recognition Centre of Excellence of the Academy of Finland. In addition to the participants' papers, we have brought in three additional contributors, Trent Dougherty, Brandon Rickabaugh and Kelly James Clark. The topic of our workshop, 'Investigating Natural Theology' was chosen based on the apparent international interest in the theme.

The last golden age of natural theology was in the 19th century, when special attention was paid to biological design arguments. However, Darwin made these arguments obsolete, and later currents in European philosophy and theology made natural theology look philosophically futile and meaningless from the religious point of view. The renaissance of philosophical theology after the 1970s in Europe and the US caused philosophers and theologians to reassess what had in fact happened to natural theology arguments, and they found that the news of its death had been greatly exaggerated. For

example, both Oxford and Cambridge University Presses have recently published large handbooks on the topic. However, contemporary philosophical theology cannot be made equivalent to the project of natural theology since, for example, one major current within it, Reformed Epistemology, has not traditionally considered these arguments of great value within its own epistemological project. Nonetheless, in the wake of the rise of philosophical theology and philosophy of religion in the end of 20th century, countless books and articles have been written that can be classified as natural theology or comments on natural theology.

Our approach in these papers is mostly meta-theoretical. We focus on the project of natural theology, and ask, for example, what kind of arguments are offered against it, what kind of intuitions lie behind it, and what might be the benefits of engaging in thinking about these arguments. The breakdown of the contents of articles is as follows.

Olli-Pekka Vainio provides a recent history of natural theology from the 19th century to our day. During the last 150 years, theologians and philosophers have adopted various attitudes towards natural theology. Roman Catholics have typically been more favourable, whereas Protestants, following the surprising combination of Barth and logical positivism, have been critical towards it. The article offers a simple set of presuppositions that characterize contemporary forms of natural theology and assesses two basic counter-arguments against it.

Rope Kojonen assesses in more detail six types of critiques against natural theology. He shows how natural theology arguments have evolved in response to philosophical and theological critiques of, for example, Hume, Kant, Darwin, and Barth. As a result, contemporary natural theology is a rather diverse phenomenon and in the absence of good counter-arguments against the project, its popularity is not likely to decrease.

Trent Dougherty and Brandon Rickabaugh offer a response to Paul K. Moser's project of religious epistemology that has been critical towards natural theology. They argue, contra Moser, that natural theology does not necessarily involve intellectual vices, such as epistemic pride and arrogance, but can be seen as an act of epistemic humility, which seeks to be attentive to the available evidence.

Ilmari Karimies and Panu-Matti Pöykkö examine two different streams in theology that are typically seen as hostile to natural theology. Karimies analyses the writings of the Reformer Martin Luther, whose thinking has influenced many contemporary thinkers arguing for an anti-metaphysical understanding of religion and against the role of natural theology in religious forms of life. Going against superficial readings of Luther, Karimies argues that Luther, in fact, has room for natural theology in his religious vision.

Pöykkö offers a close reading of the French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion, who works in a similar framework to many anti-metaphysical Lutherans: in order for revelation to be genuine, it needs to be freed from categories that might turn God into an idol. Pöykkö goes on to show how Marion's attempt to guard God from idolatry and onto-theology does ultimately require some help from the categories he tries to avoid. How can we know that we address God and not an idol, if we lack ways to talk about God? In the end, Marion's project is understandable only within a robust Christian theological tradition.

Amber Griffioen examines the philosophy and phenomenon of religious experience and how it is used in natural theology arguments. In this vein, she argues that natural theology can have affective, aesthetic, moral, and even liturgical functions. Therefore, there is no reason to think about natural theology as a mere intellectual exercise. Griffioen draws our attention to the materially mediated nature of religious experience, which takes seriously our bodily existence and the reality of lived religion.

Helen de Cruz and Johan de Smedt, and Kelly James Clark investigate in their papers the cognitive foundation of our reasoning about natural theology arguments. De Cruz and De Smedt argue that the intuitions that support the natural theology arguments are the same as those we use in our everyday reasoning. This may partly explain their intuitive force although this does not as such settle the issue concerning their epistemic value. They also evaluate the role of cognitive biases and background assumptions at work in the reasoning of natural theology.

Clark offers a critical reading of some of the recent studies that link, on the one hand, atheism and rationality, and, on the other hand, theism and the lack of rational inference. He argues how the relation between intuitions and arguments is often treated simplistically, and how they cannot be neatly separated in human cognition. Therefore, neither atheism nor theism can be

classified ultimately as purely rational or having epistemic advantage since the same intuitions function on the background of all our thinking.

In the final article, we move from the analysis of natural theology to natural theology proper. Mats Wahlberg offers a refined version of the Leibnizian cosmological argument against physicalism according to which either the totality of physical beings have a non-physical cause or a necessary being exists. He argues that physicalism faces a dilemma where it needs to either deny the causal closure of physics or admit the existence of (possibly physical) necessary being.

We hope that these contributions will further the understanding of natural theology and the nature of religious reasoning in general.