

7-1-1991

## Book Review: God, Suffering, And Solipsism

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### Recommended Citation

Keller, James (1991) "Book Review: God, Suffering, And Solipsism," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 8 : Iss. 3 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol8/iss3/11>

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The book contains also a brief appendix in which Cassirer offers some further reflections on St. Paul's relationship to his fellow Jews, an index of biblical references, and a sonnet by Grace Luckin composed at the time of Cassirer's death on February 20, 1979, which appears as the book's frontispiece. Thomas F. Torrance, according to editor Ronald Weitzman, was instrumental in helping to bring the manuscript of this book to final publication, as well as the late Rev. Dr. Eric Abbott, the former Dean of Westminster, who described Heinz Cassirer as "*sui generis*" and persisted in urging that his later writings and translations must be published.

*Grace and Law* offers an altogether fascinating and instructive study. For anyone the least bit interested in the problems of ethics or moral theology, or in the practical philosophy of Kant, or in Pauline theology of grace and law and its Old Testament background, this book would make profitable reading.

*God, Suffering, and Solipsism*, by Clement Dore. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989. Pp. x and 120, \$35.00 cloth.

JAMES A. KELLER, Wofford College

This slim volume provides an argument against the skeptical thesis that no one is justified in believing that there exists an external world beyond the present states of that individual's consciousness. Its strategy is similar to Descartes' way of resolving a similar doubt in his *Meditations*: first, establish that God (a being than which no greater being is logically possible) exists; and second, show that this truth, along with certain others that do not depend on the assumption that an external world exists, entail that such a world exists. But though this overall strategy is reminiscent of Descartes, the arguments are much more fully developed than Descartes' and differ from his in several important ways.

As one would suspect from the purpose of the book as well as from the characterization of God given above, the one argument for the existence of God which Dore discusses is the ontological argument. The first four chapters are devoted to articulating and defending certain versions of it. Chapter 1 presents a modal version. But it leaves undefended the claim that God as defined in the argument is a logically possible being. Dore employs two strategies to defend this claim: in Chapter 2 he provides a non-modal ontological argument, which does not depend on the assumption that God is a logically possible being; and in Chapter 4 he explicitly defends the claim that God is a logically possible being. Chapter 3 is devoted to a critique of what

Dore calls parodies of the ontological argument; such parodies are attempts like Gaunilo's to show that the argument must be fallacious by constructing arguments with similar form to show that such entities as "minor deities," a "Super-Satan," and a "maximally nutritious food" must exist. Dore attempts to refute each of these by showing that the purported entity is not logically possible.

Dore next turns to a defense of the claim that God exists against what he calls the most formidable argument against it: the atheistic argument from suffering. He considers two versions of the free-will defense—those of Plantinga (in Chapter 5) and of Hick (in Chapter 6), agreeing with them at points and supplementing them at others. He finds that they have some plausibility, but he later concludes that they are not the best defense against the argument from suffering. So Dore proposes (in Chapter 7) a different line of defense: all the evil that occurs is "logically necessary for indiscernible, valuable ends" (p. 71). The defense of this claim against various objections leads to its fuller and more precise reformulation. He claims that there is some one great good E for which the following complex state of affairs is logically necessary: "the for-the-most-part unimpeded operation of scientific laws on the matter which the universe contains" (p. 73) plus "virtuous free choices having to do with suffering" (p. 80)—i.e., free choices which may be made in such a way as to be virtuous, but which necessarily involve a capacity for wrongdoing that frequently gives rise to suffering. Dore points out that this last condition does not depend on the free-will defense, for it does not presuppose that free will itself is a great enough good to outweigh suffering; Dore's claim instead is that it is logically necessary for E. This line of defense also plays a key role in Dore's argument against skepticism.

In Chapter 8 Dore first explicitly discusses perceptual skepticism. He states an argument for it and notes that it depends on the claim that all we are ever non-inferentially aware of, even in veridical perceptions (if there are any), is seeming perceptions. Since this is itself a controversial thesis, Dore defends it against various analyses of "seeming to perceive" which deny that this concept refers to an experience involved in all perception. For example, he considers the suggestions that "I seem to see" is equivalent to "Maybe I see" or to "I am inclined to doubt that I see."

Having argued that perceptual skepticism is a genuine problem, not to be dismissed by linguistic analysis, Dore provides his own response (in Chapter 9), drawing together a number of considerations from earlier chapters. The essential strategy of this chapter is this. "God exists" and "My suffering exists" are both knowable without presupposing the existence of an external world and appear to be logically inconsistent. Their consistency can be saved by positing that there is some valuable end which God wishes to obtain and for which my suffering is logically necessary. But Dore had earlier argued

for the truth of the proposition that "It is frequently morally admissible for me to avoid suffering if possible and to attempt to relieve it when it occurs." Yet this proposition appears inconsistent with the claim that "My suffering is logically necessary for a valuable end which God wants to obtain." Dore argues that the best way of resolving this seeming inconsistency makes reference to an external world.

Dore's book, though brief, is not easy. His arguments are often complex and subtle. And they deal with several diverse topics—the ontological argument and the argument from suffering as well as perceptual skepticism. Cartesian-like arguments against perceptual skepticism are not common today, so I have tried to indicate in some detail the course of his argument, for his book may be of interest to people who are interested in the ontological argument or the problem of evil rather than in perceptual skepticism.

One might ask two different sorts of questions in evaluating Dore's book: (1) Are there significant points where his argument needs further elaboration or defense? and (2) Even if there are not, what has Dore accomplished? I shall respond to the latter question first. Because Dore has constructed an argument against perceptual skepticism which does not presuppose any knowledge of an external world, has he constructed an *a priori* argument against it? No, for his argument (i) depends on the knowledge that he suffers and (ii) takes the form of a claim that the hypothesis that an external world exists is part of the best explanation of how certain apparently inconsistent propositions, which do not involve an external world, can be reconciled. Since it also depends on knowing (or at least being justified in believing) certain moral propositions, it presupposes that the truth of these propositions can be known without presupposing the existence of an external world. For these reasons, he has also not constructed an argument which purports to show that it is logically necessary that perceptual skepticism is false. What he does claim to have done is to have provided an argument which increases the plausibility of the hypothesis that there is an external world (p. 110). But whether, and to what extent, it increases the plausibility of that hypothesis depends on whether, and to what extent, its premises (and its reasoning) are more plausible than other reasons for rejecting perceptual skepticism. That plausibility itself depends largely on Dore's success in establishing certain points in earlier chapters which are essential steps in his overall argument. This brings us to what I termed the first question, which concerns the details of his argument.

It seems to me that there are a number of places where important points in his argument are either undefended or insufficiently defended. Of course, one could make this claim about any philosophical work, but the brevity and the scope of this book combine to make this problem more serious than in many other books. For example, Dore admits that his argument to prove that God

is possible depends on his being able to refute the idea that "exist" is not a descriptive predicate, but he devotes only about a page to refuting this common idea (p. 19). His strategy is to claim that "exist" seems descriptive when the grammatical subject is a proper name and that the burden of proof is on his opponent to show that "exist" has a different meaning when the grammatical subject is a common noun. But when we consider the point of saying "Ronald Reagan exists" (his example), we may well conclude that "exist" here does make a different point (have a different meaning) than it does in "Cows exist." Frequently his argument turns on undefended claims about what is better and on assumptions about what is logically possible. He asserts that God is greater if it is logically impossible for any being to come close to God in the number and degree of its perfections (p. 24). (To counter the claim that God is greater if God could create such a being, he replies that doing so would lessen God's perfection. It is not obvious to me that this is so. I wonder too how one individuates God's perfections.) His argument in Chapter 4 depends on defining a number of artificial concepts; I suspect that Dore's opponent would doubt the logical possibility of these concepts, but Dore never considers this problem. Certainly, my asking these questions does not show that Dore is wrong in any of these claims, but I do think it shows that he might well have devoted more attention to their defense.

*The Specter of the Absurd*, by **Donald A. Crosby**. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988. Pp. IX and 456, \$59.50 (cloth), \$19.95 (paper).

LOUIS DUPRÉ, Yale University

This insightful, balanced, and clearly written study of the intellectual sources of modern nihilism stands out by the width of its range. In the first part the author distinguishes no less than five different types of nihilism. *Political* nihilism began in the revolutionary societies of mid-nineteenth century Russia; *moral* nihilism rejects all moral principles or denies that they can be rationally justified; *epistemological* nihilism either relativizes truth claims or denies even commonality of *meaning* among different cultures; *cosmic* nihilism assumes the cosmos to be devoid of intrinsic intelligibility or at least of human value; to *existential* nihilism, the most fundamental and in common usage often the only known type, human existence itself appears absurd. All of these varieties are duly illustrated by texts taken from representative philosophical or literary sources. Obviously, then, this study extends the limits of its subject well beyond the traditional definition. By more conventional standards most of what the author describes as epistemological nihilism and