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Philosophers of religion have traditionally focused their attention on belief in God and assessed such belief in terms of it having some epistemic status like “rationality” or “probability”, or indeed by determining whether or not it constitutes knowledge. In this paper, I focus my attention on the non-doxastic attitude of *hope* and formulate reasons for whether or not we should hope for God. In light of these reasons, I formulate hopeism as a research programme according to which we should develop concepts of God by starting with the question of what type of being would be worthy of our utmost hope. I compare this view with belief-based concepts of God, such as perfect being theism and what I call worship-worthiness theism. Arguably, the greatest benefit of choosing hopeism is that it is inclusive. Most atheists as well as agnostics and theists can endorse the view. I also suggest a number of directions in which hopeism can be developed.

Introduction

Philosophers of religion have traditionally focused their attention on belief in God and assessed such belief in terms of it having some epistemic status like “rationality” or “probability”, or indeed by determining whether or not it constitutes knowledge.¹ In this paper, I focus my attention on the non-doxastic attitude of *hope* and formulate reasons for whether or not hoping that God exists would be reasonable.² These reasons are not epistemic, but rather axiological. That is to say, they are reasons purporting to show that the world would be better off (more valuable) or worse off (less valuable) if God were to exist, compared with how it would be if God did not exist.³ To some, it might seem obvious that it would be better if God were to exist, compared with the opposite. Yet it turns out that this is not obvious.

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I take the following approach. First, under the heading “Hoping that God Exists”, I present three reasons for hoping for God. The second of these reasons is a novel one, while the others are present in the recent literature on the axiological value of theism. Under the heading “Hoping that God does not exist”, I then present three axiological reasons for why it would be better if God were not to exist. Finally, I suggest that we evaluate these reasons, not by arguing against each of the reasons presented, but instead by taking the more modest line that, if the reasons are correct, we should revise our concept of God. This leads me to present what I call “hopeism” as a research programme. I argue that philosophers of religion should formulate and assess concepts of God by reflecting on whether or not the God they describe is worth hoping for. They should not begin by asking which God would be the most perfect one⁴ or even which God would be worthy of adoration and worship,⁵ even if these other questions also are relevant, interconnected and interesting. Finally, I reflect on possible directions for hopeism and on the merits of the research programme. In particular, I argue that the greatest benefit of hopeism is that it has the potential to broaden research on conceptions of God and that it is inclusive. Most atheists as well as agnostics and theists can endorse the view. I conclude that hopeism contributes to a much-needed renewal of philosophy of religion.

I use the term “God” as a title. When presenting the axiological reasons for hoping and not hoping for God and unless specifying otherwise, I presuppose that the titleholder of “God”, as a minimum, is all-powerful, all-knowing, perfectly good, the creator of the world and wants a loving relationship with all created human beings.⁶ A theist believes that there is a titleholder of “God”, an atheist denies it and an agnostic withholds judgment on whether there is such a titleholder. However, towards the end of the paper it should be clear that I am open to revising, or indeed think one should revise, the concept of God by asking the question of whether or not the God presupposed is worth hoping for.

Hoping that God exists

I think there are quite a few “pro-theistic” reasons for why, all else being equal, the existence of God would be more valuable than God’s non-existence and that we therefore should hope for God.⁷ Arguably one of the best of these reasons is that God’s existence functions as a “meta-physical guarantee against gratuitous suffering”, to use the words of Jimmy Alfonso Licon. That is to say, if God were to exist, then all

cases of suffering in the world would be necessary for greater goods.⁸ One way to gain a clearer understanding of what Licon means is to consider how William Rowe thinks theists should try to answer his now classic formulation of the evidential argument from evil. The following is a shortened version of Rowe's argument:

- (1) There are cases of gratuitous suffering.
- (2) If God were to exist, there would be no cases of gratuitous suffering.

Therefore:

- (3) God does not exist.⁹

Rowe correctly points out that the argument is valid and that premise (2) follows from the definition of God that he uses. More precisely, it follows from the following premises:

- (4) A perfectly good God does not want gratuitous suffering in the world.
- (5) An all-powerful God can prevent all cases of gratuitous suffering in the world.
- (6) An all-knowing God is aware of all gratuitous suffering in the world.

Instead of quarrelling with the support for (2), Rowe proposes that theists could try to answer the argument by denying premise (1) and conclusion (3) and by turning it upside down. Using such a procedure, one arrives at the following inverted argument:

- (3*) God exists.
- (2) If God were to exist, there would be no cases of gratuitous suffering.

Therefore:

- (1*) There are *no* cases of gratuitous suffering.

This argument is also valid. Since (2) still follows from (4), (5) and (6), Rowe goes on to argue that theists only need to produce arguments for (3*), that is for the existence of God. Standard arguments for that conclusion would include “moral arguments”, “cosmological arguments”, and “design arguments”.¹⁰ The idea here is that the evidence (in the form of arguments) for (3*) could be stronger than Rowe’s own argument from evil.¹¹

I think Rowe’s approach is an interesting one indeed, but here I just want to recognize that the argument from (3*) to (1*) gives us a reason to hope for God, precisely because God guarantees that there is no gratuitous suffering. We could call it *the reason from no gratuitous suffering*. In other words, even if one finds it difficult to believe in God in light of the evidential argument from evil and even if one thinks that Rowe’s proposed counterargument from (3*) to (1*) would in the end fail, one could, and perhaps should, at least hope that God exists.¹²

The second reason concerns what Christian theists at any rate would generally regard as being the meaning of life, i.e. that which makes human life valuable and worthwhile.¹³ For Christian theists, a necessary requirement for such a life would be to meet God’s purpose of having a loving relationship with God.¹⁴

Moreover, Thaddeus Metz points out that if God, or in particular a loving relationship with God, is necessary for a meaningful life, then there must be something about God that cannot be found in the rest of the world. He writes:

In looking for an acceptable explanation of why God alone could make our lives meaningful, we must appeal to features that cannot be found anywhere but in God. Again, if our lives acquire significance just to the extent that we have a proper relationship with God, then to explain why God is central to life’s meaning we must appeal to features which only God can manifest.¹⁵

Now, I think Metz is correct, and it also seems obvious that when we look at the definition of God used here, there is no particular divine attribute that is qualitatively unique. Humans also are good (at least to some degree), have a certain amount of power and are to some extent knowledgeable. Therefore, if a loving relationship with God could constitute a meaningful life, then so could a relationship between human persons. To be in a loving relationship with other human beings could then serve as an atheistic (or naturalistic) definition of what constitutes a meaningful life.¹⁶

However, even if God's attributes are not qualitatively unique, they are quantitatively greater than our human attributes. Indeed, based on the definition God as maximally good, maximally powerful and maximally knowledgeable. A relationship with such a wonderful being for eternity would certainly be far greater and far more valuable than any relationship between humans. A second reason for hoping for God would therefore be that the existence of God gives us humans the possibility of having a more meaningful or valuable life. There are, of course, other, alternative answers to the question of what makes life meaningful, but most people would arguably agree that loving relationships and in particular loving relationships with perfectly good beings would add value to their lives. I will call the reason proposed here *the extra meaningful life reason*.

Another related reason concerns the *objective* meaning of life. Susan Wolf presents this reason well (even though she ultimately rejects it):

[A] life can be meaningful only if it can mean something to someone, and not just to *someone*, but to someone other than oneself and indeed someone of more intrinsic or ultimate value than oneself ... If there is no God, then human life, each human life, must be objectively meaningless, because if there is no God, there is no appropriate being for whom we could have meaning.¹⁷

The idea here is that only God is the source of objective meaning, because, without God, the higher standard by which our life can be valued evaporates. All we have left are our human subjective standards. Hence, not only is, say, a loving relationship with God more valuable than loving relationships between human beings; without God every human life is objectively meaningless. On the other hand, if God were to exist, there would be an objective standard by which our life can be valued. I will call this reason *the objective meaning reason*.

We thus have three axiological pro-theistic reasons for hoping that God exists. The first is that God would function as a metaphysical guarantee against gratuitous suffering, the second is that God's existence would make possible an extra meaningful or valuable life through a relationship with Him as a perfectly good and loving being and the third is that only God could make life objectively meaningful or valuable. However, there are also reasons suggesting that we should not hope for God.

Hoping that God does not exist

It might seem obvious that the world would be a better place if God were to exist, but there are actually quite a number of reasons for why the existence of God would make things worse and that we therefore should not hope for God at all. I will present three such anti-theistic reasons.¹⁸

Recently, these anti-theistic reasons have received considerable attention, especially after the publication of Thomas Nagel's *The Last Word*, from which the following passage about fear of religion is worth quoting at length:

In speaking of the fear of religion, I don't mean to refer to the entirely reasonable hostility towards certain established religions and religious institutions, in virtue of their objectionable moral doctrines, social policies, and political influences. Nor am I referring to the association of many religious beliefs with superstition and the acceptance of evident empirical falsehoods. I am talking about something much deeper – namely, the fear of religion itself. I speak from experience, being strongly subject to this fear myself: I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people that I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope that there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that.¹⁹

Nagel thinks this "fear of religion" has pernicious consequences for our intellectual life. More specifically, he believes that it is responsible for much of the ill-advised reductionism and scientism that we see today.²⁰ However, there could be another concern associated with Nagel's fear of religion. According to this concern, the theistic worldview in particular depicts a morally flawed state of affairs. Here is how Graeme McLean presents this concern, which he equates with Nagel:

Nagel himself refers to his fear of religion as a "cosmic authority problem." But there is perhaps a creditable construct that we can place on this, for it might be taken to suggest that the desire should be thought of as springing from a concern for human autonomy. And autonomy is surely a good thing. Something that we very

probably desire. But on the Christian picture we are answerable to – indeed we belong to – an authority whom we have not appointed. It is this person who will determine our destiny. This person, in fact, can control everything about us and everything we do. These features, it might be felt, which are inconsistent with desirable autonomy, and the embrace of atheism is accordingly described by some people as a *liberation*.²¹

Similarly, Paul Moser also interprets Nagel's fear as a fear of an authoritative God and believes that this sort of fear is widespread today and also associates it with a fear of losing one's own autonomy. He writes:

[Nagel'] fear seems widespread among humans and seems to arise from human fear of losing our own supposed lordship over our life. A philosopher might have this fear of losing "autonomy," whatever that slippery term connotes. Wilful children are good at exhibiting this fear, and adults can be too.²²

The idea here is that if God were to exist, humans would be the subordinates of an authority that they have not appointed and that this restricts human freedom and autonomy to a significant degree. I will call this reason *the authority reason*, and it is at least one possible reason for why the world would be worse off if God were to exist and why hoping for such a God would be ill-advised.

The second reason might be associated with a certain answer to the problem of evil and it received a certain amount of attention when the Irish broadcaster RTE interviewed the British comedian and atheist Stephen Fry. Fry was asked what he would say if, at the end of his life, he met God, he replied:

I'd say, bone cancer in children? What's that about? How dare you? How dare you create a world to which there is such misery that is not our fault. It's not right, it's utterly, utterly evil. "Why should I respect a capricious, mean-minded, stupid God who creates a world that is so full of injustice and pain?" That's what I would say.²³

Fry could justifiably be characterized as a contemporary protest atheist. That is to say, he denies the existence of God, but also claims that if God did exist, he would protest against Him and specifically against God's moral character. Later in the interview, Fry explicitly claims that:

[a]theism is not just about not believing there is a God, but under the assumption that there is one, what kind of God is he? It's perfectly apparent that he is monstrous, utterly monstrous, and deserves no respect whatsoever.²⁴

Fry does not get the opportunity to dig deeper into why he thinks God would be an immoral and monstrous God if he existed, but others have done so.

Arguably the most poignant account of this attitude towards a possible existent God is the oft-quoted dialogue from Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. In the dialogue, Ivan presents his religious brother Alyosha with horrendous cases of suffering children. To my mind, the following case is the most heart-breaking:

A little girl, five years old, is hated by her father and mother, "most honourable and official people, educated and well-bred." [...] These educated parents subjected the poor five-year-old girl to every possible torture. They beat her, flogged her, kicked her, not knowing why themselves, until her whole body was nothing but bruises; finally they attained the height of finesse: in the freezing cold, they locked her all night in the outhouse, because she wouldn't ask to get up and go in the middle of the night [...] for that they smeared her face with her excrement and made her eat the excrement, and it was her mother, her mother who made her! [...] Can you understand that a small creature, who cannot even comprehend what is being done to her, in a vile place, in the dark and the cold, beats herself on her strained little chest with her tiny fist and weeps with her anguished, gentle, meek tears for "dear God" to protect her [...]²⁵

Ivan then goes on to proclaim his own dislike and rejection of God by referring to God permitting the undeserved suffering of children in order to achieve a higher harmony:

I absolutely renounce all higher harmony. It is not worth one tear of even that one tormented child who beat her chest with her little fist and prayed to "dear God" in a stinking outhouse with her unredeemed tears! [...] I don't want harmony, for the love of mankind I don't want it [...] I'd rather remain with my unrequited suffering and my unquenched indignation, even if I am wrong. Besides, they put too high a price on harmony; we can't afford to pay so much for admission. And therefore, I hasten to return my ticket.²⁶

It is clear that Ivan does not like the world he finds himself in, but he also says that if God were to exist, he would turn his back on him. To quote John Gray, “[Ivan] is trapped in an impotent hatred of God and the world”.²⁷

Finally, towards the end of the dialogue Ivan presents the following challenge to Alyosha:

Tell me yourself directly, I challenge you – reply: imagine that you yourself are erecting the edifice of human fortune with the goal of, at the finale, making people happy, of at least giving them peace and quiet, but that in order to do it, it would be necessary and unavoidable to torture to death only one tiny little creature, that same little child that beat its little fist, and on its unavenged tears to found that edifice, would you agree to be the architect on those conditions, tell me and tell me truly?²⁸

Alyosha’s answer to the challenge is a gentle but up-front “no”. However, the relevant point here is that a common, and arguably the most straightforward, interpretation of the dialogue is that Ivan rejects or dislikes God because he seems to treat at least some of his created human beings, in particular innocent children, as means and not as ends in themselves and that this would be an immoral and indeed monstrous thing to do.²⁹ I will call this reason *the moral monster reason*, and it is a second possible reason for why the world would be worse off if God were to exist and that we therefore should not hope for his existence. It might be good to add here that quite a few theistic philosophers would agree with this reason. Eleanor Stump, for example, writes that:

There is something morally repulsive about supposing that the point of allowing a child to suffer is some abstract benefit for the race as a whole.³⁰

However, Stump thinks that if God were to permit seemingly gratuitous suffering for the sake of realizing a greater good, this should not be considered repulsive or monstrous in so far as it benefits the sufferer, and she has therefore tried to formulate such possible goods.³¹ Still, quite a few philosophers and theologians belonging to the school of thought known as “anti-theodicy” would disagree even with Stump’s qualification.³² The Wittgensteinian philosopher D.Z. Phillips – to take just one such example – quite forcefully states that

To rescue sufferings from degradation by employing cost-benefit analysis, is like rescuing a prostitute from degradation by telling her to charge higher fees.³³

In other words, Phillips's analogy with the prostitute illustrates that there really is something morally repulsive about a God who permits suffering, like the suffering in Ivan's story above, in order to realize greater goods for victims of suffering.

Nevertheless, another, and in one sense similar, reason is put forward by Kurt Baier. He seems to think that what makes theism less desirable is that God has certain purposes with us humans. He writes:

To attribute to a human being a purpose [...] is not neutral, let alone complimentary: it is offensive. It is degrading for a man to be regarded as merely serving a purpose. If, at a garden party, I ask a man in livery, "What is your purpose?" I am insulting him. I might as well have asked, "What are you for?" Such questions reduce him to the level of a gadget, a domestic animal, or perhaps a slave. I imply that we allot to him the tasks, the goals, the aims which he is to pursue; that his wishes and desires and aspirations and purposes are to count for little or nothing.³⁴

The idea here is that if God had an objective purpose with us humans, that would also be something akin to treating us as a means to his own ends, and this would be a way of belittling us.

To elaborate, Baier does not suggest that God's act of assigning us a purpose would be specifically harmful, but rather that in using our capacity for rational choice as a mere tool in order to realize a specific purpose that we do not share, he is degrading us. Indeed, whether the fulfilment of this purpose would be good for us or not is irrelevant; it would, in Metz's interpretation of Baier, merely add a paternalistic aspect to our degradation. I will call the reason Baier presents the *degradation reason*. It suggests that we should not hope for God since, if God were to have purposes for us, this would degrade us and therefore be intrinsically bad regardless of the good consequences of fulfilling such purposes.

We now have three axiological and anti-theistic reasons for why, all else being equal, the existence of God would make our world less valuable compared with a world where God did not exist, and why we therefore should not hope for God. The question is how to assess both the pro-theistic and anti-theistic reasons and how to respond to them.

Hopeism as a research programme

There are possible arguments against the pro-theistic reasons presented, and, although the formulation as well as the assessment of anti-theistic reasons is a fairly recent field of research, there are already quite a few counter-arguments against the authority reason, the moral monster reason and the degradation reason.³⁵ There are of course also more axiological reasons in the ether of philosophical research than space permits me to present here.³⁶ However, rather than assessing these reasons individually, I will present a more general or broad-brush response to the whole idea of producing reasons as objections to hoping for God.

It seems to me that there is something fundamentally flawed with anti-theistic reasons and arguments, or if the reasons themselves are not flawed, then the correct response should be to reconsider the concept of God that is used. My suggestion, then, is that the methodological starting point, when formulating the very concept or definition of God, be to consider what kind of God would actually be worth hoping for. We could call the concept of God formed from such considerations "hopeism". Perhaps the easiest way to describe this approach is to compare it with belief-based concepts of God, such as perfect being theism or what we might call worship-worthiness theism. According to perfect being theism, God is the most perfect being conceivable. Given such a conception, all divine attributes must be perfect, and whenever one finds that a specific attribute of God is not perfect, then God simply does not have that attribute.³⁷ According to worship-worthiness theism, God is worthy of our adoration and worship, and whenever one finds that a specific attribute of God is not such as a God worthy of worship would have, then God simply does not have that attribute. By comparison, according to hopeism, God is the being worthy of our utmost hope. In this conception, if we find that a certain attribute entails or perhaps suggests something that we do not value or do not hope for, then God does not have that attribute, or if God does have that attribute it is because it is necessary for the realization of other values that are greater, rendering the value all things considered positive anyway. The idea here is that if the axiological anti-theistic reasons I have presented are reasonable, then the response is not to protest against God or to hate God. One should not respond like Nagel, hoping that God does not exist, but rather acknowledge that the concept used might be wrong and instead consider what kind of God would be worthy of one's hope.

To elaborate, hopeism, seen as a research programme, would consist of two subjects of investigation, both of which appeal to necessary and altogether sufficient requirements for hoping.³⁸ The first subject would be to formulate and assess axiological pro- and anti-theistic reasons in order to see what kind of God one would regard as desirable and worthy of our utmost hope. I will call the requirement appealed to here *the desirability requirement*. Depending on which reasons one considers convincing, this first step of the programme can proceed in different directions. For example, if one is inclined to agree with proponents of the authority reason or even with the proponents of the moral monster reason, one might opt for a God without the property of being all-powerful and thus choose a God more in line with, say, panentheism or process theism. Presumably, God cannot be conceived as a moral monster if God lacks the power to intervene and stop seemingly gratuitous suffering from occurring. Alternatively, if one agrees with Baier and the degradation reason, one might consider a more deistic or (perhaps) ietistic³⁹ conception of God to be worthy further investigation.

When formulating pro-theistic reasons, one might go further by not only considering the positive value of a certain conception of God, but also by considering the value of a certain conception together with other religious doctrines. One might even consider syncretic conceptions and doctrines where different conceptions or attributes of God are combined in order to maximize positive value. The values one would suggest here could of course also be of different kinds. Some of the values might, for example, refer to human beings and some might refer to the environment or non-human beings. Other values might only be realized in religious practice, worship and adoration, in which case the one who hopes might have pragmatic reasons to also practice a certain religion. This would mean that a hopeist also has reason to explore and perhaps endorse what might be called “religious hopeism”.

Perhaps this seems too radical. It could be objected, for example, that the above suggestion simply involves exploring one’s own preferences and has nothing to do with reality. Hopeism, according to this view, is simply a sophisticated form of wishful thinking. Fortunately, our second subject of investigation deals with such criticism. This step would consist of considering whether or not the concept of God derived from the first type of investigation could also possibly exist. I will call the requirement appealed to here *the possibility requirement*. However, the kind of possibility one is after matters. Normally, when we accuse someone of wishful thinking, we think that the person we are accusing desires something that he or she should know cannot be

realized. Therefore, to avoid being subject to wishful thinking, the existence of the God posited must at least be epistemically possible. It cannot be the case that we have knowledge that contradicts the existence of such a God. However, epistemic possibility is still a bit too weak. Arguably, we can formulate lots of desirable but bizarre concepts of God that do not contradict things we know to be true, yet we would consider them to be so unlikely that we cannot really hope that they are true. Recently, Carl-Johan Palmqvist has used William James' notion of a "live possibility" in order to avoid this kind of problem.⁴⁰ To exemplify: when I misplace my glasses, there are many possibilities of where they might be. They can, for example, be in the fridge, on the kitchen table or on my desk. Some of these possibilities are merely epistemic possibilities, but some are live, somewhat more likely possibilities. In my case, misplacing my glasses in the fridge would be an epistemic and unlikely possibility while misplacing them on the kitchen table or on my desk would be live possibilities. In the same way, the desirable concepts of God that we can hope for and that are worthy of investigation are not those that are very unlikely and are merely epistemic possibilities, but rather those that are at least live possibilities, even though they may still be somewhat unlikely.

Now, I think it is clear that hopeism is a genuine research programme that avoids the criticism of being subject to wishful thinking, but I also believe that adopting hopeism can contribute to a much-needed renewal of contemporary philosophy of religion.

Renewing philosophy of religion and the merits of hopeism

In recent years, the question of whether or not contemporary philosophy of religion, especially the analytic school of thought, really is in good health (so to speak) has gained considerable attention.⁴¹ Arguably, the question has arisen due to the fact that the field is neither diverse nor inclusive. Most of the research done concerns Christian theism with a specific focus on a perfectly good, all-knowing and almighty God⁴² and most philosophy of religion is done by Christian philosophers.⁴³ The failure to have a diverse field with researchers from different religions or secular perspectives creates the risk of partisanship, confirmation bias and group influence.⁴⁴ Indeed, there is a real danger of the field becoming a sort of echo chamber where only certain sorts of proposals and arguments are appreciated. Arguably, in such a field, it will be difficult to spot any "philosophical progress", regardless of what this difficult term connotes.

However, turning to axiological reasons for hoping or not hoping for God, and adopting hopeism as a research programme, has the potential of curing philosophy of religion of its currently sick, or at the very least half-sick, condition. For one thing, most of the axiological values mentioned in the debate above are values that theists as well as atheists and agnostics actually accept. Most of us would agree that autonomy, dignity (for example, not being degraded) and objective meaning are indeed valuable. Kirk Lougheed writes that:

[P]art of the reason why the axiology of theism debate has been able to proceed (and even made some progress) is that it turns out there is enough agreement over value judgments about particular advantages and disadvantages associated with theism and atheism.⁴⁵

Theists, atheists and agnostics may of course disagree on the arguments put forward to support the pro- and anti-theistic benefits above⁴⁶ and perhaps also on how to assess the overall value when combining the axiological reasons presented. However, there is common ground in that they all more or less would agree that the values in question are indeed something we would like to have realized in our world. Take the reason from no gratuitous suffering as an example. Certainly, it would be good if all suffering in our world were necessary for greater goods, and even atheists, at least atheists who put forward evidential Rowe-style arguments from evil, would have to agree that if there is a perfectly good, all-powerful and all-knowing God, then there would be no gratuitous suffering. It will be recalled that the proposition that there is no gratuitous evil follows from Rowe's definition of God. On the other hand, some theists who also endorse anti-theodicy reasons would agree that it would be good if there were no gratuitous suffering, but if there also existed an almighty and all-powerful God who permitted suffering of the worst kind for the sake of greater goods, then they would make the overall assessment that a world with such an immoral God would be worse than one without it. Indeed, I think there is a potential discussion to be had about the overall assessment of axiological reasons with respect to different conceptions of God.

More importantly, the foremost advantage of hopeism is that the possibility requirement is quite modest compared with the requirement of belief-based conceptions of God such as perfect being theism. Arguably, the epistemic requirement for belief is that it is at least more likely than not that God exists. Perfect being theists, in particular, often use the ontological argument in order to establish such a degree

of conviction.⁴⁷ According to hopeism, the requirement is much lower. Both theists and agnostics can be hopeists, and as long as atheists think that the probability of a particular God existing rises to the level of being a live option they can too.

Perhaps even such tough-minded atheists as Richard Dawkins could accept hopeism. In *The God Delusion*, Dawkins places himself on a self-made scale measuring the strength of one's belief or disbelief in God. He claims that he does not fully know that God does not exist; he just thinks it is very improbable.⁴⁸ This indicates that he would see the existence of the theistic God as at least an epistemic possibility. Dawkins thus seems to be confronted with the question of whether the particular God he has in mind is worth hoping for and whether the probability of God existing reaches the level of thinking of God's existence as a live possibility. However, and importantly, if one reaches the conclusion that God is not worth hoping for and is not a live possibility, it would be consistent with hopeism to do further exploration into what particular God might fulfil these two requirements. Such investigation would arguably broaden the research field, since the focus would not only be on one particular concept of God, as well as make the field more inclusive.

Conclusion

To conclude, in this paper I have presented axiological, or "pro-theistic" and "anti-theistic", reasons for hoping for the existence or non-existence of God. As examples of a pro-theistic reason, I presented *the reason from no gratuitous suffering*, according to which the theistic God serves as a metaphysical guarantee against gratuitous suffering. I formulated a new pro-theistic reason which I dubbed *the extra meaningful life reason*, according to which a possible loving relationship with a perfectly good and loving God would add extra intrinsic value to a person's life and the *objective meaning reason* according to which only God can make life objectively meaningful.

I then presented three objections or reasons, not as counter-reasons against the pro-theistic reasons offered, but instead as independent anti-theistic reasons for why we should not hope for God. According to *the authority reason*, human beings are the subordinates of an authority that they have not appointed and the existence of such a God significantly restricts human freedom and autonomy. According to *the moral monster reason*, God treats at least some of his created human beings, in particular innocent children who undergo suffering, as means to obtain a greater good and not as ends in themselves. According to *the*

degradation reason, we should not hope for God because if God were to have purposes with us, this would degrade us and be intrinsically bad regardless of the good consequences of fulfilling such purposes.

Finally, I addressed the anti-theistic reasons, not by evaluating them independently, but instead by arguing that, rather than concluding that we should not hope for God, we should reconsider the very concept of God. Here, I presented hopeism as a research programme. According to hopeism, we should formulate our concept of God by considering what kind of being would deserve our utmost hope, and I compared this concept of God with other belief-based concepts of God such as perfect being theism and what I called worship-worthiness theism. I argued that there is considerable agreement on the values presented in the axiological debate on theism, even though the overall assessments might differ. I also argued that focusing on different conceptions of God that might be worthy of one's hope can broaden the research field. However, the greatest benefit of choosing hopeism is that it is inclusive. Agnostics and theists and arguably quite a few atheists can endorse the view. Hopeism can thus be a vital part of a much-needed renewal of philosophy of religion.

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Notes

1. Examples of standard as well as recent epistemic assessments of belief in God include Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, Copan and Moser, *The Rationality of Theism*, and Walls and Dougherty, *Two Dozen*.
2. Even if it is not the conventional attitude towards God adopted by philosophers of religion, the attention given to hope as a non-doxastic attitude towards the existence of God is progressively growing. See, for example, Licon, "Aspirational Theism"; Bøhn, "The Logic of Hope"; Palmqvist, "Faith and Hope" or Howard Snyder, "Propositional Faith". Some even think that religious faith is best described by hope. Jeff Jordan, for example, writes: "My faith is perhaps best described as a hope rather than as a belief ... I hope that the Christian message is true, and I try to act in the light of that hope. While I assent to the propositions of Christianity, I think it is best to describe my faith as hope rather than as a belief". See Jordan, "Not in Kansas Anymore," 134.
3. Two comments at once. (i) There is a controversy about whether or not one actually can compare theism and atheism with respect to the axiological value of the world. The problem is that God's supposed attribute of "necessary existence" would entail that God exists in every possible world, so there is no possible world without God to compare with. For a discussion of this problem, see, for example, Licon, "Aspirational Theism," 5; Kraay and Dragos, "On Preferring God's Non-existence"; Kahane, "Should We Want God" or Mawson, "On Determining". Since I have not defined the theistic God as being necessarily existent, I need not solve this problem in this particular paper. (ii) It is important (I think) to distinguish between hoping that God exists because the world is better off if God exists and pragmatically committing in practice to God because the world or indeed the person who commits to God is better off if God exists. The latter position represents the sort of commitment that is sufficient for a religious agnostic. See, for example, Gutting, "Religious Agnosticism" and Draper, "Seeking but not Believing". However, the question of whether or not the value of the world increases if God exists and the question of whether or not one should commit to God in practice because the value of the world would increase if God exists are two separate questions and should be treated as such.
4. See, for example, Morris, *Our Idea of God* and Nagasawa, *Maximal God*.
5. See, for example, Moser, *The Elusive God*, 1.
6. This is consistent with the literature where these reasons are presented.
7. The term "pro-theism" was introduced by Kahane, "Should We Want God." See also Kraay and Dragos, "On Preferring God's Non-Existence."
8. Licon, "Aspirational Theism," 5.
9. See Rowe, "The Problem of Evil". Also compare with Rowe, "Friendly Atheism," 80.
10. For a recently developed version of these arguments, see, for example, Walls and Dougherty, *Two Dozen*.
11. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil."
12. It is also the case that Rowe sees his argument as an evidential (probabilistic) argument. That is to say, he does not put it forward as showing a straightforward

contradiction between suffering and God's existence. If there were such a contradiction, then hope would not be possible.

13. Here I understand a meaningful life as being synonymous with a valuable life. If one can say about a person that it is better that he or she has lived his or her life than that he or she had never existed, then that person has lived a valuable life. See Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue*, 15. Similarly, an "objectively valuable life" is a life that has positive value regardless of how we humans value it. See Seachris, "General Introduction," 12.
14. Thaddeus Metz calls this kind of theory a "purpose theory", but there are of course other theories in which God is the source of life's meaning. See, for example, Metz, "Could God's Purpose." For a thorough explication of God's supposed purpose of having a loving relationship with his created humans, see Moser, *Jesus and Philosophy*, 1–23 and Moser, *The Elusive God*, 95–101.
15. Metz, "Could God's Purpose," 306.
16. The atheist Eric Wielenberg argues that a meaningful life would consist of intrinsically valuable activities. One such activity that he himself regards as intrinsically valuable is falling in love. See Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue*, 34. The activity of falling in love seems to be related to or perhaps included in the activities involved in being in a loving relationship with God.
17. Wolf, "The Meaning of Lives," 13. See also discussion in Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue*, 16–18.
18. See Kahane, "Should We Want God," where he introduces the term anti-theism.
19. Nagel, *The Last Word*, 130.
20. *Ibid.*, 131.
21. McLean, "Antipathy to God," 21.
22. Moser, "Religious Skepticism," 222.
23. Fry, "The Meaning of Life."
24. *Ibid.*
25. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 315–6.
26. *Ibid.*, 320.
27. Gray, *Seven Types of Atheism*, 111. It is interesting to note that Gray presents Ivan as a misotheist and not as a protest atheist.
28. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 321.
29. Betenson, "Anti-Theodicy," 56.
30. Stump, "Suffering and Redemption," 433.
31. Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*.
32. For an overview of anti-theodic arguments, see Betenson, "Anti-Theodicy."
33. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil*, 71.
34. Baier, *The Meaning of Life* (1974), 104.
35. See, for example, Moser, "Religious Skepticism," 222–3; Jonbäck, *Meningsfullt liv* (2020), 35–8; Stump, "The Problem of Evil," 433; Metz, "Could God's Purpose," 300.
36. See, for example, Penner and Loughheed, "Pro-Theism"; Elliott and Soifer, "Divine Omniscience"; Lackey, "Divine Omniscience"; Penner, "Personal Anti-Theism"; Davis, "On Preferring That God" and Kahane, "Should We Want God."
37. See, for example, Nagasawa, "A New Defence". See also Morris, *Our Idea of God* and Nagasawa, *Maximal God*.
38. See Palmqvist, "Faith and Hope," 4. See also Böhn, "The Logic of Hope."
39. Elliott, "The Power of Humility."
40. See Palmqvist, "Analyzing Hope" and Palmqvist, "Faith and Hope."

41. See, for example, Draper and Nichols, "Diagnosing Bias" and Draper, "Seeking but Not Believing" (2017).
42. See, for example, the statistical table with data from philpapers.org in Mizrahi, "If Analytic Philosophy," 560. See also Frankenberry, "Feminist Approaches," 5–6 and Schilbrack, *Philosophy and the Study*, 9.
43. See De Cruz and De Smedt, "How Do Philosophers."
44. See, for example, Draper and Nichols, "Diagnosing Bias," 420.
45. Loughheed, *The Axiological Status*, 14.
46. One might, as an example, object to the objective meaning reason, not by arguing that objective meaning is undesirable, but rather by saying that the existence of a perfectly good, almighty and all-knowing God does not secure objective meaning. See the version of the Euthyphro dilemma presented in Mawson, "Recent Work," 1140. One might also give reasons showing that one need no God to secure objective meaning. See, for example, Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue* or Singer, *How Are We to Live?*.
47. See Nagasawa, "Anselmian Theism," 567.
48. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 73.

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