

form of non-Humeanism. Perhaps the view could adopt a form of semi-Humeanism according to which the tapestry is not a mind in any robust sense even though perceptions bear robust, necessary connections among themselves. But these necessary connections would be quite difficult to explain given that nothing more fundamental would serve to tie them together. Given the view's idealism, no mind-independent spatial-temporal relations could tie them together. And given the view's semi-Humeanism, no further underlying mental substance could tie them together either. A more promising pairing, in my view, would combine the tapestry with one of the idealistic interpretations of Spinoza's metaphysics or one of the more well-known versions of absolute idealism. On the Spinozistic view, for example, the tapestry's regularity wouldn't be an absurd accident because reality couldn't have been any other way. But reality would also lack an infinite mind with any sort of agency. So if divinity requires agency, Yetter-Chappell would have some reasonable grounds for labeling the resulting view atheistic.

The essays I've highlighted above deserve further attention, of course, and I hope they continue to be read by those with interests in philosophy of religion. But the volume should also attract attention from philosophers with other interests. Readers will find excellent essays touching on topics in contemporary metaphysics, Kant, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, and the philosophy of science. Overall, the editors deserve praise for cultivating a volume that stands a good chance of leaving a positive and lasting mark on the discipline.

*A Grotesque in the Garden*, by Hud Hudson. Xerxes Press, 2017. Pp. 150. \$9.99 (paperback). (Available only through Amazon.)

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In philosophy the genre of first-person fictional narrative is rarely used. This is likely because the philosophical issues and arguments raised are typically not illuminated by being discussed by a character whose attitudes or personality can distract from rather than enhance the topic of interest. In addition, most philosophers, both presently and historically, are not skilled enough to portray a complex literary character entirely through the character's own voice. Yet Hud Hudson's *A Grotesque in the Garden* accomplishes a rare feat: it presents two main characters whose understanding of theism and its intellectual challenges are inextricable from their personal stories, including their emotional and spiritual shortcomings, and this powerful combination is engaging for both the seasoned philosopher and



the newcomer to such issues. *Grotesque* introduces several philosophical arguments concerning divinely permitted evil, divine hiddenness, divine silence, and the possibility of divine deception, as well as puzzles related to epistemology or the nature of love, wrapped in a sophisticated display of the dialectical landscape. But it is Hudson's care in portraying the individuals as persons who deeply crave interpersonal contact, and whose situations and self-reflections contribute to their emotional and spiritual well-being, that results in a book which is at once incisive, sensitive, and pastoral. For it illustrates how an undue preoccupation with philosophical reasoning can make one vulnerable to spiritual ruin.

*A Grotesque in the Garden* presents itself as the story of two spiritual mistakes, a failure on the one hand, to love the Lord your God with all one's heart and mind and soul and strength, and, on the other, to love one's neighbor as oneself. Part I presents the character exhibiting the first mistake: an angel, Tesque, tasked with guarding the Garden of Eden after expelling Adam and Eve. Tesque has fulfilled this duty for millennia, having to pass the time in solitude in the midst of the Garden. Yet because he was created anew in the Garden just for this task, he has not experienced any other place, and has had no contact with other persons nor angels; lamentably, he has not even met God, though he is so constituted to know that God exists and has assigned him this task. Tesque's only exposure to others, one-sided though it is, appears to be through visions of what happens in our world available to him from the Tree of Knowledge. He must pass the time by watching such visions and by creating mathematical patterns to give him routines for each new day in the Garden.

Tesque's story and his rationale come in the form of a letter (in six short chapters), intended for his human "daughter," whom Tesque will help to create if he indeed goes through with his plan to abandon his post by leaving the Garden. He knows that the price he will pay for this abandonment is immediate or eventual annihilation; but the ongoing isolation and alienation he feels has become more than he can bear. Thus Tesque's letter to his daughter amounts to a lengthy justification of why he feels he must disobey his orders even though he remains committed to the idea that God exists and is perfectly good. Yet because he will no longer exist once his letter arrives, the irony is that the only interpersonal interaction of Tesque's entire existence must be transmitted under conditions where he does not even get to experience his daughter's reception of it.

Tesque explains to the reader why arguments from the existence of evil, and from divine hiddenness and divine silence, should not lead us to deny, or even become agnostic about, God's existence. Even readers familiar with such arguments will find Tesque's charting of this dialectical terrain to be exceedingly helpful. Beginning with the problem of evil, Tesque suggests that the arguments only work if we are well-positioned to determine what morally justifying reasons there might be for God to allow the sorts of evils found in the world; but then he proceeds to defend a broadly skeptical theist approach to defusing the problem, by offering

a parable. The analogy of this parable (of the “Lazaraistones” in chap. 2) makes the lesson quite vivid: only if we suppose that we *could* discern what the morally justifying reasons are (if there are any), will we be well-positioned to conclude, from our inability to discern them, that there in fact are none. And Tesque, whose angelic intellect far exceeds our own, and who admits that the reasons for many such evils remain inscrutable even to him, urges the reader to remember that their finite understanding impedes the success of the argument from evil. God has God’s reasons which we cannot fathom.

Tesque then considers similar arguments from divine hiddenness or silence, acutely painful ones given Tesque’s own situation. He argues that, on the assumption that God has unfathomable reasons for causing (or allowing) certain events, the variety of potential divine purposes could mean that we are not even entitled to the idea that God always acts in our best interests. With another parable (of the ship’s captain and his dogs, chap. 3), Tesque reminds us that our place in the divine order may well be one where we are not owed survival or well-being, let alone God’s presence; and if so, divine silence and divine hiddenness do not give us adequate reasons for doubting God’s existence either. Yet having built up the defensive power of skeptical theism given these earlier arguments, Tesque notes that being this skeptical of our ability to discern God’s reasons will lead us to concede that it is possible for God, even on the supposition that God is omnipotent and wholly good, to deceive us; and these arguments are ones which Tesque admits have haunted him from the beginning. For as is familiar from mundane human cases, one can often have overriding moral reasons to lie or otherwise deceive someone, even someone loved and for whom one wants the best (illustrated by a parable of the emperor’s son and his counselor, chap. 4). So if God can have reasons which we cannot discern, as the arguments from evil and divine silence/hiddenness taught us, it could well be that God has overriding reason to deceive us, even for our own good; even worse, God may have overriding reason which *obligates* God to deceive us on some matters. At the very least, Tesque argues, for all we know, God may have deceived us on matters about which God has testified directly to us.

In articulating this last argument Tesque slowly shifts from dissatisfaction to frustration and anger. The possibility that God has deceived him, along with related possible justifications for divine silence and hiddenness, lead him to justify his own desire for no longer cooperating with the divine plan, lashing out at God for the unhappiness accompanying his long-term stance of obedience. Tesque’s rant conveys that he, a lonely but obedient angel, wishes he had any of the interpersonal and social goods which he can see from the Tree are standard human fare, and even constitutive of human flourishing: among them, “admiration, respect, friendship, care giving, mutual love” (77). It is outrageous to Tesque that even in “the Holy Story,” it was “not good for the man to be alone”; and thus God makes Adam a companion, Eve. “Why have I been allowed no

companion to soften or render bearable my exile, no friend or second self with whom to share the joys of union and of love freely given and received, not even a dog, for which I would suffer all the privations of the Garden? I have been permitted only mathematics and the Tree, and neither speaks" (86–87).

Tesque's failure to love the Lord his God appears to originate, in part, from an intellectual fixation on the need to know why. The philosophical is made personal, or in Tesque's case, that which is (not) interpersonal. Where he does not understand, Tesque takes matters into his own hands. Yet we learn that his fixations have blinded him in significant ways; for as we learn in the brief Part II, Tesque has in fact not been alone in the Garden. (I shall allow the reader to discover this important character on their own.)

Part III is written by Tesque's daughter, who gives herself the name "Naphil." Naphil receives his letter, and out of amusement decides to write a response in her diary (four short chapters). Adopted when young without a backstory about her real parents, and now a middle-aged mathematician, whose large stature led others to mock and tease her, Naphil's experiences shaped her into the misanthropic friendless loner she now is. Her refuge was in solitary speculative thought, and thus her ability in mathematics is due not only to her intellect but also to its antisocial value. Naphil reveals several places of agreement with Tesque; but she also deftly critiques many of his arguments, counterbalancing some of his assumptions and tendencies. Through Naphil's narrative we begin to see both Tesque's personality and his argumentation in a new light, discovering how some of his arguments can seem plausible only to someone of Tesque's temperament: prideful, entitled, and compromised by narrowness of focus. Naphil pinpoints how Tesque's pride goes unseen even by him: he craves personal contact, but highlights what is desirable about it primarily in terms of how such interactions would make *him* happier. Feeling abandoned by God, Tesque feels justified in abandoning God's role for him.

Yet in Naphil, we find the flip side of the same coin: she hates because others first hated her. Indeed, she acknowledges a sort of pleasure in cultivating her hatred for others. But Naphil's antisocial feelings find root in her warped view of herself as unworthy of love. And such self-loathing has shaped her theological outlook: she believes that God is perfectly loving, but "that God is perfectly loving . . . does not entail that God loves us. . . . We, the fallen, have polluted ourselves, rendered ourselves utterly unlovable" (126). Naphil's logic, perverse though it is, is one she explicitly applies to herself: "The first and greatest of the love commandments [toward God], I observe. . . . The second and lesser commandment, I finesse. I love my neighbor exactly as I love myself and exactly as we deserve to be loved—not at all" (129). Thus Naphil's own reasoning leads her to fail in loving her neighbor as God intends they be loved. A particularly

sad feature of this father and daughter is that they might have made very good friends. He wishes to be in acknowledged contact with another, and, thinking he could not have it in the Garden, was willing to give up his own existence in its pursuit; whereas she, preferring the solitary existence he needed to escape, wants nothing of such interactions, even though she desperately seems to need the kind of interpersonal relations which would allow her to be loved. (Fortunately, philosophers of religion have begun to explore more carefully the relevance of such interpersonal aspects, particularly their epistemological relevance: see especially Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* [Oxford University Press, 2010], esp. chaps. 3–4; and Matthew Benton, “God and Interpersonal Knowledge,” *Res Philosophica* 95 [2018]: 421–447.)

Hudson’s masterful portrayal of these characters manages to blend the deeply spiritual and personal needs we all have with the ways in which our intellectual reflections can sometimes exacerbate our already fraught condition. His book also reminds us that we can learn from one another, and even from fictional characters like Tesque and Naphil, if we would just enter honestly into such deeply personal discussions. While those can be harder to do with real people, the lessons learned from this engaging book can help even philosophers do them better.

*Maximal God: A New Defence of Perfect Being Theism*, by Yujin Nagasawa. Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. viii + 225. \$61.00 (hardcover).

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For nearly a thousand years, St. Anselm’s ontological argument has exhibited a curious necromantic cycle. Generations of critics declare the argument dead, only to see the thing reanimated by the cunning incantations of a Descartes, a Gödel, or a Plantinga. It must be frustrating.

In this compact and ambitious book, Nagasawa sets out to vindicate the ontological argument and the perfect being theology it recommends. Nagasawa also aims to refute atheological arguments from evil—and other atheological arguments besides. I’m afraid, then, that St. Anselm’s critics are in for some more frustration. So too are some theists, I suspect—for Nagasawa suggests that their tradition is mistaken in insisting on the thesis that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent.

Nagasawa has published extensively on perfect being theology and related matters; his views there are already well known to metaphysicians and philosophers of religion. And those views haven’t changed much, so

