

---

# Two criticisms of natural theology<sup>1</sup>

Błażej Gębura

John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

## Summary

The article aims at considering two general criticisms often formulated against the natural theology. First criticism is based on the thesis that the conclusions of the natural theology are not adequate with the religious beliefs of non-philosophers. It is widely known as opposition between God of Religion and God of Philosophers. One can find that argument in the writings of Blaise Pascal. I'm arguing for the thesis, that the natural theologian cannot fulfill the criteria given by the proponents of this argument. This is because the argument of the natural theology cannot contain the premises taken from the Revelation. If the argument of the natural theology would contain the premises taken from the Revelation, then it would be the argument of religion. But philosopher of religion (natural theologian) can't do this, if he wants to formulate an philosophical argument.

The second criticism is based on the notion of a rational person. In the light of this argument, the natural theology is successful

---

<sup>1</sup> This publication was supported by Copernicus Center for Interdisciplinary Studies under grant "The Limits of Scientific Explanation" founded by the John Templeton Foundation.

only, if every rational person will accept the conclusion “God exist”. I’m trying to show that there is no philosophical argument that can guarantee it’s acceptance by some rational persons. The acceptance of the conclusion of the argument of the natural theology is a matter of personal decision. There is no logical argument, which can “force” rational persons (rational subjects) to accept it’s conclusion. But if this is true, the arguments for the existence of God are no worse than other philosophical arguments.

Key words

theism, natural theology, God

*The heart has its reasons of which  
reason knows nothing.*

Blaise Pascal

## I. Introductory remarks

**T**he aim of this article is to present and to attempt to refute two charges that are often made against natural theology, that is against this part of philosophy of religion within which attempts are made to prove the thesis that God exists.<sup>2</sup> The criti-

---

<sup>2</sup> Certainly natural theology may be understood more broadly, namely, as including all philosophical issues connected with the concept of God, that is with his existence, nature, attributes, relation to the world,

cisms prejudge the sense of formulating natural theology's reasoning by suggesting that it cannot show what it has been created for, or by stating that the results that are obtained with their help are grossly inadequate to the area (religious beliefs or faith) they refer to. It should be remembered that any attempts to respond to the charges have to be in some way symmetrical to them. This is so since both criticisms concern not individual arguments for the existence of God, but the whole discipline. Hence, it seems that a natural theologian, responding to them cannot find support in analyses concerning particular arguments for the existence of God, but has to try to defend natural theology as a certain whole. Using its particular arguments could be considered as simply settling the question, because an atheologian<sup>3</sup> could reply that there is no sense in examining the value of particular arguments presented by natural theology, if we first ask the question whether postulating the existence of such a discipline is at all justified.

---

the problem of evil, etc. However, it seems that the term "natural theology" most often is used by philosophers as one referring to attempts to prove the existence of God, and hence it may be assumed that such understanding of the term as I accept in the present article is justified.

<sup>3</sup> I am using the term "atheologian" to denote someone who is against practicing natural theology, although at the same time he may not believe in God. Another explanation of who an atheologian is can be found in A. Plantinga's works. The difference consists in the fact that Plantinga thinks that such a person is someone who constructs philosophical arguments contradicting the thesis about the existence of God. Cf. Plantinga 2002, p. 7. However, it seems that a position is possible, within which someone recognizes that natural theology is superfluous and at the same time he does not construct arguments for the non-existence of God.

However, a question arises at once, whether formulating such an apologia for natural theology is possible at all. Since in natural theology we deal with so many arguments or proofs of the existence of God, is it possible to formulate, in a way *en bloc*, one apologia for all such argumentations that in fact differ from one another in assumptions, premises and conclusions? This contradiction within natural theology is noticed by Linda Zagzebski, who writes:

The classical arguments for the existence of God can be confusing because they have not always been offered in response to an inquiry whether God exists. The theistic arguments have a number of different functions and they have been offered as responses to a variety of questions.<sup>4</sup>

It seems that in the history of contemporary philosophy there have been at least two attempts at constructing a general defense of natural theology against accusations that were supposed to discredit this discipline as one that does not give hope for a reliable solution of philosophical problems undertaken within its area. The defenses were constructed, firstly, in the context of the debate with the supporters of verificationism, and secondly, during the debate with the naturalistic position. Even if we agree that in both cases natural theology was defended in an indirect way, in the context of discussing other, broader phil-

---

<sup>4</sup> Zagzebski 2012, p 25.

osophical problems, it seems unquestionable that this type of defenses tried to invalidate the accusations made by opponents of natural theology, and also – which is important – no analyses were made of the value of particular proofs for the existence of God, but the defenses attempted to show the validity and purpose of theoretical efforts made by natural theologians.

I think this is a complicated problem, but it seems that – for the needs of the present text – a certain introductory way of solving it may be suggested. So, I am not going to defend, or the more so I am not going to try to invalidate some particular proof for the existence of God. I think that it is enough if I concentrate on these aspects that are common for most proofs used by natural theology. Taking into consideration a minimum understood in this way I am going to show that both the analyzed criticisms are based on fundamental misunderstandings and for this reason they cannot be considered as decisive. However, what is this minimum? What do these, so diverse, arguments, have in common? Obviously, it is the assumption according to which the arguments prove that God does exist.<sup>5</sup>

It should be emphasized that it is not my aim to examine the historical versions of both the criticisms discussed in the text. The article by assumption is to concentrate on systematic

---

<sup>5</sup> This – it would seem – rather trite statement will prove to be the key one in the light of my analyses. Because of this assumption my defense of natural theology does not include arguments that only postulate the existence of God, such as the moral argument, Pascal's Wager or William James' thesis about the right to believe.

issues. Hence, my characterization of both charges should not be treated as one accurately showing all their historical formulations. It is rather a reconstruction that – I hope – highlights the meaning of the charges against natural theology, allows to understand them better, and – which follows from this statement – to enter into an honest philosophical argument with them.

## II. Criticism of Pascal. The God of philosophy and the God of religion

One of the best-known charges against the proofs presented by natural theology is the argument saying that even if they are conclusive, then beings whose existence is proved by them have nothing to do with the God of religion, that is with the being whom religious people worship. Blaise Pascal certainly may be considered a supporter of this objection. In Section IV of *Thoughts* he wrote:

(...) It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason. This, then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not by the reason. Faith is a gift of God; do not believe that we said it was a gift of reasoning. Other religions do not say this of their faith. They only give reasoning in order to arrive at it, and yet it does not bring them to it.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Pascal 2012.

A detailed interpretation of this statement by the author of *Provincial Letters* in the context of the whole of his philosophical project should certainly be left to scholars studying his philosophy. However, it seems clear that in the opinion of the French thinker philosophical methods cannot decide the most important issues connected with religion. And yet – which raises no doubts – the thesis about the existence of God is one (and certainly the most important) of such issues. This is how Pascal's position towards the value of proofs for the existence of God is discussed by Frederick Copleston:

Pascal seems to say clearly that the natural reason is incapable of proving God's existence and that faith alone can assure us of this truth. (...) But Pascal had a profounder reason for rejecting the traditional proofs of God's existence. The knowledge of God which he had in mind was the knowledge of God as revealed in Christ, mediator and redeemer, a knowledge which is the response to man's intimate consciousness of his own misery. But a purely philosophical knowledge of God involves knowledge neither of man's need for redemption nor of Christ the redeemer. It can coexist with pride and with ignorance of God as man's supreme good and final end.<sup>7</sup>

Let us now try to reconstruct the first general criticism of natural theology on the basis of these statements. Its supporter

---

<sup>7</sup> Copleston 1994, pp. 160–161.

will argue that every proof formulated within its area will have a certain essential fault. Briefly speaking, it will not prove what it should prove. A pure act, the prime cause, a perfect designer, or finally a being most perfect of all possible ones are not objects of worship. Natural theology can at most prove the existence of such beings.<sup>8</sup> It seems obvious that worshipping beings so “distant” from man (in the moral-axiological sense) would be something strange, or indeed surprising. Hence proofs supplied by natural theology cannot have any significance for a person who wants to find an answer to the question whether God exists, because they pass over the aspect of the person’s experiences and beliefs concerning the worldview.<sup>9</sup> This is why they seem too tenuous a base for establishing, or rather justifying, a form of a religious cult, as well as for inspiring religious feelings in a person. This is why they may be considered completely useless as far as assistance is concerned in deciding problems encountered by someone who tries to ponder over issues connected with religious beliefs.

---

<sup>8</sup> Here an important reservation should be made. The present critique maintains its “striking power” only when it is directed against natural theology with a theistic background. Deistic natural theology may content itself with proving the existence of a perfect designer, architect, builder etc. It resists the present critique as deism rejects Revelation, and the main “edge” of the charge is based on inadequacy of the concepts of God occurring in natural theology to the religious description of him.

<sup>9</sup> It should be stressed that these aspects are taken into consideration in the above mentioned moral argument, Pascal’s Wager or William James’ thesis about the right to believe. This is why they are resistant to the first critique of natural theology.



How can this type of criticism be rebutted? Firstly, it should be noticed that there can be the fideistic position at its foundation. As is well known, fideism is by definition ill-disposed towards an intellectualistic approach to pondering over issues connected with religious faith. It may even be said that fideism is simply one of the shapes of irrationalism in philosophy. This type of observation certainly does not allow rebutting the discussed criticism as groundless, but rather is a kind of a hint. It allows showing the relation that occurs between this criticism and fideism – one of the positions discussed in the area of philosophy of religion.

However, one has to agree that religion indeed assumes a personal contact with God, an interpersonal relation enabling the theist to feel moral obligations towards God (e.g. that he should worship him, obey him etc.), whereas God emerging from the conclusions of natural theology proofs is presented at most as an abstract obtained from a full, religious concept of God. Hence these proofs cannot have any significance for the theist, as they concern something different from God, and certainly something much poorer than what religion expresses. They are unable to strengthen a person's faith or to enrich it.

It seems that the accusation is based on a certain misunderstanding. Both natural theology (philosophy of religion) and revealed theology (as two separate disciplines) possess the same material object, which is God (even if they not always use the same name to denote this object). However, they have different formal objects, so each of them deals with God in a slightly

different aspect. Defining this difference is a rather subtle problem and, which follows from it, a very difficult one, but at least an attempt at such a differentiation may be outlined.

Natural theology asks such questions as: Does God exist? If he exists, what is he? If he exists and is something, how do we learn about him? On the other hand revealed theology seems to concentrate rather on moral-personal qualities of God, that is the ones that would justify the fact that God is worthy of worship and say why his orders should be obeyed. It should also be added that revealed theology is based on texts considered sacred, whereas natural theology builds its proofs on the basis of data coming from the mind; in the question of justification it does not accept the authority of Revelation.

After what has been said it may be stated that the gap between the concept of God found in natural theology and the concept of God in revealed theology proves to be apparent only. For even if we agree that theists do not worship a pure act or the prime cause in itself, the truth still is that these aspects of God are present in the religious concept of him.

The God of religion is both a pure act and the creator of the world, the prime cause and a being most perfect of all the possible ones. Religion simply adds something else to the mentioned aspects. No important reason can be seen to argue that there is a contradiction between these understandings. It seems that they are can be harmonized, that they are complementary. The charge may be treated then as an expression of the view that a philosopher of religion speaking about God has to maneuver

between Scylla and Charybdis. On the one hand he has to avoid the charge of accepting as premises the data from the Revelation of a given religion, and on the other, when his discussion is devoid of these elements he is exposed to the accusation that he passes over factors that are most important for the religious faith and constructs something that may be called an “alienated” or “abstracted” religion.

Someone could say then that he should look for some middle course. However, is such a course possible in the question of the existence of God? It seems it is not; it seems we have to make the decision about what we are in favor of. I think that if we are to keep consistently to the division of competences between natural theology and theology *sensu stricto* – then a philosopher of religion (a natural theologian) has to avoid the charge of confessionalism. In a sense, as it were by the nature of his own profession, he has to be engaged in abstracted religion, and it is not at all decided (which was said above) that theses of natural theology and revealed theology on some level cannot be harmonized, or at least shown not to be contradictory. What is clear, however, is the statement that if a philosopher wants to remain faithful to philosophy, he has to use his reason only.

To sum up, a natural theology proof cannot prove the existence of the God of religion, for then it would have to contain premises coming from the Revelation. Then automatically it would be subject to the charge of confessionality. At the same time it would stop being part of philosophy of religion – it would become an argument of revealed theology. But if a philosopher

of religion is to stay on the ground of his own competences, he may not offer such a proof, and – which follows – nobody may make an accusation against him because of that. Finally let us emphasize that the criticism has a certain value. It seems that it may be treated as a postulate saying that faith (understood as religious involvement) may not be directed to some abstract entities but to God as a real person. It may be argued that this is a valuable observation, in some way significant from the theistic point of view, but one not having much in common with some irremovable defect of the proofs of the existence of God. In a proof of the existence of God his personal relation with people is disregarded. Thus it seems that the discussed criticism is the aftermath of a certain popular belief about what philosophy is. It may be said that it has a direct connection with certain (albeit not always consciously accepted) assumptions with a metaphilosophic character. The question of such an understanding of philosophy has been explained by Professor Antoni B. Stępień:

Connecting philosophy with the view of the world makes an amateur, who does not possess the competence of solid philosophizing, approach its issues not in a solid, intellectual way, but with subjective prejudices and various emotions. He demands that philosophy should respond proportionally to these emotions. But solid philosophy escapes this. (...) I remember some philosophy students in their first year of studies, who, having listened to a lecture on metaphysics presenting some deliberations that were quite clear in themselves and led to the recognition of the existence of

God, raised some doubts: “this is too simple to be true. Is it that much only?” Similar attitudes can often be encountered.<sup>10</sup>

From the above deliberations the conclusion may be drawn that although it is true that philosophical findings may influence someone’s worldview (in this case – its religious part), this happens in a specific, rather limited range of cases. Thus the above criticism of natural theology comes, firstly, from ignoring this fact, and secondly, from giving philosophy tasks that are beyond its capabilities, methods and aims, and first of all beyond its nature. It is so because of the functions in which philosophy cannot replace religion, and this is exactly what the discussed criticism expects from natural theology (that, after all, is a branch of philosophy). In this sense Kant’s statement in *Critique of Pure Reason* “*I have found it necessary to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith*”<sup>11</sup> should be slightly changed to: “*The area of knowledge should be restricted a little in order to maintain some room for faith*”. This only means that maintaining a clear boundary between revealed theology and natural theology will be advantageous for both these disciplines. However, it seems that natural theology will always have to face the criticism we are discussing here, for as long as religious beliefs will constitute a significant part of the worldview, they will pose philosophical questions to which human persons will demand answers.

---

<sup>10</sup> Stępień 1999, pp. 12–13.

<sup>11</sup> See Logan 1998, pp. 133–148.

### III. A criticism of Oppy. A proof that will convince any rational subject

The other criticism of natural theology also hypothetically assumes that there may exist a conclusive proof of God's existence. A supporter of this criticism maintains, however, that such a proof will not make a person – a rationally thinking atheist or an agnostic – maintain the belief that God really exists. This is the position assumed, among others, by Graham Oppy<sup>12</sup> In *Arguing about God* he writes:

I have tried to defend the view that no argument that has been constructed thus far provides those who have reasonable views about the existence of orthodoxly conceived monotheistic gods with the slightest reason to change their minds.<sup>13</sup>

Thus the condition that is set to natural theology here is that the proof is to induce rational persons to change their beliefs about the existence of God.<sup>14</sup> The starting point of this ar-

---

<sup>12</sup> See Oppy 1995, pp. 198–199: “I conclude that there are no ontological arguments that provide me with a good reason to believe that God (...) exists. (...) I conclude that there are perfectly general grounds on which I can dismiss the possibility of a dialectically effective ontological argument. Only those who make the relevant presuppositions will suppose that some ontological arguments are sound (...)”.

<sup>13</sup> Oppy 2006, p. 425.

<sup>14</sup> One could defend the conclusions Oppy has reached in the following way: He not so much wants to say that irrespective of the logical

gument is the concept of a rational subject, or in other words, of a rational person. According to Oppy a rational person is one who is able to revise his beliefs when he realizes that they may be in some way improved.<sup>15</sup> Thus in Oppy's perspective rationality is a certain disposition that may be manifested by subjects (human persons).

Certainly the conception of rationality that Oppy is in favor of may be debated. It can be indicated that the concept of a rational subject (or a rational person) is a concept that is formulated as a result of the operation of idealization. In this sense one could argue that in fact there are no purely rational subjects. It is rather a certain ideal postulated by epistemology or philosophy of science. It ignores the existence of the psychological-emotional sphere in man. And this is what the main error of the second general critique of natural theology consists in. It leads straight to the question that may seem ludicrous at first glance: Where does the certainty come from that proofs of the existence of God are to convince anybody? And

---

value of the proof, it is effective only when it will make someone change his belief about the existence of God, as that the proofs that have been presented up till now contain either incorrect (or controversial) premises, or the conclusions do not follow from the premises. This is why subjects that are considered rational will surely reject their conclusions. But the reply should be that the key concept of the criticism of Oppy is the so-called dialectical effectiveness. It is this effectiveness that is the ultimate criterion for recognizing a proof of God's existence as satisfactory. See Oppy 1995, p. 198.

<sup>15</sup> Oppy 1995, p. XII.

the next one is: Even if we agree that their most important aim is to persuade someone to hold the conviction that God does exist, how do we know that such a proof is never going to convince anybody?

I would like to propose the hypothesis that the function of convincing is not an essential feature of proofs of the existence of God. I think that what is most important in those proofs is an attempt at deciding a certain question – whether a certain being exists or not. The conviction that natural theology's proofs are successful if and only if they convince someone to accept the conclusion drawn from them is false and perhaps is the main reason why the debate about the problem of the existence of God is so muddled and complicated. Certainly this is not to mean that formulating a proof that will convince someone that he should accept the conclusion drawn from it may be excluded beforehand. This is confirmed by everyday practice of philosophers who, although they often treat some arguments with reserve, are also sometimes persuaded by some reasoning to change (often radically) their position. However, I claim that this cannot be guaranteed *a priori*. It seems that this refers to all philosophical arguments, for it is meaningless whether an argument is supposed to support one of the positions in the debate concerning the problem of universals, or to justify the Cartesian dualism. It seems that the opinion expressed in the hypothesis formulated above is also shared (at least partially) by Alvin Plantinga, for in the Preface to the second edition of *God and Other Minds* he wrote:



In evaluating the theistic arguments, (...) I employed a traditional but improperly stringent standard; there may be plenty of good arguments for theism even if there aren't any that start from propositions that compel assent from every honest and intelligent person and proceed majestically to their conclusion by way of forms of argument that can be rejected only on pain of irrationality. After all, no philosophical arguments of any consequence meet that standard, and the fact that theistic arguments do not is not as significant as I thought.<sup>16</sup>

Although in this respect I agree with Plantinga, it is worth noting that often validity of a proof is agreed on, but its soundness is not. Incorrectness of the thesis saying that convincing someone is an essential feature of proofs of the existence of God may be demonstrated in two ways. The first one is weak and refers to the generally known historical-philosophical findings, whereas the second one refers to analysis of the very concept of proof.

It is well known that proofs of the existence of God were formulated in writings by those philosophers who were at the same time theists. I mean here especially Anselm of Canterbury. His philosophical project is commented by saying, more or less, that his theological conceptions are not addressed in the first place to non-believers, but they are rather rational deepen-

---

<sup>16</sup> A. Plantinga, *Preface to the 1990 paperback edition*, [in:] Plantinga 1990, pp. IX–X.

ing of the truths of the formerly accepted faith<sup>17</sup>. However, if it is really so, nothing seems clearer than the fact that proofs of the existence of God cannot be expected to convince anybody, if originally they were directed to the convinced ones only and they were not designed for the aim of convincing anybody else.

Nevertheless, on the basis of the above findings a completely different conclusion is most often drawn. It is not said that the proofs have nothing to do with the function of convincing someone, but it is stated that they are not proofs *sensu stricto*! And it is here that we are reaching the second important objection. Together with this conclusion such vague terms denoting proofs start appearing as ways, attempts, attitudes, etc. Exactly at this point the sense of the term “proof” is changed, no one knows when or how, from the logical one to the psychological (or popular) one.

The difference between these two understandings was accurately explained by the outstanding Polish philosopher Tadeusz Czeżowski. He writes:

A proof in the psychological sense is a set of statements, spoken or written, aiming at inducing in a competent person a justified belief about the truth of the proposition constituting the object of the proof. The action that is performed when providing a proof is called argumentation, and particular links of the proof – argu-

---

<sup>17</sup> Viola 2009, pp. 6–7. It may be debated if Anselm himself would agree with such an interpretation of his thoughts, especially in the context of the method of rational analysis of the truth of the faith.

ments. In the logical sense a proof is a system of propositions consisting of the proposition being proved and other propositions, with which it is connected by the relations of entailment, and from which – as from premises – it can be inferred by deduction.<sup>18</sup>

Let us look at the situation once again. Let us imagine that we possess a proof of the existence of God with premises, relations of logical inference and a correctly drawn conclusion. We start analyzing it as a logical proof: we are examining it to check if it is valid or sound. But at the very end of the analysis we change the sense of the term “proof” and from the proof being examined we begin to require something completely different than at the beginning. No wonder that we have to admit at once that the proof “is not effective”.

It seems that the logical proof is a being of such a kind that even if no subject capable of accepting it existed, it would still be legitimate; similarly, the thought occurs to us that if no man existed two and two would still be four. Hence, the fact that a proof will not convince anybody (if we agree to this) cannot be an accusation against it. The proof itself does not need anybody’s approval; its only “worry” is whether it is formally and materially correct. And nothing more. The truth of a proof cannot be considered dependent on whether it will be recognized by somebody or not. It seems that in the opposite case this would lead straight to a position that is close to psychologism, and –

---

<sup>18</sup> T. Czeżowski, *Dowód*, [in:] Czeżowski 2009, p. 89.

which follows from it – it would undermine the authority of scientific achievements.

This new expectation of the proof of the existence of God is a search for either a self-evident conclusion (let us call it Cartesian), or an empirical proof (let us define it as Humean). In both cases we are dealing with expectations impossible to meet.

The former one seems to echo the philosophical dream of absolute certainty. The misunderstanding consists in the fact that if we especially care about certainty, what we are looking for is not a logical proof, from whose conclusion we can always distance ourselves, but an efficient method of psychological persuasion that will convince everyone. Let us add that any attempt to construct such a proof would face basic problems. I will draw the reader's attention to the most important of them. We do not have the necessary knowledge of future facts. This means that when we are constructing a proof in this sense it cannot be guaranteed that a subject who will familiarize himself with it in the future will or will not recognize its conclusion. This depends on what the subject will do. If acceptance of any proof could be guaranteed, this would mean that there is always an efficient method of psychological persuasion, and this seems highly dubious.

Still another question may be posed. Doesn't a supporter of this criticism have to assume that a conclusive proof from natural theology has causal powers effecting the subject? It seems that he does, since it is assumed here that the proof in a way automatically (as far as it is conclusive) will start the process of

including the new conviction into the set of the ones that are accepted by the subject. Postulating this automaticity induces associations exactly with the causal relation. It seems, however, that ascribing the ability to be a cause of anything to any philosophical reasoning is at least controversial.

Certainly it may be said that some philosophical reasoning is a cause of in the sense that it changes the subject's attitude towards the beliefs that he maintained earlier. However, this is a highly metaphorical expression, as it is the very subject that changes his beliefs. Reasoning within philosophy may only give rise to such a change that is made by the subject, whereas it does not take any "actions" concerning a set of any beliefs. In the terminology that is used in analytical philosophy it may be said: no philosophical argument is an "agent" – it does not initiate anything, apart from some conceptual consequences for some philosophical theses. Thus it seems that this kind of "causality" may not be considered either physical causality, or agent causality.

As far as the Humean type of suggestion is concerned it may be said that it is a remnant of verificationism. Despite the fact that the project has ended up in a defeat, in philosophy still the desire vegetates to postulate a method of verifying theses by sensual experience. However, if God is a spiritual being by definition, one cannot expect to "see" God in such a way that empiricists postulate. All this seems to show that we have to get used to the thought that ultimately we may only use our reason to decide about the existence of God.

We may not like – for a variety of reasons – the results we can obtain with the use of it, but if we do not have an argument against them we have to accept them. The above reasons make me think that the discussed arguments against the natural theology are not sound.

#### IV. Conclusion

At least two serious accusations may be made against the above analyses. The first one would say that even if they are correct they do not introduce anything important into the development of natural theology, because they pass over the answer to the essential question posed by this discipline, which is: Does God exist? In this context the author may be accused of deliberately not referring to the most important object of the debate and trying to find and analyze secondary problems that cannot have any influence on finding an answer to the question of the existence of God. Apart from the fact that the presented analysis, as it were, had to leave aside this question (in the face of the general form that both charges against natural theology have, which was discussed above), it seems that their value may be defended in the following way.

Although the argumentation presented in the article indeed does not bring one closer to directly solving the question of the existence of God, it may prove useful for natural theology in a more indirect way. If the analyses presented here really point

to the fact that both the discussed criticisms of natural theology are not correct, then if a conclusive proof of the existence of God was formulated, at least it would be clear that the criticisms cannot decide about theoretical uselessness of such an argument. This certainly does not mean that this would guarantee its correctness (because everything would depend on what the argument would be like), but it would be clear beforehand that its possible criticisms would have to be different from the ones discussed above – since both, as unsound, cannot demonstrate the uselessness of any argument from the domain of natural theology. What is more, it seems that the very postulate of defining the conditions that a line of reasoning has to meet to be recognized as – to use Plantinga’s formulation – “a victorious sample of natural theology” seems legitimate. Especially in the face of the never-ending debates concerned with the value of particular proofs of the existence of God, in which – one could have the impression – too little room is devoted to what is really expected from an efficient proof of natural theology.

The other charge that may be brought against the theses in the present text has an epistemological character, for if we agree that the ability to convince is not the essence of proofs of the existence of God, the situation is possible (at least theoretically) that the existence of God is proven, in the sense that there exists an objective basis for producing a conclusive proof that God exists, and yet the subject does not possess the knowledge about it, because in accordance with the classical definition of knowledge the element of belief that the proposition “God exists” is true is

missing here. I think this is a rather serious problem, even if for the reason that we usually agree with the view that if a belief is proven it may be included in the set of beliefs called knowledge (this is so especially in the case of scientific knowledge). However, is it acceptable for a theist that the thesis concerning the existence of God should be such a formal issue? An answer to this question has already partly been given in the present text: discussing the problem of the existence of God within philosophy requires agreeing to the use of its methods (as well as to the limitations of these methods) and agreeing to the aspectual character of these analyses. However, this is an issue that greatly exceeds the scope and the subject matter of the present article and needs a separate, detailed analysis; nevertheless one should be aware that such a problem does exist.

What is more, someone could make another charge against the thesis that the function of convincing is not the essence of the proofs of the existence of God. Proofs of the existence of God (as well as any other proofs and lines of reasoning within philosophy) are formulated by human persons and are presented to other people to be assessed and analyzed. Thus incorrectness of the thesis formulated by the author of the article would consist in the impossibility to omit the epistemological aspect when the subject of the discussion is correctness of a philosophical argument. This is so because proofs are not up in the air, they are not created *ex nihilo*. They are just a tool for expressing and transmitting our beliefs to other people. And what else does the author of the article want to do but exactly convince other human



persons that the thesis he is in favor of is true? And since it is so, he wants to induce in those persons the belief that the thesis is true. Thus it may be stated that the author is inconsistent when he wants to do what in his article he pronounces unfeasible.

A reply to a charge formulated in this way has to be the following. The most important aim of my analyses was to show that certain two general criticisms of natural theology are not efficient. Hence I disregard the question whether the conclusions that ultimately I am in favor of will make someone nourish the belief that it is really like this. Certainly, it would be really rewarding for the author if it happened just like this – but this is another story. For it seems that philosophy is something more (or even something else) than some large-scale psychological game to win people's hearts (or it should be rather said: people's minds). What is more, from my reply to the second criticism it does not follow that it is impossible that some proof can convince someone sometime. As I pointed above, such cases happen fairly frequently in philosophers' everyday experience. However, it is impossible to guarantee that a proof will surely make someone nourish one or another belief in something. For this reason I think then that such a criterion may not be applied to natural theology proofs.

It should also be remembered that the fact that theoretical findings supplied by natural theology may influence a lot more fields than only those problems that philosophy of religion is interested in, speaks for this branch of knowledge. As is well known one of the central issues brought up by contemporary

philosophy is the problem of naturalism. If natural theology managed to formulate a conclusive proof of the existence of God this would at the same time be a proof that the naturalist position is false<sup>19</sup>, for if ontological naturalism states that there is only one space-time universe, it is enough to show that there exists one being that is non-temporal, non-spatial and not identical with this universe to prove the falsity of this position. And if a philosopher managed to formulate a conclusive proof of the non-existence of God, this would not yet show that the thesis of naturalism is true. Even if God does not exist, still mathematical objects, values, purely intentional objects etc. may exist. In this situation to show that naturalism is true one would have to prove that the existence of these beings is possible only when there exists God who is at the same time the condition for or the cause of their existence. However, since it has been proven that God does not exist – a naturalist could argue – also the other beings (constituting a theoretical problem for ontological naturalism) do not exist either, and hence naturalism is true. An interesting problem arises here that is connected with the question about what reply could a theist give to such argumentation. Anyway, on this level of debate a naturalist is forced to prove the thesis about the ontic dependence of the above mentioned beings on God (or nature), whereas for a theist this is completely unnecessary. However, it should be remembered that perhaps

---

<sup>19</sup> This is so, obviously, if we have a orthodoxly theistic, and not e.g. pantheistic concept of God.

the theist had to prove the ontic dependence between God and beings in the world before, i.e. at the level of that natural theology proof that he proclaims himself in favor of. Whatever it is, though, it seems that it can be maintained that natural theology is a tool with which it is possible to support analyses made in other branches of philosophy, e.g. in ontology.

Obviously all the statements contained in the present article can be (and I hope will be) subject to debate. However, irrespective of whether the results of these analyses are correct or not, it seems that the questions tackled in the text clearly show that natural theology continues to pose a lot of problems and issues that demand a solid philosophical analysis.

## References

- Copleston F. (1994), *A History of Philosophy*, vol. IV: *Modern Philosophy: From Descartes to Leibniz*, Image Books (Doubleday), New York.
- Czeżowski T. (2009), *Filozofia na rozdrożu*, Wydawnictwo UMK, Toruń.
- Logan B. (1998), *Hume and Kant on Knowing the Deity*, "International Journal for Philosophy of Religion", 43, pp. 133–148.
- Oppy G. (1995), *Ontological Arguments and Belief in God*, Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Oppy G. (2006), *Arguing about Gods*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

- Pascal B. (2012), *Thoughts*, trans. W.F. Trotter, available online at: <http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/pascal/pensees-contents.html> [accessed November 12, 2012].
- Plantinga A. (1990), *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London.
- Plantinga A. (2002), *God, Freedom and Evil*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids.
- Stępień A.B. (1999), *Filozofia jest nauką*, [in:] A.B. Stępień, *Studia i szkice filozoficzne*, vol. 1, Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, Lublin, pp. 9–15.
- Viola C.E. (2009), *Anzelm z Aosty. Wiara i szukanie zrozumienia*, Polish trans. E.I. Zieliński, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin.
- Zagzebski L.T. (2012), *Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.