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Great Thinkers On Great Questions

By: Roy Abraham Varghese

GREAT THINKERS ON GREAT QUESTIONS

★
Is there
a God?

★
Can right be
distinguished
from wrong,
good from evil?

★
Is there a life
after death, and
if so, why?

★
Does the soul or
mind exist separately
from the body?

★



Edited by ROY ABRAHAM VARGHESE

- The difference between sapiential sense and other ways of knowing can be recognized by reference to certain conditions and criteria: No claim or theory that requires empirical evidence to establish it is a datum of sapiential sense. Data in the natural sciences can only be obtained by the application of the scientific method. Data in the social sciences pertains to the behavior of human persons and communities and is dependent on speculation deriving from empirical investigation. Both the natural and the social sciences sometimes make assumptions about the nature of the human person that cannot be supported by any amount of empirical study. Arguments and theories in mathematics and logic also fall outside the purview of sapiential sense. Nevertheless, they cannot start from ground zero and are dependent on certain axioms and premises that cannot themselves be proved by the arguments or theories. The axioms and premises are the starting-points from which a deductive argument is built and implicitly “contain” the conclusion. (Philosophers like Bertrand Russell have even pointed out that the whole of mathematics can only give us tautologies.) Of course, it is possible to increase one’s knowledge through an argument because we find out what is indeed “contained” in the premises. Moreover, inductive arguments are probabilistic in nature and therefore their conclusions give us new, albeit revisable, information. At least in certain cases, the validity of the premises of a logical argument can only be discerned by sapiential sense and cannot be demonstrated in any other way. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p7]
- Sapiential sense-data are: 1. affirmations. 2. affirmations of such a fundamental nature that they are presupposed by (and therefore lie beyond) our abilities and activities of empirical and logical investigation – they are both meta-scientific and meta-philosophical 3. obvious and immediately known to all human beings. 4. entirely congruent with ordinary experience without contradicting it at any point. 5. marked by a fundamental coherence, clarity and simplicity. 6. presupposed by all of our intellectual activity. 7. impossible to deny without implausible rationalizations and absurd consequences. 8. only “seen” to be true and, therefore, self-guaranteeing and self-authenticating (the truth of what is “seen” cannot be demonstrated with external criteria) . [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p7-8]
- A realist of Gilson’s generation, D. J. B. Hawkins, has given a fair description of the relation between philosophy and a common sense that incorporates elements of sapiential sense: Reflection assures me that there are a number of points, relevant to philosophical inquiry, about which I am already

genuinely certain, and their evidence is such that nothing could upset them. . . I am in possession of many truths about what things exist or have existed, whose evidence is quite unshakable, and these are often relevant to philosophy. There are what would normally be described as facts of experience, such as the existence of the self as a unitary being persisting through time and the existence of an external world and other men. . . That we are genuinely certain implies that the belief is more than instinctive, that its object is presented to us as a fact and that on the plane of common sense its evidence is in itself. These facts have to be submitted to philosophical analysis, but they cannot be explained away by it, because their certainty is prior and independent. Consequently common sense often provides a negative test of the validity of philosophical conclusions. If these contradict common sense truths, or make it impossible that we should know things which we do in fact know, they are certainly false. [D. J. B. Hawkins, *Approach to Philosophy* (London: The Paladin Press, 1938), pp. 19-21.] . [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p11-12]

- Gilson himself shows the necessity and even the nature of sapiential sense in the same book in which he criticizes “common sense”: If we turn to the testimony of experience, which we should do at the beginning of any undertaking, it would seem difficult to designate by any other word than “evident” the type of certitude we have concerning the existence of the external world. The actual existence of the page I am writing or the one you are reading is not an intellectual evidence of the axiomatic type, for it is possible for this page to be elsewhere, nor would it be self-contradictory for this page to have never been written. On the other hand, I need not ask that it be accepted as a postulate, for sensible perception is normally accompanied by an immediate certitude so clear that we hardly care to question it. No one really doubts that sight, touch, hearing, taste and even smell are normally competent to attest to existence, and whenever it is necessary to verify the existence of anything, it is to the testimony of one or more of the senses that we turn. This conviction of the reliability of our senses is simply the self-evidence of our experience. Since we are here concerned with self-evidence, it is futile to demand a demonstration.” [Etienne Gilson, *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), pp. 180–1.] . [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p12]

- **Part I: CAN WE KNOW AND KNOW THAT WE KNOW?
(RELATIVISM)**

- **Great Question 1:** It is commonly believed that “truth” is simply a product of perspective or genetics or cultural environment. We are told by relativists that the human mind cannot really know anything. What is your assessment of relativism?
- **Richard Swinburne**
- “It is commonly believed that ‘truth’ is simply a product of perspective or genetics or cultural environment.” Well, this doctrine cannot be, in general, true because it is clearly self-defeating. If there isn’t such a thing as truth, then this view, that truth is a product of perspective or genetics, cannot itself be true. So the general doctrine cannot possibly be true. What is more plausible is that on some matters human beings cannot know anything; there isn’t a truth in some areas or, at any rate, a truth that human beings can discover. For example, it might be (though I don’t think it is the case) that there are no truths of morals. The doctrine that there are no truths of morals would not be self-defeating in a way that the general doctrine “there are no truths” is self-defeating because there might be truth in some other discipline, say metaphysics, but not in morality. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p23]
- The only thing to do in any field is to proceed and see how far we can get. Some things are obvious and some things aren’t so obvious. Let’s see how strong the arguments are, starting from the things which are obvious for different kinds of knowledge, and maybe some things can be known fairly well and other claims to knowledge are weak. I don’t feel happy with any general doctrine that we can’t have knowledge in this area, or certainly not, for reasons I have already given, that we can’t know anything at all. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p24]
- **Hugo Meynell**
- What you rightly say “is commonly believed” is in fact self-destructive. Is the proposed truth, of perspective or genetics or cultural environment? If so, there is no good reason to believe it. If not, it falsifies itself. All forms of relativism may be disposed of by similar arguments. Now I maintain that Kant was right in holding that there are certain a priori principles of reasoning that have to be established by something other than deductive logic, and which are presupposed in all of our commonsense and scientific reasoning. I should say that these assumptions, and the reasons why we tend to know what is absolutely true and to know and do what is absolutely good to the extent that we thoroughly apply them, have been set out more brilliantly and persuasively by [Bernard] Lonergan than by anyone else. He summarizes

them in what he calls the “four transcendental precepts:” be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p24]

- Finally, to be responsible is to act in accordance with the value-judgment at which one has reasonably arrived. Deductive logic facilitates the operation of intelligence and reasonableness; one makes deductions from hypotheses, and rejects those hypotheses, deductions from which are falsified by experience, retaining (usually only provisionally) those which are corroborated by it. It is true that, by itself, or even in combination merely with experience, deductive logic can discover nothing new. **On the other hand, there are no other ways of reliably discovering what is true and good than being thoroughly attentive, intelligent, and reasonable; “scientific experimentation and philosophical argumentation” are simply ways of applying these precepts to get to know different aspects of reality.** [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p25]
- characteristics of our way to knowledge that cannot be reduced to logic in the strict sense. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p26]
- Relativists infer, from examples like this, that morality, value, and responsible conduct are completely relative to social milieu. But in my view this is a boneheaded conclusion. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p26]
- I conclude that the principles of truth and value which I have tried to sketch and justify are quite incompatible with relativism; though there is a kind of dogmatic and shortsighted absolutism, which would impose on everyone the customs and conventions which happen to suit one’s own society or group, against which moral relativism is an understandable though confused protest. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p27]
- **Alvin Platinga**
- Why should I believe that truth is simply a product of perspective or genetics or cultural environment? Is this being proposed to me as something that is really true, is it being proposed to me as a product of genetics? If all the relativist is really telling me is just that from his perspective that is what truth is, then of course I agree with him. From his perspective that is what truth is. But from my perspective it’s dead wrong. The fundamental problem here, a fundamental problem for relativism – apart from just the fantastic nature of it (it’s extremely difficult to believe that it isn’t really just true that $7 + 5 =$

12, but only true from somebody's perspective or point of view), apart from the sort of incredibleness of it, the main problem is that it completely does away with the possibility of disagreement. It looks like people actually disagree. One person says: it is wrong to discriminate against people just because of their color; someone else says no, it's right to do that; and each person thinks that what they say is true. The relativist comes along and tells us that the whole presupposition of their debate is false: there isn't any such thing as truth. All there is really is truth-from-a-perspective. So (according to the relativist) the one person is saying "from my perspective, it is wrong to treat someone badly just because of their color;" and the other person is saying "from my perspective that is not bad." But then we no longer have a disagreement. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p27]

- Each person is just explaining how things stand from his or her perspective and each person can perfectly well agree with the other person that from that other person's perspective, that is indeed how things look. There is no longer any opportunity for disagreement. Relativism ordinarily begins from an acute awareness of human disagreement: this disagreement, the relativist thinks, suggests that we can't really know much of anything. But then relativism ends by denying that there is any such thing as disagreement. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p27-28]
- So it seems to me there are two problems with relativism. First it denies that there is any such thing as disagreement. Second, it is at most dubiously coherent, because it looks like the relativist is trying to tell us a truth: that truth is just a product of perspective or is always relative to a perspective. It looks like the relativist wants to assert that; but from their own perspective they are not really asserting that. From their own perspective, they are only asserting that from their perspective that is the way things stand. But of course that isn't news, and it isn't startling, and isn't really what they want to claim. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p28]
- **Gerard J. Hughes**
- Popular expressions of relativism, such as "It is true for them that she fell ill because her dead mother-in-law had it in for her", or "It is true for them that cannibalism is morally permissible" are often no more than confused ways of saying "They believed that her dead mother-in-law caused her illness", or "They cannot be blamed for cannibalism, given their sincere beliefs". Nothing follows about the truth of those beliefs, one way or the other. More

sophisticated forms of relativism are more difficult both to state and to assess. For instance, it might be argued that since all our thought and language already presuppose an interpretation of the world, it makes no sense to ask what the world is like “in itself”, uninterpreted. There is no neutral Archimedean point from which the truth of various interpretations might be assessed. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p28]

- Of course, it makes no sense to ask whether something has color independently of any possible perceiver; color essentially involves a relationship between objects and perceivers; equally, it makes no sense to ask whether a whale is a mammal independently of any language users who employ the words “whale” and “mammal”. It still remains the case, though, that the world is the way it is, and the way it is might justify classifying parts of it as whales, or mammals, or both. If such classification is justified, then it will be true to say that whales are mammals. What sort of justification might be involved here? I take the answer to this question to involve some version of pragmatism. That is to say, the test will be some form of success. If we adopt some particular understanding of (a part of) the world, we might then discover that we can interact with it more predictably, control it more tightly, understand it more coherently and in progressively simpler terms. This encourages us to believe that we have. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p29]
- If all our human interpretations are in this way checked against the world, one might expect them gradually to converge. I believe that they do, and that the differences between cultures are less radical than is often supposed. Many of the differences that there are can be explained by differences in technological expertise (say, between Aristotle and ourselves, or between someone from the developed West and a member of a remote Papuan tribe), or by differences in ease of access to information, and so on. Anthropological studies, far from lending support to relativist theories of truth, seem to me on the contrary to demonstrate the possibility of mutual comprehension, and to show that the fundamental modes of human thinking are universally shared. In evolutionary terms, it might be argued that we have succeeded as a race precisely because we are reasonably successful in understanding the world as it is; in theistic terms, it might be argued that God has so created us as to be able to grasp the truth about our world. got it right. Of course this type of criterion will not yield equally definite results in every case. Truth is therefore not equally easy to determine in every instance. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p29]

- Relativism has more often been advanced as an account of morality than as an account of knowledge generally. This is easy to account for, since the test of successful interaction with the world is here less easy to apply than it is in, say, medicine, or chemistry. While I shall offer some further thoughts on truth in ethics in the next section, it is worth remarking here that many allegedly relativist views of ethics are not relativist at all. For example, it is an absolutist, not a relativist, view, that differences in circumstances will often mean that people should act differently; and it is surely obvious that people living in different social, environmental, and economic settings will for that very reason have different moral obligations towards one another. It is no part of the absolutist's view that everyone ought to behave in precisely the same way, no matter who or where they are. Secondly, it is no part of the absolutist's view that there must be only one correct answer to the question "What is it permissible to do in these circumstances?" And finally, an absolutist can, and indeed should, maintain that each person has a moral duty to act as they honestly and sincerely think best, even if those beliefs are in fact mistaken. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p29-30]
- I also think, contrary to what is often supposed, that it is the absolutist rather than the relativist who can give a proper account of the value of tolerance. On the relativist view, truth is self-contained, immune from criticism by any "external" views which might be held by other cultures. There may be practical or political reasons why relativists will decide not to be intolerant of other cultures, and indeed they may believe (and therefore hold that it is true for them) that they should be tolerant. But this belief itself will have no more than a relative truth. In contrast, absolutists will hold that the sincerity of their own beliefs is no guarantee whatever of their truth; there may be much to be learnt from other ways of seeing the world, other ways of structuring society, other ways of leading the moral life. The views of others deserve respect not for merely practical reasons, but because they may be a source of enlightenment and knowledge. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p30]
- **Josef Seifert**
- It is perhaps too much to assert that it is commonly believed today that what we call truth is simply a product of perspective or genetics or cultural environment. But it is true that skepticism and relativism in countless forms are very much prevalent today. The relativist who says that truth is relative contradicts himself, however, because, in so saying, he claims truth for this very judgment. Thus he claims that it is actually so that truth is relative.

Hence, he claims that his own position is true because it is adequate to reality. For he believes that as a matter of fact truth is relative, and thus that relativism is true. Consequently, any relativism presupposes the absolute truth of its own position, of its content and of its reasonability, and in particular of the proposition of the relativity of all truth. But relativism also presupposes the truth of all the reasons which lead the relativist to adopt his relativism. We can see from the internal contradictions of relativism that it cannot possibly be correct. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p30]

- But in addition we can refer to countless evident truths which we can gain in mathematics, even in the sphere of chess theory, in the recognition of our own existence and in the infinite variety of our own experiences and acts which are accessible to us through undeniable evidence, in the insights into mathematical objects and the laws that govern them, into laws governing colors, motions, the moral order, the nature of love, the nature of promises, etc. For example, truths such as that colors are necessarily extended, that motion necessarily presupposes time, that to respect the rights of other persons is necessarily good, while to disrespect them, to murder or to rape others, is not only an evil such as pain, but a moral evil – all these and innumerable other universal truths about the essences of things are supremely intelligible to the human mind. The same applies also to the laws of logic. This immediate access to evident truths (however difficult and arduous the path that leads to evident truth might be) is another and more profound refutation of relativism than the understanding of its internal contradiction. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p30]
- One could refute relativism and skepticism also by understanding the logical connections between the truth and falsity of propositions in formal logic and syllogisms. The way in which the premises of logical arguments contain their conclusion is not such that one presupposes these conclusions but rather that the truth of the different premises guarantees the truth of the conclusion. Hence, from that point of view a conclusion of a logical argument can very well reveal something new that is not known directly but known only indirectly by means of a demonstration. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p30]
- **George F. R. Ellis**
- In my view, this relativist stream of thought can only be pursued in relation to science by those who have had no practical experience of science. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world

Publications 1998, p30]

- One of the most striking features of science throughout its history has been how human presuppositions have again and again been proved false by the nature of reality, as exposed by the experimental method. Nature has often surprised scientists and forced them to revise their theories in the face of indisputable experimental evidence (for example in the cases of quantum theory and of relativity theory); and this is equally true in the case of mathematics, where for example the phenomenon of chaos has been hidden in simple equations until the past decade. It is untenable that the surprising theories that result are simply the result of social construction. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p30-31]
- As regards that hard-core of relativists for whom this argument is unconvincing, my response is a challenge: if you really maintain that scientific laws are simply a social construct or the result of a choice of a language game, then let's see you change your social construct or alter your language game, and rise up and float in the air. Then you will have shown that what is identified by science as the universal law of gravitation does not have a real foundation in nature, and is just a social convention. I do not expect any successful takers. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p31]
- **Ralph Mcinerny**
- Relativism has got to be one of the hardest things to adopt. It seems to me that you have nothing but trouble trying to hold it consistently and I think the example of Nietzsche and Rorty and other nihilists is worthwhile taking into account. Finally they don't try to justify it at all. They don't think relativism is true. If they did they couldn't be relativists. So, finally it is sort of an aesthetic stance that they take and, well, they are welcome to it, but I don't know why I should pay any attention to it. Try being a relativist and it is impossible. In order to state the position you have to negate it. And so I think it is a reductio kind of argument against relativism. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p33]
- Also, we know that we know. Yes. That's a good point. If you have doubt about knowledge, you don't have doubt about the fact that you know that, so you get caught up in the kind of usual difficulties brought against Descartes: he has great confidence in the reason in which he has no confidence. But all those arguments are dissatisfying. Reductio ad absurdum is dissatisfying because we don't need an argument for what we are getting to. So most of the time we have the sense we are playing a game, like that being played by

the people who raised the difficulty. It's almost a shame to have to formulate these things on behalf of the obvious. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p33]

- **William P. Alston**

- The first thing I want to say about this is that we shouldn't assimilate the question of truth to the question of knowledge. As I understand truth, that is propositional truth, the proposition that "SMU is in Dallas" is true if and only if SMU is in Dallas. That is, the content of the proposition provides the necessary and sufficient conditions for its truth. If that content is, shall we say, realized, if it obtains in the world, then the proposition is true. That is all it takes to make it true, and nothing else will suffice. So we shouldn't conflate the question of whether truth is relative to culture or society or something of that sort with the question of whether knowledge is relative in those ways. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p34]

- I think it is obvious there are many truths that no one has knowledge of. For a simple example, just consider the set of propositions of the form, "at such and such a time it was raining on this spot". Think of the indefinitely large set of such propositions where time stretches as far back into the past as you like. Now with respect to this particular spot where I am sitting right now, nobody knows whether it was raining at this spot exactly ninety thousand years ago. No one will and no one can ever know. God knows, no doubt, but leaving God out of the picture, as far as human beings are concerned there is an infinite number of true propositions such that no one knows them to be true, ever will know them to be true. So it is very important not to assimilate truth and knowledge, and there is a pervasive failure to grasp this point in the intellectual world today. People have just forgotten what truth is. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p34]

- There is what it is from an Aristotelian perspective or point of view, there is what it is from a Spinozistic point of view and a Whiteheadian point of view. These may be all empirically equivalent but they are different ways of categorizing the matter. This means that we have to regard what we are talking about as relative to, in this case, metaphysical schemes. But we don't have to relativize truth. We can say that to give an adequate formulation of any proposition, you have to put in a reference to the conceptual scheme or perspective from which the proposition is being asserted. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p35]

- There is no such complete proposition as, that tree has leaves. That tree has leaves relative to Aristotelian metaphysics. Truth can still be the same. It's still the case that the proposition that the tree has leaves relative to Aristotelian metaphysics is true if and only if that tree does have leaves relative to Aristotelian metaphysics. So truth is still a matter of things being as you are saying them to be. It is just that there is a plurality of different ways the world can be said to be. I think that some of these ways can be rejected as being incoherent or selfcontradictory or something like that. And in any event I don't hold any brief for this relativism, but it is a prominent view nowadays, and people are often confused about what is involved in this. It leads them to say that truth is relative, whereas truth isn't relative at all. It is what your propositions are true of that is relative according to this view. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p35]
- **Universal insights presupposed by science and philosophy**
- **Great Question 2:** It is often said that the premises in an argument already "contain" their conclusions and therefore logical arguments cannot reveal anything new. Are there any fundamental insights that lie beyond scientific experimentation and philosophical argumentation to which the human mind has access?
- **Alvin Plantinga:** I think there are all kinds of things we know pre-philosophically and pre-scientifically. We know that there are other people pre-scientifically and pre-philosophically. That is not a product either of scientific investigation or experimentation nor is it a product of philosophical insight or argument. The same goes for our belief that there has been a past, that seven plus five equals twelve, and that I had an orange for breakfast this morning. These are all not results of scientific experimentation nor a result of philosophical discussion. They are rather things that science takes for granted. Science starts from these things. In the same way, science doesn't establish that there are telescopes or other scientific instruments. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p39]
- Philosophy is a bit different. It typically takes logic for granted. It is hard to say what philosophy just as such takes for granted. What you've got are lots of philosophers, and each of them takes certain things for granted. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p39]
- both philosophy and science are enterprises that start, after one already knows a whole lot of things and after one already takes a whole lot of things for

granted. The human mind has access to all kinds of things that it doesn't get by scientific experiment or philosophical argumentation. Certainly the existence of God would be among these things, as would be the existence of other minds. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p40]

- **Josef Seifert:** Not all truths can be known by logical inferences; the fundamental premises and the first principles of logic itself lie beyond demonstrable knowledge, not because they could not be known rationally or because they would just have to be assumed in blind faith, but rather because the supreme and more perfect form of evident and rational knowledge is the intuitive understanding of existence or of necessary essential truths. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p40]
- **Ralph Mcinerny:** Absolutely. I think to be a human being is to know certain truths about the world and about oneself and it is not a matter of education, it is not a matter of gift, it is not a matter of IQ. There are drop-off points, obviously, where we are talking about someone who is impaired from using their human powers. The Aristotelian holds that we all already know things. Philosophy isn't the beginning of knowledge but presupposes that we know things, and that is a very attractive, so to speak, democratic way of doing philosophy, it seems to me, whereas most modern philosophy is very elitist. . [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p40]
- **Does the notion of fundamental insights apply also to moral truths, to our understanding of right and wrong?** Try to find somebody who doesn't have that knowledge. It is very hard, to the point of being impossible, to expunge that from the human consciousness. A lot of people accept dreadful principles of action but would still be appalled if you mistreated them. Our mothers told us, "How would you like it if someone did that to you?" That is a golden rule. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p40]

• **Part II: IS MATTER THE WHOLE STORY?**

- **THE EXISTENCE OF THE SOUL**
- **Great Question3:** Do you accept the existence of a soul or mind separate from the body and, if so, on what basis?
- **Richard Swinburne:** Yes, indeed. This is something of which I am very, very confident. I think all human beings consist of both the body and the soul. I am my body, plus my soul. These are the two parts of me and the soul is the essential part. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great*

Questions, One world Publications 1998, p43]

- Why do I think this?
- Well, consider a thought experiment which, up to now, is just a thought experiment but in the future it certainly may be more than that, it may be really done. I have two parts to my brain, a left part and a right part, and there is reasonable evidence that people can survive with only their left brain, or at any rate their left brain plus their brain stem and maybe a few other bits. So, imagine my brain taken out of my skull in the future and imagine the left half of the brain put into an empty skull, from which the brain has been removed, and my right brain, the right half of my brain, put into a different empty skull from which the brain has been removed. And suppose these two half brains to be connected up to the nervous system of the body into which they have been put. So you have, as it were at stage one, me; and then two unfortunate people from whom brains are removed and the left half of my brain is put into one of these bodies and the right half of my brain into another. And suppose that any other bits which are necessary in order to get a functioning person, say extra bits of brain stem, to be added to each of these half brains, maybe even taken from the brain of my identical twin, so that now we have two people, each one of which differs from the previous two people, in that they have different brains from those and the central part of one of these people is the left half of my original brain and the central part of the other person is the right half of my original brain. Now which of these people is me? There seem to be four possibilities or perhaps only three. One is that neither of them are me, that messing about with brains in this way has simply destroyed me. Or it may be that it is the person with my left-brain who is me or, thirdly, it may be the person with my right-brain who is me or, fourthly, I suppose, it might be that both are me. They couldn't literally both be me because they are different people from each other but it may be that in some sense both are partly me or something like that. Now the point is, we don't know what the answer is, and we wouldn't know what the answer is even though we knew what has happened to every bit of my brain and even though we knew exactly what were my thoughts and feelings before this operation and the thoughts and feelings of the one or two successive persons after the operation. We still wouldn't know which is me. But it is an allimportant, crucial fact, whether it is the left-hand person who is me or the right-hand person who is me or whether I haven't survived the operation or whether, in some sense or other, I am both of these people. This is all-important, all-important for me whether I have survived this operation. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p43-44]

- It is a crucial fact about the world which we would remain ignorant of even if we knew what had happened to every bit of my brain and even if we knew what were the thoughts and feelings of all the people involved. We still wouldn't know which later person was the same as the earlier me and this, therefore, has the consequence that there is going to be a crucial fact about the world which we will be ignorant of if all we know about is what has happened to the material objects of the world. So there must be an immaterial object of which these crucial facts are facts about. Only if I consist of soul and body and if what happens in the operation is that my soul goes with one part of my brain or, alternatively, with the other, can we make sense of what has happened. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p44]
- Our ignorance about what has happened is our ignorance of where my soul has gone and we explain why we don't know the answer, that is because we can't keep souls under observation even though we can keep bits of brain under observation. So only if we suppose there are souls can we make sense of the fact that we don't know some crucial truth about the world, with whether I survived the operation, even though we do know what has happened to every material object in the world. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p44]
- They point out that there is an awful number of truths you won't know about the world if you merely know what has happened to the bits of matter and what properties they have had and, therefore, there must be something extra. For example, if you merely know what is going on in a brain you won't know whether the brain is connected with one person or two persons. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p45]
- It is an obvious fact, say, that I might be having a visual experience and an auditory experience at the same time – I am conscious of hearing this and seeing that – but all an observation of the brain will show you is that certain visual stimuli produce effects in certain parts of the brain and certain auditory stimuli produce effects in other parts of the brain. And it may be that the brain is so disconnected that, really, there are two separate people in whom these stimuli set up mental impressions or, alternatively, that that isn't so. But mere knowledge of what happens in the brain wouldn't tell you how many subjects of experience are connected with the brain and that is often a real question when the brain has been tampered with in various ways so that the left half behaves autonomously from the right half. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications

1998, p45]

- So I don't think you can describe, let alone explain, some basic facts about the world, "I am the same person that has had this previous experience" or "I continue to exist" or "I had this experience and that experience at the same time," unless you suppose that experiences happen to souls rather than just to brains. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p45]
- **Alvin Plantinga:** I do accept the existence of a soul or mind separate from the body. I don't think that a person is the same thing as his or her body. I don't think a person is a material object; my main reason for thinking that is a philosophical one. If I were a material object then I would have to be identical with, say, my body, or my brain, or some part of my brain, or some other part of my body. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p45]
- (Presumably I wouldn't be identical with some other physical object or with somebody else's body, or some collection of other people's bodies.) But (so it seems to me) I am not my body; I am distinct from my body, because it is possible that I should exist when it didn't exist. It seems to me possible, for example, that all the parts of my body should be rapidly replaced by other body parts while I remain conscious, the original parts being destroyed. This is beyond present medical science, of course, but it's logically possible that this could happen. If that were to happen, then I would continue to exist, but the thing that is in fact my body wouldn't exist. It is therefore possible that I exist at a time at which my body does not exist. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p45]
- So I can't be identical with my body. So I must be something distinct from it. But for any other material object, it's also possible that I should exist when it didn't. So it seems to me I am not any material object at all. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p45-46]
- **Hugo Meynell:** Well, my views about this, I'm afraid, are rather unfashionable, but I'll grit my teeth and present them all the same. I think that there are two forms of explanation which we have of things and events, neither of which can be reduced to the other. One is what one might call agent explanation, where you explain something by reference to the intentions and purposes of persons. Why did she walk out of her office? Because she knew Roy Varghese was down the passage and wanted to talk to him about something. Other sorts of explanation don't make any such reference, as when we say that a pond has frozen because of the low temperature, or that

plants have died due to lack of moisture; this is the kind of explanation which isn't agent explanation. One of the reasons, it seems to me, for the belief that we are not totally reducible to our bodies is that agent explanation cannot be reduced to explanation of the other kinds, authorities like Skinner and Freud in some moods notwithstanding. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p46]

- That we can in principle so reduce it is often claimed in the name of science; but the fact is that we cannot subject our mental processes to merely physico-chemical explanation without making nonsense of science. As Lonergan expresses it, if it is really true that the scientist says what she says only due to physico-chemical causation, then the scientist does not say what she says because there is a good reason for her to do so. So there is no point in listening to her. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p46]
- **Josef Seifert:** I accept the existence of a soul or mind separate from the body not only on the basis of religious faith: because of the Christian revelation, as well as because of the teaching of the Catholic Church, to which I adhere. Rather, I think that the existence of a soul, and of a separate mind which is distinct from the body, is also evident on philosophical, rational grounds. In three books which I wrote on this topic, I sought to develop many different arguments for the existence of the soul. One of them is based on the insight that any conscious activity, any act of knowing, or of free decision, can evidently never be performed by a material thing that is extended in space and has parts of its being outside of others. It is evident that the I, the Self, who performs conscious activities, is simple in the sense of being strictly speaking and absolutely indivisible; it can never consist of parts outside other parts in space. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p47-48]
- Moreover, there are many further reasons which demonstrate philosophically the existence of the human soul, above all that being and substantiality are possessed by the human mind in a much more perfect way than any material things could ever possess them. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p48]
- **SIR ALFRED AYER:** I don't think that there are independent mental properties in the sense that I don't believe there are mental properties standing out of any causal relation to physical properties. But what I don't see is a step by which you proceed from a causal relation to an identity. I do think that just as a matter of empirical fact mental properties are caused by physical properties. Language, Truth and Logic was extremely mentalistic in

the sense that it reduces physical objects to what I call sense-contents. Now sense-contents I represent as neutral. But in fact in the history of philosophy they are much nearer the mind than they are to the body. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p48]

- Logical Positivism died a long time ago. I don't think much of Language, Truth and Logic is true. I think it is full of mistakes. I think it was an important book in its time because it had a kind of cathartic effect. It swept away a lot of rubbish and excited people and to a certain extent it gave a new direction to philosophy. But when you get down to detail, I think it's full of mistakes which I spent the last fifty years correcting or trying to correct. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p49]
- **RALPH MCINERNY:** [Thomas Aquinas held that the] body and soul are two different things but they make up one substance. But he also held that the shape of a thing and the thing shaped are one thing. You don't ask where the shape is independently of what it shapes. But in the case of the form that makes a human being a human being, you seem to have reason to think that it could exist independently of matter and the reason is reason. You know, our thinking does not seem to be a physical or chemical process however much it might presuppose sensation, perception, and the like. Thinking itself seems to be an activity that is quite distinguishable from any physical change or psychological change of the lower kind. Now that raises the question, does that mean that the soul is one substance and the body another? No, the body doesn't exist independently of the soul and, if the soul exists independently of the body, it is still a form that requires, for its complete existence, the body, which is the argument for the fittingness of the resurrection. So the soul separated from the body is in an anomalous position. Thomas [Aquinas] speaks of it as a quasisubstance rather than a substance, not made to exist by itself and, if it does for a time, this is not its natural state. . [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p49-50]
- **G. E. M. Anscombe:** I don't know about the soul being distinct from the body. It is the principle of unity of an organism, the soul, and a living organism is a unity and the principle of unity is called the soul. This applies not just to human beings. . [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p52]
- **John Lucas:** The interactionist account involves considerable difficulties and I'm sometimes quite taken with the possibility of some other attempt to

explain the mind and the body in terms of different sorts of predicates or different sorts of explanation. It might be that the real distinction lies not in what we say that it is but in how we understand it. I don't know about that. Whatever attempted explanation I put forward I would certainly not be denying the existence of mind. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p57]

- Dennett's main point must be that the assumption is plausible in the light of the progress of physical science in general. His thought must be something along the lines of: 1. Whenever physical science has managed to conduct a thorough investigation of the working of a physical system, it has always found that it can fully explain the relevant phenomena in purely physical terms. 2. In default of any empirical evidence to the contrary, it is reasonable to extrapolate from this to the particular case of the brain, concluding that in this area too the relevant physical phenomena are, or are likely to be, physically explicable. 3. Since a situation of systematic overdetermination would be inherently puzzling (for how could it be accounted for?), it is reasonable to conclude that the only causal influences on the brain are physical. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p65]
- Admittedly, some materialists would argue that it is precisely the relationship between psychophysical causation and the covering laws which turns out to be problematic on the dualist view. In fact, there are two quite different lines of argument here, one trying to show that the dualist cannot envisage psychophysical laws which cover the causal pairings in a sufficiently determinate way, the other trying to show that the dualist cannot envisage psychophysical laws at all. Both these arguments turn on issues of considerable technical complexity, which I do not have space to discuss here. I have, however, examined them in detail elsewhere and, in each case, tried to vindicate the dualist position. In any case, there is not the slightest suggestion that, in his rejection of dualism, Dennett has either of these arguments in mind. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p68]

• **The freedom of the will**

- **Great Question 4:** Are human decisions entirely shaped by heredity and environment or are human beings capable of free choices? On what basis is it possible to accept the reality of free will?
- **Gerard J. Hughes:** It has often been argued that were all our choices determined by our heredity, upbringing, and the impact of our environment, then moral responsibility would be a chimera. This argument has been

questioned, but, I think, unsuccessfully. The ability to choose one way or another, given all the beliefs and desires that we have at that moment, is surely integral to our concept of what it is to be morally responsible. Of course, the mere fact that determinism would undermine our picture of ourselves as morally responsible, free beings is not of itself a conclusive argument for the falsity of the deterministic account. Perhaps our picture of ourselves is simply a mistaken one. Still, it is a picture which is deeply embedded in our whole way of life and our whole system of values; and that fact alone does, I think, constitute important evidence in its favor. It should not be abandoned without the very best of reasons. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p70]

- One type of argument which is advanced in support of the conclusion that we are not free is a kind of “slippery slope” argument. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p70]
- There are several problems with this argument. One, but perhaps the least important, is that it is not at all evident, and indeed is probably false, that the physical world is a wholly deterministic world. Secondly, it assumes without evidence that the events in our brains must have a causal explanation of a physical kind, by which I mean an explanation in terms of the laws of physics and bio-chemistry, and which is part of a chain extending beyond the agent into parents, sensory inputs, and other features of the external environment. In short it assumes that the agent cannot cause such brain-events in a way which is not explicable in physical terms. Of course the physical world is the world as described in terms of physics; but it is quite another matter to assert, as the argument we are considering does, that the facts of physics are the only possible, or the only ultimate, facts. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p71]
- I conclude then that we do have free will. But I do not want to be dogmatic on how far our freedom extends, or precisely how free will is related to habit, routine, and settled character traits. To make a free choice one has to be able to present more than one alternative to oneself as in some way good; and it may well be that a given individual might, for a variety of reasons, simply be unable to present some things in this light. I think we understand too little of the interconnections between intellectual appraisal, emotions, and desires to be more precise. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p72]
- **Richard Swinburne:** Yes, I believe human beings are capable of free choices. Not, of course, totally free choices. We are all subject to various influences from environment and heredity but I think we have the power to resist those

to some extent. We have a limited free choice. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p72]

- Why do I think this? Well, I think any argument I give will be a fairly complicated one and, therefore, I can't give it in full in this context. But the first thing I would draw attention to is that modern science teaches that the most fundamental laws of nature are the laws of quantum theory and the laws of quantum theory say that the very small bits of matter, the electrons, the protons, etc., of which our universe is made, only behave in statistical ways, that is to say there is a 50% probability that an atom will decay after a certain time, a 70% probability that if the photon goes through this slot it will end up in this place on a photographic plate, and so on. Now, in general, the indeterminacy of nature on the small scale averages out on the large scale. That is to say, to take an analogy, suppose that whether a coin falls heads or tails is an indeterministic matter, a 50% chance of heads and a 50% chance of tails. It will nevertheless follow that if you toss a coin a thousand times, approximately 500 of them will be heads and 500 tails. That is to say, small scale indeterminacies average out on the large scale. Now the photons and protons are the real vehicles of indeterminacy rather than the tossings of coins. But the same will follow: in general, small-scale indeterminacy produces large-scale virtual determinism. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p72]
- The argument goes that for almost all possible deterministic theories of human behavior it should be possible to tell a subject what they will do in such a way that it will not affect their behavior, and therefore it follows that, if telling them what they will do does affect their behavior, it is most unlikely that there is a true deterministic theory of their behavior. And, therefore, I argue that although it is possible we don't have free will, probably, very probably, we do. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p74]
- **Alvin Plantinga:** Of course human beings are capable of free choices. On what basis is it possible to accept the reality of free will? [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p74]
- We all believe (unless corrupted by philosophy) that on many occasions we could have done something different from what we did do. That seems to me to be part of what one naturally believes. We naturally believe that there are other people, that there is an external world and so on. We also believe, in the same way, naturally and initially, that on many occasions we could have done something different from what we did do. Not only do we naturally

believe that, but we naturally believe other things that imply it; for example, that some actions are wrong and deserve blame, or even punishment. If it weren't possible for a given person not to have done what that person did on a given occasion, then the whole idea of blame, the whole idea of holding the person responsible for what he or she did, would make no sense. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p74]

- I don't know of any theorem in physics or psychology according to which human beings don't have any freedom. Perhaps some scientists assume this, but it is just an assumption, not an established scientific result; and it's certainly hard to see how such a thing could be established. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p75]
- **Hugo Meynell:** It seems clear to me that heredity and environment limit us in all kinds of ways; that's something on which people who feel morally superior to criminals may care to reflect. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p75]
- But all the same, it seems to me that the case for at least a limited freedom of will is compelling. There is a rather subtle philosophical argument for its impossibility, which goes like this. Any human action is either explicable or it is arbitrary. If it is explicable, it is predetermined, and so not free. But if it is arbitrary, this is inconsistent with anyone reasonably or willingly performing it. So if every action has got to be either determined or arbitrary, then free will just disappears out of the picture. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p75-76]
- I think there is more and more reason to believe that Aristotle and common sense are right, that human agents are in a special sense causes of their own actions, genuinely responsible for whether they perform them or not. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p77]
- **Josef Seifert:** Human decisions are certainly not entirely shaped by heredity and environment. That human beings are capable of free choices, we know with an immediate knowledge which is not less certain than the knowledge of our own existence. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p77]
- To deny our free will is always a metaphysical construction or a belief which flatly contradicts the evidence of our experience. Whenever we feel guilty for something, we have the knowledge and evidence of our freedom. When we make a promise to another person, we know that they are free to accept

or to reject our promise, and that we are free to keep it or to break it. The meaning of the promise involves necessarily the awareness of the freedom of the one who makes it. Whenever we make a resolution, regret or repent an action we have committed, or praise someone for what they have done, we presuppose freedom. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p77]

- The pagan Roman philosopher Cicero insisted that the whole legal system and countless human actions are accompanied by this evidence of freedom. Therefore, it is quite in accordance with human reason to accept freedom. The evidence of freedom is indeed so great that I would reject any religion as evidently false which denies this truth which each one of us knows indubitably: that we are free. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p77]
- RALPH MCINERNY: You can reduce to absurdity the questioning of it [free will]. Most people who have thought about that in the past, about the denial of free will, would say it would render human life, as we talk about it and know it, nonsensical, because we hold ourselves accountable for what we do, we hold other people accountable for what they do, we raise our children urging them to act this way as opposed to that way, and what the denial entails is that all that is nonsense. Well, it's the denial that's nonsense, I would say. There is no reason to accept the denial. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p78]
- **Is it one of those things which we know from experience?** Yes, and it is one of those things, not just personal experience, but it's the experience of the race, and it is comic for someone to pop up and say I think free will is an illusion. This is a lonely voice in a crowd of people who know better, and why we should attend to that voice as if it alone is significant I've never understood, particularly because we seem to have the freedom to listen or not listen to that sort of nonsense. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p79]
- **John Lucas:** [Since 1959, in a series of books and papers, the Oxford philosopher-mathematician J. R. Lucas has applied Gödel's Theorems to the mind-body and free will-determinism discussions. Gödel's Incompleteness Theorems showed the inherent limitations of formal systems. For instance, the consistency in terms of number theory of a formal system cannot be proved within the system. Lucas points out that computers, being formal systems, are necessarily limited by the kind of limitations of formal systems delineated by Gödel. Since the human mind is not similarly limited, the mechanist is mistaken in modeling it on a machine. No representation of a

mind by a computer or Turing machine, writes Lucas, “could be correct, since for any such representation there would be a Gödelian formula which the Turing machine could not prove, and so could not produce as true, but which the mathematician could both see, and show, to be true.” These kinds of applications of Gödel’s Theorem received popular prominence in recent years through the works of Roger Penrose.] [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p79]

• life after death

- **Great Question 5:** Do you believe in a life after death and, if so, why?
- **Josef Seifert:** I do believe in an everlasting life after death and the resurrection of the body. In addition, I am also convinced about the immortality of the human soul for philosophical reasons. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p83]
- The most convincing of these arguments I find are those which are based on the following two premises: the first ground of these arguments is that all the most significant acts and activities of the human person remain unfulfilled, and would be contradicted in a tragical manner, without immortality. In all knowledge of the truth we aim at a lasting contemplation of the truth, and we reach something that is timelessly true. Even the knowledge of the historical past reaches a truth about what has happened, which can never pass away. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p83]
- Most of all, the knowledge of the eternal truths, of the essences of mathematical objects, of the nature of moral actions, of sin, etc., aims at something lasting and at something which will never pass away. This is most of all true of our knowledge of God as the eternal and absolute ground of all things. Therefore, in all acts of knowledge man aims at eternity, and at a lasting cognitive union with truth and above all with the truth about those things which are eternal. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p83]
- Also the desire for happiness cries out for immortality. Let us summarize the argument of St. Augustine to this effect: If a state of our feeling is such that we are indifferent towards its continuation, we cannot be said to be happy. For if we are truly happy, we want this happiness to last forever and can exclaim with Goethe’s Faust: “Verweile doch, du bist so schön.” Even the atheist Nietzsche said: “Woe speaks: pass away, but pleasure desires eternity, it desires deep, deep eternity.” [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p84]

- **Richard Swinburne:** Yes. Well, if we are both souls and bodies, then if our body is destroyed there is a soul left. That doesn't mean to say that the soul will necessarily survive. All that the arguments I gave earlier show is that I currently consist of both a soul and body. It is possible that when my body is destroyed, my soul also in some way ceases to exist. That may or may not be the case. So we need a further argument to show that when my body is destroyed my soul does continue to exist. I think that argument will be a very indirect one, that is to say, it would be an argument for the existence of God and it would then be an argument showing that God has revealed certain things, including that there is life after death and, therefore, that is reason for believing it. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p85]
- **GERARD J. HUGHES:** Surely no traditional theist could deny outright the possibility of a mind existing independently of a body. God, after all, is traditionally believed to be a person with a mind and a will, even if we are far from clear what God's mind or will are like; and God is not traditionally thought to have a body. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p86]
- **Part III: Are religion and morality simply and solely by-products of the socio-cultural environment?**
- **Great Question 7:** Some thinkers hold that religion can be explained entirely in psychological and sociological categories. Can it?
- **Gerard J. Hughes:** Freud argued that religious belief was a projection of the deep psychological need we all have for an ideal parent who can give love and stability and security to our lives. Yet a Christian might believe that God is indeed such a being. Augustine was happy to suggest that the human heart remains restless until it rests in God. The difference between Augustine and Freud, then, is not about the position that religion can occupy in the emotional life of the believer, nor about the psychological benefits that religious belief might bring. What is in question is the explanatory interpretation which should be put upon such psychological facts. In this connection I would wish to make just two remarks. I have already said that I do not believe that the religious experience of believers was in itself conclusive evidence for theism. The reason is that a Freudian explanation of such experience is possible. And if it is a possible interpretation, then it needs to be refuted by argument, and not simply rejected without discussion. On the other hand, while it seems to me that Freud calls attention to a feature of human beings which any believer might well accept, the believer cannot accept that a Freudian explanation of the psychological value of religious

belief somehow discredits the Augustinian view of the matter. It is one thing to say that religious belief corresponds to deep psychological needs in ourselves, and quite another to say that God is simply an idealized projection of those needs. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p97]

- To establish that the existence of God is required as an ultimate explanation of everything, including the existence of our religious and social needs, is a much wider project, and not one which, in my view, should be narrowly based on our religious experience, or the social benefits of a shared religious outlook. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p98]
- **Richard Swinburne:** Is the fact that individuals have the particular religious experiences they do a matter of the way they are made psychologically, or the way their society is formed? I think not, because I think humans have free will and therefore their behavior is not to be entirely explained in any categories, their behavior about anything. And with regard to religion, although, of course, people's beliefs and behavior are much influenced – we don't have perfect free will, as I emphasized before – are much influenced by psychology and sociology, we do still have the power to resist some of these influences and, in turn, gradually to change the influences to which the next generation are exposed. So, no, it can't be explained fully in those terms. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p98-99]
- We can make a difference to the world and we can decide to investigate new areas and reject fashionable views as a result of our investigation and therefore, the birth of religion is partly due to people rejecting the influences upon them. And they will reject those influences partly because arguments and experience have led them to suppose that the views of their society are mistaken in certain ways. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p99]
- **Josef Seifert:** Certainly, religion, as the relation between humankind and God, can never be explained entirely in psychological and sociological categories. If God exists, religious acts and rites or sacraments objectively relate a human person, in worship, in praise, in prayer, etc. to God. Hence, if God exists, these religious relationships to God are never immanent and pure psychological or sociological phenomena. Thus to reduce religion to the psychological and sociological order is based on atheism and a thesis of the radical immanency and subjectivity of human consciousness and of its intentional objects as having existence only for humankind. [Roy Abraham

Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p99]

• **Right And Wrong**

- **Great Question 8:** Can right be distinguished from wrong, good from evil? More fundamentally, is there an objective moral order and can human beings become aware of it?
- **Josef Seifert:** I think that right can evidently be distinguished from wrong. Already children can clearly grasp, if they are lied to by their brother or sister, or if something that has been given to them is taken away or destroyed by somebody else, that such actions are wrong. They understand with evidence that it is evil to torture some innocent person, to murder a child, etc. Already the child can comprehend, and often more keenly than adults, whose minds are frequently blinded by passions or obscured by confused theories, that this moral order is objective and not merely a matter of subjective preference or taste. To recognize the objectivity of the moral order requires the evidence of value. For only because the human person possesses an inherent dignity and value that imposes moral obligations on us, can it be immoral to kill, murder, rape, deceive, etc., human beings. But this preciousness, this inherent goodness which raises a being out of the sphere of neutrality, is accessible to human reason with evidence. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p100]
- **RICHARD SWINBURNE:** We must start with what in morals, as with everything else, stares us in the face, and what stares us in the face is that certain things are wrong and certain other things are good. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p101]
- Any theory that proves that there were no human beings would be obviously false and therefore to be dismissed. So any theory that proves there aren't any moral truths and therefore that it isn't moral truth that you want to have taught to children, any moral theory which had that consequence would obviously be false. So, yes, there is an objective moral order and human beings can become aware of it, because some of the aspects of it are just too obvious. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p102]
- And, of course, what it is will rather depend on other things, such as whether there is a God or not. If there is a God, then certain things become our duty which wouldn't otherwise be our duty, for example to worship God and do what He wants us to do. But the existence of God would only make a difference to the content of the moral order; it wouldn't make any difference

to the fact of the moral order. If there is a God, there will be an awful lot of things which are right and wrong which would not otherwise be and, no doubt, there would be a depth and importance to their rightness and wrongness which otherwise they would not have. But still, God or not, there is clearly an objective moral order. What God makes a difference to, is just the content of that. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p102]

- **Alvin Plantinga:** Certainly; and deep in their hearts, most everybody else thinks the same thing. Different people may emphasize different things as right and wrong, but very few people think that there just isn't any difference at all between right and wrong. Those who are most enthusiastic about tolerance and who are reluctant to say that a given way of acting is wrong, also, typically, think it is wrong to be bigoted, to denounce somebody, or to disapprove of them. It is extremely difficult to be a normal human being and not think that some actions are wrong and some are right. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p102]
- **Gerard J. Hughes:** Morality has to do with what enables human beings to flourish. How humans can flourish will, as Aristotle pointed out, and as has often been repeated since then, depend on the kind of beings that humans are. What it takes for a human being to flourish will depend on our common human nature and on the particular qualities which each person possesses as an individual, and on the environment, physical and social, in which that person lives. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p103]
- We should seek to ensure that our various moral beliefs are coherent with one another. If our existing moral beliefs and the content of revelation conflict, then both sets of beliefs must in principle be questioned. Revelation should be allowed to challenge our "secular" morality; and equally, our secular morality should challenge our understanding of revelation and its practical implications. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p105]
- **George F. R. Ellis:** I believe most anthropologists and sociologists will fight for women's freedom in their own societies as if there is real meaning to this action, rather than just being an expression of their own culture which has no more justification than the attitude to women in societies where they are treated as slaves. Unfashionable as it may be, I propose that those societies where women are treated as equal to men are more advanced in their ethical understanding than those where this is not true. I understand that in so doing

I am claiming precedence for my own particular (partly socially determined) moral understanding over rival views that are equally strongly held; nevertheless, I defend this position. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p106]

- **Keith Ward:** If there is a creator God, one would expect that, in addition to purely rational considerations, there will be human discernments of the will and purpose of God which give to morality an ultimate authority which overrides self-interest, and a faith that moral commitment will not be in vain. Evolutionary ethics cannot support the supreme authority of morality, and it undermines any belief that the universe is oriented to the fulfillment of a moral purpose, which it is human destiny to cooperate in realizing. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p107]
- In short, evolutionary ethics denies what is, even from a humanist viewpoint, most distinctive about human existence, that which gives it dignity and sanctity, the capacity for moral reflection and action. From a religious viewpoint, it denies the deepest purpose of human existence, the free development of a relationship of joyful obedience to the will of God, within a community of justice, peace, and love. Human beings are certainly animals, but they are animals raised to the dignity of children of the creator God. In failing to see this, evolutionary ethics gives a drastically impoverished and grossly inaccurate account of human nature. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p107]

• **Atheism**

- **Great Question 9:** Atheism – the rejection of the existence of God – is an intellectual option embraced by several thinkers. How do you explain atheism?
- **Alvin Plantinga:** First of all, atheism goes back a long way. It is not an invention of, say, the Enlightenment, although it has been much more prominent since the Enlightenment. In the Psalms we read of the fool that said in his heart there is no God. And Jonathan Edwards, in the eighteenth century, talks at some length about atheism, about how it is much more prevalent now (then) than it was 200 years earlier. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p108]
- I think, one part of the rejection of the existence of God in modern society has to be attributed to the sin of earlier generations of Christians. But that is only a part. I would suggest that you take a look at Michael Buckley's *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (Yale University Press, 1987). [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications

1998, p109]

- **RICHARD SWINBURNE:** How do I explain atheism? Why are some people atheists? Well, I think the answer to that will depend on who they are and when they lived and what are the influences they were open to. But, if we are talking about atheists in our time, I'm sure that for them, as for all of us, part of the explanation of why they have the beliefs they do is the kind of intellectual environment they have been open to. But humans have the opportunity of going out and looking for the truth more fully than their environment has taught them and one explanation of atheism is, therefore, that although the persons concerned have been influenced by a certain class of arguments, they have not taken the trouble, or, alternatively, have not been fortunate enough to find the counter-arguments against atheism. Of course, it is not only a matter of argument. It is a matter of personal experience. Some people have been lucky enough to have an experience of the presence of God and others not so. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p109]
- Again, part of the reason why there are so many atheists around in our time is obviously is going to be a historical explanation. This will draw attention first to the great influence and prestige of science which has, mistakenly, led a lot of people to think that, therefore, there is less place for God in the universe. I give my reasons for thinking that was a mistaken view of the relevance of science. But nevertheless it is a view that some people for wrong reasons have had, and has therefore led to atheism being more prevalent. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p109]
- Another reason, I think, why atheism is so prevalent in our time is because people came to think of the Bible, the, as it were, vehicle of Christian truth, as somehow shown to be false by the discovery that the world is older than four thousand years BC, or that various of the human authors of the Bible got certain historical or scientific things wrong. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p109-110]
- As I say, I think this was a great misfortune, this growing up of the over-literal interpretation of the Bible, and this has quite a share in the development of atheism in modern times. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p109-110]
- **Gerard J. Hughes:** In my view, there are two main reasons why people deny that there is a God. The first is that the intellectual case for the existence of God is not beyond all possible question. God is by nature quite different from any of the objects of our experience, with the result that our attempts to

describe God are indirect and imperfect. To say that God exists is therefore to make a statement which is unclear in itself; and most religious believers will point out that God is in the end mysterious, beyond our intellectual grasp. Many atheists would see this unclarity as a sign of weakness. Moreover, the reasons for believing that there is a God are complex. Theism is a large-scale interpretation of our experience quite generally, and the data can quite plausibly be “read” otherwise. The evil in the world is the most obvious feature of the universe which might make an atheistic interpretation seem intellectually attractive, clear where theism is at best mysterious, unpretentious where the claims of religion seem over-ambitious. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p111]

- A second explanation of why atheism is an attractive view is that many, perhaps all, religions have supported views which are demonstrably false and practices which are superstitious or immoral. While it would of course be argued by believers that these mistakes do not touch the essential core of religious belief, it is not difficult to see how other people conclude that religious belief is simply a combination of bad science and indefensible conduct. In contrast, atheism can be presented as a means of liberation from the infantilism of religion and the tyranny of dogma, and as the essential framework for a human race come of age. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p111]
- **Hugo Meynell:** Why are many thinkers atheists? Well, we are back at the problem of evil; that is a good reason why people deny the existence of God. Again, some tend to think or assume, as Wilfred Sellars puts it, that science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not. Of course, if you take these restrictions in a narrow sense, then they lead to atheism; taken in a broad sense, I have already argued that they do not. Also it is thought by many people, including the majority of contemporary philosophers, that none of the arguments for the existence of God are sound. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p112]
- Some philosophers have even claimed that it is strictly meaningless to say that God exists; though it is much less fashionable than it was in the heyday of logical positivism forty years or so ago. The reason alleged was, roughly, that one couldn't conceivably see or hear or touch God. But you can't touch or hear or smell electrons or positrons, or for that matter the thoughts and feelings of other people; but they are there all the same. In general, apart from the problem of evil, I think that it is partly scientism, partly positivism, which has made atheism seem convincing to so many. I find it useful to divide

atheists into two overlapping types, theoretical atheists and what you might call existential atheists. Existential atheists are people like Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche, who rightly inveigh against the harm that is so often done to people in the name of religion, but wrongly (though all too understandably) regard theism as incompatible with a fully actualized human life. The complaints of existential atheists have to be taken with the utmost seriousness, because I am sorry to say that there is almost nothing so nasty, that some religious believers will not get up to in the name of God. In the Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul talks about believers making the name of God stink among the heathen. When you think of some of the abominable actions by representatives of the churches which have come to light recently, and the ingenuity and social ruthlessness displayed by them and their colleagues in covering them up, you can see that the existential atheist has a lot going for her. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p112]

- **Josef Seifert:** The intellectual option of atheism has many roots. Some of these reasons we touch upon in discussing the problem of evil [Great Question 12]. There I try to point out how the choice of atheism is quite comprehensible in the face of evil, but nevertheless irrational and objectively not justified by the existence of evil. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p113]
- But atheism has many other roots: the pride of people who do not want to accept their total dependence on God, and who wish to assert their own character as supreme in the universe; the wish that there not be any moral order and supreme judge but that we can live according to the arbitrariness of our own desires and wishes, etc. But there are also countless intellectual errors such as materialism, determinism, etc., which can lead a person to adopt atheism. Yet, none of the countless reasons and grounds for atheism can be justified rationally, as follows from the discussion of the arguments for the existence of God [Great Question 10]. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p113]

• **Part IV: IS THERE A GOD?**

- **The existence of god**
- **Great Question 10:** The existence of God has been one of the most hotly debated issues in the history of human thought. What are your own conclusions on the question of God's existence and on what basis do you affirm or deny the existence of God?
- **Richard Swinburne:** I affirm the existence of God. I do so on the grounds that the hypothesis that there is a God can explain everything which we find

around us. [Great Question 10]. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p118]

- So, in summary, I think the theistic hypothesis can explain the whole range of phenomena we find around us, including all those that science deals with, that is to say things being ordered by scientific laws, including the general phenomena of history and including some rather special phenomena to which religion draws our attention. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p119]
- The divine attributes are omnipotence, omniscience and perfect freedom and such properties as perfect goodness, I think, derive from them. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p120]
- **Alvin Plantinga:** The existence of God has been hotly debated, although there have been literally millions, maybe billions, of people who have accepted belief in God without any debate or any argument at all. It is not primarily a topic of debate, except among a certain kind of intellectual constituency in the Western world and substantially since the Enlightenment. But taken in itself, it is a whole lot like, say, belief in other minds. Philosophers have argued about other minds too, about whether it is reasonable to believe that there are other minds. But all human beings, apart from philosophical discussions, do believe in other minds; and the vast majority of human beings, while perhaps they haven't all believed specifically in God, have certainly believed in something like the theistic God, somebody who controls nature, someone to whom they are obligated, to whom they owe allegiance and obedience and so on. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p120]
- As to my own conclusions on this question: I certainly do believe in the existence of God, but I don't believe by way of conclusion from arguments or because I think the probabilities point in that direction. It seems to me that I experience God. I experience God in a variety of ways, just as lots and lots of people do: in church, in reading the Bible, in nature, in human relationships, in a thousand different ways. And so my reasons for accepting theistic belief, belief in God, are reasons more like my reasons for believing in other people, or that there is an external world, or in a memory judgment. It is not a conclusion from an argument. It is something more immediate, something much more existential and experiential. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p120]
- **Gerard J. Hughes:** Any philosopher who claims, as I do, that there is a God, has to reply to the arguments advanced by Hume and Kant, both of whom,

albeit on rather different grounds, would dispute that we can have any good grounds for saying that God exists. They accurately pinpointed the key issues. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p120]

- We have no possible way of showing that the universe as a whole might not itself exist of necessity, rather than because it is caused by some other, transcendent, being. In short, Kant accepts that the question “Why is there anything rather than nothing at all?” must be answered by saying that there must exist something whose nonexistence is simply impossible; but he can see no way of showing that this necessary being might not simply be the universe itself. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p121]
- My own view, however, is that while they can be legitimately invoked as part of an overall picture once the philosophical position has been reasonably established, they cannot provide an adequate substitute for a proper philosophical grounding. I take the same view of revealed religion quite generally. That any experience or event can properly be regarded as embodying a divine revelation seems to me to depend on our having already shown that it is reasonable to suppose that there exists a God from whom such revelations might come. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p121]
- **Brian Leftow:** Some people expect philosophers to try to “prove” God’s existence, and assent to it only if some hulking brute of an argument drags them kicking and screaming through the church door. But arguments cannot do that. Arguments do not compel our assent. They merely appeal for it. A proof is not an argument so compelling that one cannot reject its conclusion, but one so worthy that an ideally rational person would accept its conclusion. Suppose I show with impeccable logic that if $2+2=4$, then God exists. If you understand the argument, and grant the connection between premise and conclusion, you still have a choice. You can grant that God exists, or you can avoid this by denying that $2+2=4$. The argument does not force you to do either. It just sets up the choice. Which choice you make depends on which seems more implausible – that “ $2+2=4$ ” is not true, or that there is a God. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p122]
- To each of us, the world looks as if there is a God or as if there is none. It either does or does not seem that a hand is guiding one’s life, or that one’s life has a purpose which is not one’s own invention. Those one loves do or do not seem too wonderful to be products of sheer accident. The world seems

a fundamentally good place, despite its evils, or a bare neutral fact, or a horror. The religious people one knows seem good and kind, or evil and hypocritical; those whose goodness most impresses one are religious or irreligious. Or perhaps all this is just ambiguous. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p123]

- I think there are in fact some very good philosophical arguments for God's existence. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p125]
- **JOSEF SEIFERT:** While I do think that traditional philosophy of God and theology ought to develop more genuinely personalistic metaphysical categories and abandon certain elements of a Greek metaphysics of God which risk to lose the sense for the entire newness of "being-a-person" and seek to define the divine perfections in an inadequate way, I basically defend the arguments for the existence of God along the lines of classical theism. Yet I seek to establish theism also philosophically on firm metaphysical and personalistic grounds. Thus the certitude of conviction that God exists, if it is thus founded, is totally opposed to atheism in any conceivable form. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p125]
- 1. The argument from motion and temporality to an eternal being: The first of these arguments starts from the nature and existence of motion, which I interpret as comprising all change and temporality in the world.... From understanding this we grasp three further metaphysical facts: (1) Only an eternal being that possesses its entire reality in an everlasting present can account for itself, not a temporal one. (2) Therefore, the eternal being alone can also contain the sufficient reason for temporal being. (3) Moreover, the absolute and eternal Being cannot produce the temporal world by any necessity rooted in its eternal nature (which would make the world eternal and could not give rise to time and change, as Parmenides and many other philosophers saw) but only through freedom. Thus this argument ascends from a changing, temporal world to the existence of an eternal and everlasting, self-explanatory, omnipresent, and free being. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p127]
- 2. The argument from causality to an uncaused first cause: A second one of these arguments takes its starting point from the existence of causal relations in the world and from the evident principle of causality. This principle neither implies that all beings possess a cause, which (absurd) formulation of the principle of causality would contradict the existence of God as an uncaused

cause, as Hume correctly saw, nor that each event follows upon another one according to a law (a general rule), which both contradicts freedom and leads to an antinomy, as Kant pointed out. Above all, the evidence of the principle of causality in its inner necessity says nothing of that sort. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p127-128]

- Rather, the principle of causality states that all changes and all contingent beings require an efficient cause, i.e. a cause through the power and agency of which they are brought about and sustained in being. Therefore, no change and no contingent being can possess the sufficient reason for its being or for its being brought about in itself. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p128]
- 3. The argument from contingent existence to a necessary being: A third one of these arguments is based on the observation that all real beings in this world exist contingently. We can understand, both from the fact that we came into existence and from the nonnecessary limitations of all our attributes, that we do exist but could also not exist. But we can understand also in another way –ketc.hed by the young Thomas Aquinas in De Ente et Essentia – that all beings in the world exist contingently. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p128]
- 4. The insufficiency of the preceding arguments and the fourth way from imperfect beings to “that greater than which nothing can be thought”: All of these arguments, which prove only an eternal, uncaused, necessarily existing and free origin of the world, are not yet properly speaking proofs of the existence of God; for God is above all the id quo maius nihil cogitari possit (“that greater than which nothing can be thought”), i.e. the infinitely perfect being. Without this infinite perfection, He would not be God at all but some other absolute being which, if it were evil, would be more a demon than a god. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p129]
- There exists also a close connection between the fourth and the third cosmological argument: The non-necessity of existence is intimately connected with the imperfection of all beings in the world and with the contingency (non-necessity) which is inseparable from any finitude of perfection, because no finite being can ever answer why it did not receive a greater or lesser share of any of its perfections. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p131-132]
- From there we can also arrive at the understanding that all pure perfections,

all those qualities of which it is absolutely better to possess them than not to possess them (such as being, unity, life, understanding, knowledge, power, omnipotence, justice, consciousness, blessedness, goodness of any kind) and which admit of infinity, therefore can and must truly be attributed to God. As a matter of fact, from a metaphysics of those attributes which are called pure perfections we can arrive at the conclusion that God must possess each and every one of these perfections most fully and wholly. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p132]

- 5. The moral argument: But I also recognize, and even find of superior value in certain ways, those arguments that proceed from specifically personal acts and personal phenomena such as the moral sphere and conscience: arguing that there is an absolute moral and simultaneously metaphysical necessity grounded in the nature of the moral sphere that the moral order be restored and justice be realized in the end. This in turn requires an absolute and eternal judge who punishes and rewards, or shows mercy (which presupposes justice) and thus (1) must be omniscient in order to know all guilt and merit, (2) must possess all power with which nothing else can interfere by obstructing the execution of justice (he must hence be omnipotent), and (3) must possess perfect goodness in Himself without which He would not be morally able and justified to be the supreme judge. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p132-133]
- 6. The argument from truth: I would also defend (among other arguments from the “ideal order” of eide, eternal ideas, possible worlds, etc.) the argument from the existence, logical unity, and perfection of truth, which in its infinite vastness transcends every human understanding and every mere being borne by those propositions that are actually thought or conceived of by human beings because these contain too many imperfections incompatible with their being the bearer of the truth. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p133]
- 7. The ontological argument: The strongest argument for the existence of God, however, though also the most difficult to comprehend, is the following one, which is often neglected and more often misunderstood both by its critics and defenders: [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p134]
- In my attempt to defend this deepest of all arguments against these objections¹³, I had to show that four conditions are to be met by this argument: 1. that its starting point is not a mere definition, a subjective

concept, or a language game (in this case the argument would be reducible to a non-informative or an analytical proposition, or make an illicit jump from the order of concepts to that of reality), but an intrinsically necessary and objective divine essence which we discover as being wholly independent of our minds; 2. that we possess a true, although imperfect, knowledge of the necessity and objectivity of the divine essence, without presupposing already God's existence; 3. that real existence, and in particular, necessary existence, can indeed belong necessarily to an essence, namely exactly to one, and only to one essence: namely the divine essence, and that necessary existence is a real, albeit unique, predicate; 4. that the infinity of reality, intelligibility, and most of all of valueperfection, objectively includes and demands the real existence of God. And that therefore God really exists simply because He is God: that His own nature is proof of His existence: God as the ultimate criterion and proof of Himself (Gott als Gottesbeweis). [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p135]

- **Russell Pannier, T. D. Sullivan:** God is a myth, some say. The evidence is overwhelming that the universe is a closed physical system. Is this something we really know, or all but know? Is the game up for theism, except in diluted form, all symbol and sentiment, nothing supernatural, nothing real? Of course we cannot in a few pages seriously consider the case against theism, but we can perhaps come to see how hard it is to construct a case that makes God's existence highly improbable. The basic reason is this. In order to establish the extreme improbability it must be shown that at least one of the following two propositions is false: (1) the physical world began to be; (2) whatever comes to be has a cause. For if both (1) and (2) are true, it follows that there is an extrinsic cause of the physical world, a creator. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p136]
- After all, as we have already seen, there is no good reason to be confident about the physicalistic world-view. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p136]
- **Hugo Meynell:** As to the reasons for believing in God, I think that if I had to choose between fideism, meaning you simply have to take God on faith, and atheism, I would choose atheism. One ought to have good reasons for believing in God, which don't presuppose what they have to prove. And I maintain that the best reason for believing in God is the fact that nature is open to our understanding in the way that it is. The universe has got to be intelligible for science to be possible. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great*

Thinkers On Great Questions, One world Publications 1998, p138]

- Some people say that the universe may not be completely intelligible, but I don't think this is properly thought through. When a scientific theory turns out to be false, scientists don't say that the matter in question cannot be explained at all. They look out for another theory. We have no real idea of what it would be to clearly and distinctly to affirm the existence or occurrence of a wholly inexplicable state of affairs. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p138]
- The essence of science is to move from description in terms of what is available to our senses to explanation in terms of theory, and so from knowledge of a world relative to us to that of the world as it is in itself. And a world to be known in terms of theory is an intelligible world. The divine intelligence is the ultimate explanation for the intelligibility of the world; the divine will for the particular kind of intelligibility that scientists progressively find it to have – in terms of oxygen rather than phlogiston, in terms of evolution rather than the special creation of species, and so on. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p138]
- **What do you think of the principle of sufficient reason, in this context, as it applies to the existence of God?** Certainly, the principle of sufficient reason plays a part in these arguments. States of affairs are alleged to obtain; and God is invoked to account for them. We accept the principle of sufficient reason as a matter of course in other contexts; otherwise, as G. E. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p140]
- Moore would say, we would just have to give up. Without the assumption that what happens is subject to some explanation, we would not be able to cope with the world at all, let alone engage in the enterprise of science. The apparent problem here is, if sufficient reason is needed for the universe, sufficient reason is needed for God as well. I have already tried to meet the problem, by showing how God, while needed to explain the world, is to be conceived as selfexplanatory. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p140]
- **Ralph Mcinerny:** I think it is hard not to believe in God. Far from thinking of it as the ordinary thing that disbelief is overcome by religious beliefs, I think, by and large, most people have an almost instinctive sense that there is a God. As to what He is and how He is and all that sort of thing, you get a lot of very strange conceptions. There is a sense of one's own finitude. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world

Publications 1998, p141]

- **Bernard J. F. Lonergan:** [Bernard Lonergan’s argument for God’s existence is developed in chapter 19 of his famous work *Insight*. “The existence of God,” he writes, “is known as the conclusion to an argument and, while such arguments are many, all of them, I believe, are included in the following general form. If the real is completely intelligible, God exists. But the real is completely intelligible. Therefore, God exists.” [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p141]
- **William P. Alston:** I think the idea of a cumulative case that’s been spelled out by various people, including Basil Mitchell and others, is very important. A lot of the argument over the existence of God concentrates on one particular possible basis for this and one supposes that if you dispose of that, that settles the matter. But, of course, belief in the existence of God has a large number of different sources, for example the traditional philosophical arguments for the existence of God, many of which I think have substance to them, although I don’t think any of them constitute, by themselves, a conclusive case by any means. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p148]
- The cosmological argument for example certainly has weight: if there is a being that exists necessarily and has the power to bring other things into existence and sustain them in existence, then that provides an explanation for the existence of what we see around us and provides an answer to the question, “Why is there something rather than nothing,” an explanation that we don’t have otherwise, and so that definitely counts in favor of the existence of such a being. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p148]
- The ontological argument claims to give an insight into why. But even if you reject the ontological argument, still the supposition that there is a being that exists necessarily, gives you an ultimate explanation in a way that you don’t have without that. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p151]

• God And Modern Science

- **Great Question 11:** What bearing, if any, does science have on religion – particularly with respect to the questions of God’s existence, the origin of the universe, and the possibility of miracles?
- **Richard Swinburne:** My answer would be fairly obvious there. Science certainly has bearing on religion, drawing our attention to the fact that the world is ordered by simple scientific laws: that is something very

extraordinary we wouldn't expect to find in the normal course of things. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p154]

- Science tells us of this, and in telling us draws attention to an enormous coincidence which provides the grounds for an argument of very considerable strength from the operation of these scientific laws to the existence of God. Science is very good evidence, as such, the general fact of scientific laws governing the world is very good evidence for the existence of God. Though note that in recent years the kind of science which has developed has quantum theory as its central plank and although quantum theory, like all previous scientific theories, draws our attention to the immense orderliness of the universe, it is an orderliness with a certain amount of gaps in it. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p154]
- According to quantum theory, the regularities which are evinced by objects are only of 99.9 per cent regular behavior and therefore, as it were, there is possibility within the orderliness of the universe for humans to exercise free will and for miracles which do not necessarily involve the breaking of scientific laws. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p154]
- The origin of the universe. Well, I don't think that the doctrine that the universe has a beginning is a crucial theist doctrine. God is the creator and sustainer of the universe but it doesn't very much matter, as regard to that doctrine, whether the universe is infinitely old or of only a finite age. If it is infinitely old, then God has been keeping the universe in being for infinite time; if it is finitely old, then for finite time. So the particular details of physical cosmology, which might suggest that the universe had a beginning with the Big Bang or that it didn't (perhaps a new theory will come along which will suggest that), do not seem to matter very much either one way or the other as regards religion. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p154-155]
- **Hugo Meynell:** In the nineteenth century, a very popular view was that as we become increasingly rational about the universe, as we apply the principles of reason to it, so God retreats more and more. But now we have the postmodernists and deconstructionists, who have no more use for reason than they have for God, and so in principle are just as hostile to science as they are to theistic religion. I think these people have grasped the extremely important point that, in the last analysis, theism and belief in the rationality of the universe, such as makes science possible, belong, as it were, in the

same basket. In the long run, to reject God is to reject reason, and to reject reason is to reject God. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p155]

- **Gerard J. Hughes:** Since the Enlightenment, it has been commonplace to suggest that religion and science are somehow competing ways of making sense of our lives and our world. Secular scientists have on occasion been happy to suggest that their discoveries, for instance about the history of the universe or the origin of humankind, have somehow replaced religious beliefs with truths that are more securely grounded; and, on the other hand, some fundamentalist religious believers have seen science as endeavoring to contradict their most cherished convictions. Both these positions seem to me radically mistaken. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p156-157]
- From the point of view of the theist, scientists gradually discover what kind of a universe it is that God has created, what its history is, and how it works. They do this by discovering the causal connections between things, thus enlightening us about their natures and the ways in which they interact. When cosmologists extrapolate backwards in the history of the universe and postulate a moment at the beginning of time when all the energy/matter in the universe was concentrated in one unimaginably dense original 'singularity' (as the jargon goes), they are, to the best of their ability, working backwards from the present using the scientific laws which have been discovered. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p157]
- In short, I see philosophical inquiry, religious belief, and the human and natural sciences as complementary attempts on our part to make sense of ourselves and our world. Honesty requires that we should try for coherence between all the beliefs we hold; and openmindedness requires us both to be prepared to modify our beliefs, religious and scientific, in the light of new arguments, new evidence, or unfamiliar lines of inquiry. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p158]
- **Josef Seifert:** As far as natural and empirical sciences are concerned, they bring us into contact with the wonders of the physical and chemical world, and above all of the living bio-cosmos. They can thus broaden our experiential basis for knowing this concrete world of ours, and contribute to opening our eyes for the impossibility that a thoughtless cause of the universe could have brought it about. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p159]

- In these, and in many other ways, modern science, when joined to good philosophy, contributes much to our knowledge of God. But it can do so, and even form the concept of God, only by using methods and borrowing concepts taken from other disciplines: from philosophy and theology. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p160]
- **Alvin Plantinga:** Take the last, the possibility of miracles. Some people claim that science shows or suggests that miracles aren't possible; but that's utter baloney. Science doesn't show any such thing. Some scientists, perhaps, think that it is a presupposition of science that there aren't any miracles, but that seems to me quite wrong. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p160]
- Science requires that the world be regular and orderly, that there be no massive irregularities. It has to be reliable. One has to expect that if I, say, discover the half-life of radium, it is not going to be the case that in ten years it will be quite different, or that ten years ago it was something different. If things were like that, science would be impossible. But of course it isn't required that there be no miracles; it isn't required that God could not or would not do things differently on a given occasion if He wanted to. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p160]
- The question of God's existence? Science seems to me not to address questions of that sort at all. It doesn't address the question whether there is such a person as God. On the other hand I do think there is a connection between religious belief and science. It seems to me the proper way for science to be conducted (at any rate, one good candidate for the proper way for science to be conducted) is along the lines suggested by Augustine, but also by Abraham Kuyper, who was the last prime minister to be a great theologian (or the last great theologian to be a prime minister); he was prime minister of the Netherlands around the beginning of this century. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p161]
- Kuyper argued that there are really two sciences. And what he had in mind was this: if you propose to treat scientifically such things as human beings, for example, then a lot will depend, with respect to the kinds of conclusions you reach, on what sorts of things you think human beings are. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p161]
- **Ralph Mcinerny:** Well, I think science can mean either science in the

narrow, modern sense of a very definite technique whereby we try to explain natural phenomena by way of hypothesis and working out theories and discarding this and that and the other thing, or it can mean more broadly the knowledge that we have of the sensible universe, of the world around us. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p164]

- Obviously we have knowledge of that world prior to doing science. So call it prescientific, call it the natural standpoint, whatever: it seems to me that is much more important for religion than specifically scientific knowledge, for this reason, that there is so much advance and change and shifting in scientific theories that it would be very unwise for people to link religious beliefs to the current theory. Then it would have the fate of that current theory. But every theory about the world presupposes these pre-scientific convictions about the world around us and that is sufficient, I think, for purposes of religion. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p164]
- Now you ask about the origin of life. It seems to me science is by its nature looking for mechanistic explanations. That includes mechanistic explanations for the origin of life. This doesn't mean that science is anti-God or atheistic. But it simply means that the rules of how we do science exclude the hand of God as an explanation. I can hold an apple in my hand and let it go; it falls to the floor, and you could say that is because of God's action in the universe causing the apple to drop. And in a certain sense, as a theist, I believe in God as a continual sustainer of the universe from one moment to another and one moment to another in the trajectory of the apple. But that's not science. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p168]
- The laws of physics are in some fashion designed, and that is where I feel that God's creativity is at work. Even if it were shown that in some way the universe existed forever, that there was no moment of creation, I would say that does not eliminate the need for a Creator because in my view of the universe the Creator in the sense of the designer of the physical laws is still required. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p169]
- I think there is a possibility of miracles in the universe. Therefore there is meaning in the efficacy of prayer. These are difficult theological questions, which I don't feel that I'm particularly well-positioned to discuss in a philosophical way. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p169-170]

- **George F. R. Ellis:** The universe has expanded to its present state from a hot Big Bang, whose physics is well understood back to the time of element formation (but is rather speculative at earlier times than that). The Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation recently examined in detail by the COBE satellite is relic radiation from the hot early phase of the evolution of the universe. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p170]
- The study of this expansion and evolutionary development is the subject of physical cosmology. The first set of problems, then, are those arising in this study. These are basic observational difficulties, additional problems due to horizons, and the limits of possible physical verification. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p170]
- **BASIC OBSERVATIONAL DIFFICULTIES:** Our ability to directly determine the geometry and distribution of matter in the universe is restricted by many observational difficulties, including the faintness of the images we are trying to understand. We can only detect distant matter by means of particles or radiation it emits that travels to us, receiving most of our information from light. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p170]
- (Here it is understood that light is a generic term for any form of electromagnetic radiation by which we can see distant objects: radio waves, infrared radiation, ultraviolet radiation, and x-rays as well as ordinary light). There are therefore fundamental limitations on the region of the universe we can see, because the radiation conveying information travels towards us at the speed of light (and any massive particles travel slower than this speed). As we look out to further and further distances, we are necessarily looking further and further back in time (for example the Andromeda galaxy is a million light years away; this means we see it as it was a million years ago). We are therefore seeing the sources at earlier stages in their evolution. This makes it very difficult to disentangle the effects of physical evolution of the sources observed, from geometrical evolution of the universe. This is the main reason we are unable to tell directly from observations of the rate of change of redshift with distance if the universe will recollapse or not. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p170-171]
- The expansion of the universe is well evidenced by the redshiftdistance relation for galaxies, but we have trouble in identifying accurately the size and age of the universe, determined by the Hubble constant. While redshift

can be measured accurately, it is rather difficult to measure the distance of distant galaxies. We cannot easily use astronomical objects as standard candles because we do not understand their evolution – how have they changed with time. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p171]

- Equally we have great difficulty in even estimating how much matter there is in the observable region of the universe, because of the problem of dark matter: it is possible that most of the matter in the universe is not radiating very much and so is almost undetectable. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p171]
- These problems are aggravated by the fact that as we look to sources at further distance (and hence higher redshift), the amount of light we receive from them rapidly fades away – an inevitable consequence of the nature of redshift (photons lose energy as their wavelength increases). Thus at larger and larger distances, the universe fades away. Modern detectors can to some extent compensate for this – and we are presently receiving remarkable images of objects at enormous distances from the Hubble Space Telescope; nevertheless what we can tell fades rapidly away on our past lightcone (that part of the universe we can see to), and so what we can deduce off the past light cone fades even more rapidly. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p171]
- Furthermore, there is an absolute limit to what we can detect by astronomical observation at any wavelength. This is because as we look back into the past and the temperature of the background radiation rises, it leads to ionization of matter at a redshift of about 1000; and then the universe becomes completely opaque. We cannot see to earlier times because radiation cannot penetrate the hot, dense primeval plasma that existed at those times. No improvement of technology will change that situation. The COBE images of microwave background radiation temperature fluctuations are images of the most distant matter we will ever be able to see by electromagnetic radiation, that is, by ordinary telescopes, whatever their wavelength (neutrino or gravitational wave telescopes can theoretically see to earlier times; but they too – if ever developed sufficiently to produce images of meaningful quality – would also each encounter a similar barrier at earlier times). [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p171]
- **The particle horizon:** Because the universe has a finite age, light can only have traveled a finite distance since the origin of the universe. This feature implies that we can only see out to those particles whose present-day distance

corresponds to the age of the universe; the particles beyond cannot be seen by us no matter what detectors we may use (light has not had time to travel to us from them since the creation of the universe). [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p172]

- It is because of these limits that we are able to say very little about the universe on scales bigger than the Hubble size (the distance we can have seen since the beginning of the universe, roughly ten thousand million light years). Thus we cannot observationally distinguish between universe models that are strictly homogeneous in the large (implying conditions are the same at a distance one million times the Hubble size away from us, as they are here), and those that are not. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p172]
- If the universe has finite spatial sections, there are at least as many galaxies outside our view as within it; while if it has infinite spatial sections, we cannot see an infinite number of galaxies, so what we can see is an infinitely small fraction of all there is. Any statements we make about the structure of the universe on a really large scale (that is, many times the horizon size) are strictly unverifiable. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p172]
- **Small universes:** There is one exception to this generally pessimistic situation. It is possible (even if the universe is a low-density universe) that the large-scale connectivity of space could be different from what we expected, so that the universe is in fact a small universe, spatially closed on a scale smaller than the Hubble size. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p172-173]
- Now it is possible we live in such a small universe, but if this were true then observationally proving this to be the real situation would be difficult; and there is no solid evidence that this is indeed the case. Thus the working hypothesis is that we do not live in a small universe, but we should keep an open mind on this matter. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p173]
- **Limits to verifiability:** Overall, what we can say with any degree of certainty is strictly proscribed by observational limits. We can in principle observationally determine (a) a great deal about the region we can observe (which lies inside the visual horizon); (b) a little about that which lies outside our visual horizon but inside the particle horizon (we might be able to tell something by use of neutrino or gravitational wave telescopes, some day when technology has developed sufficiently, but this is decades into the future); (c) nothing about that which lies beyond the particle horizon: this

region is unobservable by any method. In a small universe there are no visual horizons, but the real universe is probably not like that. The implication is that when our models give predictions of the nature of the universe on a larger scale than the Hubble radius, these are strictly unverifiable, however appealing they may be. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p173-174]

- **LIMITS OF PHYSICS VERIFICATION:** In trying to understand the early universe, we also come up against major limits in terms of our ability to test the predictions of our proposals for physical laws. Even if we could build a super-collider as large as the entire Solar System, we could not reach the kinds of energies that come into play in the very early universe, so we cannot test the behavior of matter under the relevant conditions. This puts major limits on our ability to test whether our theories of those times are right or not. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p174]
- Indeed the early universe is the only place where some of the laws of physics come fully into play (apart from what happens to matter in the final state of collapse in a black hole; but that is completely inaccessible to observation); consequently the situation is reversed from what we might hope, in that instead of being able to take known laws and use them to determine what happened in the very early universe, we may have to proceed the other way round, regarding the early universe as the only laboratory where those laws can be tested. This has led to an important discovery; comparison of element abundance observations with studies of nucleosynthesis in the early universe determined that there are only three neutrino types, rather than four, before this question had been tested experimentally on Earth. Results from the accelerator at CERN later confirmed this conclusion. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p174]
- **Physical origins:** This problem occurs a fortiori in considering the origin of the universe, which set the conditions determining what exists today. The Big Bang theory outlined previously makes it clear that at a very early times there must have been an epoch where the ideas of classical physics simply did not apply; Quantum Gravity (a theory unifying general relativity with quantum theory) would have been the dominant factor at these times. There are a number of different theoretical approaches to this topic, none of which is wholly satisfactory, so we do not even know for sure what basic approach to use in such theories; and there is no way we can test these different options by Earth-based experiments. However, it is these theories that underlie what we would really like to know about the nature of the origin of the universe.

[Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p175]

- The no-boundary idea: One rather unique and intriguing proposal sidesteps this problem neatly. This is the Hartle–Hawking suggestion that the initial state of the universe could be a region where time did not exist: instead of three spatial dimensions and one time dimension, there were four spatial dimensions. This has a great advantage: it is then possible there can be a universe without a beginning, for (just as there is no boundary to the surface of the Earth at the South Pole) there is no boundary to this initial region of the universe; it is uniform and smooth at all points. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p176]
- The issue of initial conditions: Thirdly, and irrespective of our resolution of the previous issues, we are tackling here the problem of initial conditions for the universe: we are trying to use physical theory to describe something which happened once and only once, and for which no comparable happenings have ever occurred (or at least, none are accessible to our observations). The notion of a law to describe this situation faces considerable difficulties. If a “law” is only ever applied to one physical object, it is not clear if the usual distinction between a physical law and specific initial conditions makes sense. That “law” certainly cannot be subject to empirical test in the same way as other physical laws. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p177]
- Whatever explanation we may give for them, unique initial conditions occurred at the origin of the universe. They determine both the initial structure of space–time, and its matter content. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p177]
- The matter we see around us today is the remnants of that initial state, after it has been processed by non-equilibrium processes in the early universe and then in a first generation of stars. Thus we understand the role of initial conditions; however this analysis does not answer the ultimate issues of origin and existence, in particular why the initial conditions had the form they did (even if the Hartle–Hawking proposal were correct, or a steady-state universe description, for that matter, there are alternative possibilities; we would still face the issue, why does that particular prescription describe the real universe?). [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p177]
- The point is that a great deal of “fine tuning” has taken place in order that life be possible; in particular, various fundamental constants are highly

constrained in their values if life as we know it is to exist – there are many relationships imbedded in physical laws that are not explained by physics, but are required for life to be possible. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p178]

- **THE ISSUE OF FINE TUNING:** Significant alteration of either physical laws or boundary conditions at the beginning of the universe would prevent the existence of intelligent life as we know it in the universe. If physical laws were altered by a remarkably little amount, no evolutionary process at all of living beings would be possible; so these laws appear fine-tuned to allow the existence of life. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p178]
- We can easily consider universes where life would not be possible. There could be a universe that expanded and then recollapsed with a total lifetime of only one hundred thousand years; evolution could not take place on that timescale. The background radiation might never drop below 3000 K, so that matter was always ionized (electrons and nuclei always remaining separate from each other); the molecules of life could then never form. Black holes might be so common that they rapidly attracted all the matter in the universe, and there never was a stable environment in which life could develop. Cosmic rays could always be so abundant that any tentative organic structures are destroyed before they can replicate. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p178-179]
- Thus there are many ways that the boundary conditions in a universe could prevent life occurring. But additionally, we can conceive of universes where the laws of physics (and so of chemistry) were different than in ours. Almost any change in these laws will prevent life as know it from functioning. If the neutron mass were just a little less than it is, proton decay could have taken place so that no atoms were left at all. The production of carbon and oxygen in stars requires the careful setting of two different nuclear energy levels; if they were just a little different, the elements we need for life would not exist. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p179]
- Perhaps most important of all, the chemistry on which the human body depends involves intricate folding and bonding patterns that would be destroyed if the fine structure constant (which controls the nature of chemical binding) were a little bit different. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p179]
- In summary, to allow life to occur, we require the existence of heavy elements;

sufficient time for evolution of advanced life forms to take place; regions that are neither too hot nor too cold; restricted value of fundamental constants that control chemistry and local physics; and so on. Thus only particular laws of physics – and particular initial conditions in the universe – allow the existence of intelligent life. No evolution whatever is possible if these laws and conditions do not have a restricted form, which will not be true in a generic universe. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p180]

- Thus the universe provides a hospitable environment for humanity. Why is this so? Because of the deep connections between physical aspects of the universe, this is not an issue related to only one aspect of the structure of the universe; it refers to the total interrelated organization of the laws of nature and the boundary conditions for those laws, that fashions the universe as we know it. Thus the profound issue arising is the anthropic question: Why have conditions in the universe been so ordered that intelligent life can exist? [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p180]
- **THE WEAK ANTHROPIC PRINCIPLE:** There are two purely scientific approaches to the anthropic issue. The first is the Weak Anthropic Principle (WAP), based on the comment: it is not surprising the observed universe admits the existence of life, for the universe cannot be observed unless there are observers in it. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p180]
- This seemingly empty statement gains content when we turn it round and ask, at what times and places in the universe can life exist, and what are the interconnections that are critical for its existence? It could not, for example, exist too early in the present expansion phase, for the night sky would then have been too hot. Indeed from this viewpoint the reason the observed night sky is dark at night is that if it were not dark, there would be no observers to see it. Furthermore one can deduce various necessary relations between fundamental quantities in order that the observers should exist, so that if, for example, the fundamental constants vary with time or place in the universe, life will only be possible in restricted regions where they take appropriate anthropic values. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p180-181]
- Hence this view basically interprets the anthropic principle as a selection principle: the necessary conditions for observers to exist restricts the times and places from which the universe can be observed. This is an interesting and often illuminating viewpoint. However, it is also a conservative

approach, avoiding the main issue under discussion. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p181]

- **THE STRONG ANTHROPIC PRINCIPLE:** By contrast, the Strong Anthropic Principle (SAP) tackles the issue head on, claiming that it is necessary that intelligent life exist in the universe; the presence of life is required in order that a universe model makes sense. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p181]
- Considered purely scientifically, this is clearly a very controversial claim, for it is hard to provide scientific reasons to support this view. The most solid justification attempted is through the claim that existence of an observer is necessary in order that quantum theory can make sense. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p181]
- To focus this issue, one should turn to the metaphysics of cosmology, and the three major questions one finds here: 1. Why are there any laws of physics? 2. What determines their form? 3. Why does anything exist at all? [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p182]
- These issues lie at the foundation of cosmology, which – like all science – assumes at its very start existence of space–time and matter, and that some laws of physics exist and determine what happens to them; and considers the consequences of those particular laws which happen to have been actualized in the existent physical universe. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p182]
- Then it is important to realize: Science itself cannot resolve the metaphysical issues posed by questioning the reason for (i) the existence of the universe; (ii) the existence of any physical laws at all; or (iii) the nature of the specific physical laws that actually hold. These require a different kind of explanation than a purely scientific approach can provide. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p182]
- The point here is that science assumes as its ground the existence of laws of nature. It cannot by itself investigate this issue of why laws exist – there is no experiment we can use to do so. Again one of its central concerns is what the laws of nature are; but it cannot in a serious sense ask why the laws have the specific nature they do (for example why does gravity exist?) – that is again a metaphysical issue. We cannot devise experimental tests that will answer such questions. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great*

Questions, One world Publications 1998, p182]

- Thus science itself cannot provide a metaphysics that relates to the issues of meaning that are expressed in “Why” questions; it cannot tackle the issue that the person in the street wants answered: What underlying meaning may there be? [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p182]
- When supposed science attempts to answer this question, you may be sure you are dealing with pseudo-science rather than science. Science itself cannot, by its very structure and nature, answer questions to do with meaning – with the kinds of issues that are our concern in living our daily lives. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p182-183]
- In essence the argument is that morality is real, and we know it is real through our everyday experience (which is indeed data about the nature of the universe). The only genuinely viable foundation for true morality (as opposed to attitudes and behavior necessary for a society to function relatively smoothly, which is just utilitarianism) is that this morality has an independent and intrinsic existence of its own – just as the laws of physics and of logic do. And the most obvious viable foundation for that existence is through the moral nature of a creator. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p184]
- **Keith Ward:** The whole of modern science is based on the fundamental presupposition that the universe is intelligible, that it can be understood by the human mind, that events do not just occur for no reason. The natural sciences have achieved their enormous success by discovering underlying laws which describe measurable regularities of relationship between basic physical forces and the fundamental particles upon which they operate. The question, “Why do these events happen as they do?” has unfailingly had an answer, which observation and imaginative theorizing together have uncovered. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p184]
- When Hawking says that, if there was not a first moment of time, there would be no need for a creator to start the process going, he misses the point that it is the process as a whole that needs explaining. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p188]
- Indeed, the hypothesis of God makes the evolution of rational sentient life from inorganic matter much more probable than blind natural selection alone. On blind natural selection, the existence of human life is almost infinitely improbable. If God creates the material universe, the evolution of conscious

beings, capable of knowing and loving God, becomes virtually certain. Since the best hypothesis in science is the one that makes a given process more probable, and since conscious agents have evolved, the hypothesis of God is much the best explanation of evolution. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p190]

- A wise and powerful creator might well choose to create rational agents through a long evolutionary process, which would enable them to be the means of shaping the material world itself, of which they would be an integral part, into a fuller expression of spiritual purpose. Such agents could evolve through mutation and natural selection. But one must remember that the laws governing mutations and the environments doing the selecting are both sustained and shaped by God, and are therefore far from being blind. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p190]

• THE PROBLEM OF E V I L

- **Great Question 12:** The problem of evil, the problem of reconciling the existence of evil and suffering with the existence of an all-good, all-powerful God, has puzzled believers and unbelievers. What solution, if any, do you see to this problem?
- **Richard Swinburne:** The problem of evil. Yes, indeed, this must be the central difficulty always for theism and the doctrine that there is a God. I think that the problem is a soluble one but it is a difficult problem. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p191]
- The basic solution is that all the evils we find around us are logically necessary conditions of greater goods, that is to say that greater good couldn't come about without the evil or at any rate the natural possibility of evil. That is obvious in one or two fairly simple cases. For example, it is a good thing that humans have free will, in the sense that they can make choices which have an influence either for good or for ill, choices which are independent of the causes affecting them; they can choose independently of the influences which act upon them. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p191]
- It is a good thing that such agents, in particular humans, should be the source of the way things go, for good or evil, that they should be mini-creators having to some extent the divine power of molding themselves and other people in the world for good or evil. It is good for them that they should have this sort of responsibility. But, of course, if they are to have this sort of responsibility for the way things go, either for good or evil, it is possible that

they may promote evil or negligently allow it to occur. So if there is to be the good of significant free will there has to be the possibility, which may be actualized, of evil. That is the core, I think, of any solution to the problem of evil. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p191]

- But, of course, not all of the evils in the world are caused by human beings. There is much disease and suffering which humans have no responsibility for and much suffering of animals before ever there were human beings. So we can't account for all the evils of the world in terms of human bad choices but I think that the other evils of the world nevertheless play a subsidiary role in making possible the kind of free will which the free-will defense says to be a good thing [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p191-192]
- I think the solution to the problem of evil is along those lines, but it needs a lot more detailed showing with respect to each kind of evil how that makes possible a greater good. And I think that is possible for all the kinds of evil we find around us, which are after all limited, finite-term evils. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p192]
- **Gerard J. Hughes:** The experience of human suffering, and the often terrible impact of human malice, pose a serious problem for any theist who believes that God is the creator of all, and that God is good. The crux of the problem is the sense that God could, and should, have done better than create a world in which such things seem to be woven into its very fabric. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p192]
- I do not think, for the reasons I shall give, that there is any clear way in which the theist can hope to show that the problem is a false one. There just is no simple answer. Still, it is possible to give some arguments to show that the evil in the world does not make belief in a good God intellectually impossible, or even unlikely to be correct. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p192]
- In short, we have no reason to suppose that God could create an improved, but comparable, version of this world; and no reason to suppose that a radically different alternative world, if such were possible for God, would be in any intelligible sense better (or worse) than this one. This is not to say that this is the best possible world. Rather it is to say that, for all we know, it might be; and that in some cases the very notion of "best," or "better" is so far as we are concerned an entirely empty one. That we can readily imagine

such a world does absolutely nothing to establish the crucial assertion in the formulation of the problem of evil, that God could have done better. What the problem of evil gratuitously assumes, the theist is entitled equally gratuitously to deny. Such a denial is emphatically not a solution; but neither is the contrary assertion an adequate justification for saying that there really is an insoluble problem. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p195-196]

- In which case, God is surely responsible for creating a world in which this would happen. But whether a world in which no such choices were even possible would be overall better than the world we have is a question which I think simply cannot be confidently answered one way or the other. So even in this case it does not seem that there are any conclusive reasons for asserting that in creating our world God acted wrongly. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p196]
- **Alvin Plantinga:** Many philosophers have claimed that there is a contradiction between the existence of an all-good, all-powerful God, all-knowing God, on the one hand, and evil on the other. This seems to me to be demonstrably wrong, and, as a matter of fact, at present, not very many people do affirm that there is this contradiction. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p196]
- **Hugo Meynell:** On the problem of evil, my immediate feeling is that it obviously puts the ball squarely in the theists' court. Is it not as clear a contradiction as could well be, that there is evil, or at least so much evil, in a world supposed to have been created by an almighty and omnibenevolent God? I have already said that I think there is good reason to believe that there is an intelligent will underlying the universe. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p198]
- That there are sufferings and miseries in the world, and that these are not just due to malign human agents, are things that most certainly cannot and must not be denied. One of the things that make atheists furious, and properly so, is when theists get complacent about or try to minimize the real horror of the pain and misery that there are in creation. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p198]
- Before we leave the topic of evil, I want to insist how important it is that people who are extraordinarily fortunate, like myself, should never gloss over the appalling misery that other people have to go through in the course of their lives. I once had to give a course about evil and suffering in the great religions. Very depressing it was. But it seemed to me that the only thing that they all had in common was a conviction that suffering be put to work, and

some positive use could be made of it, in preparing oneself for a more fully realized life. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p199]

- **Josef Seifert:** The problem of evil, of moral evil and of unjust suffering, is certainly the most powerful argument used by atheists against the existence of God. And yet, there is a remarkable metaphysical agreement between theists and atheists regarding evils: Atheism agrees with theism in its best forms that only an all-good, all-powerful God, who at the same time embodies moral perfections and thus perfect justice, can be properly speaking God. Any cruel, merciless, and unjust God would not properly be God. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p199]
- This is in no way given to us. Therefore, we have to embrace both truths: the existence of an infinitely good and all-perfect God and the striking reality of evil – even if we cannot fully reconcile both in our limited minds. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p202]
- **Sandra Menssen, T. D. Sullivan:** Can the world's evils be reconciled with the existence of a good God? The question has exercised almost every philosophically inclined nonbeliever; it poses what tradition has labeled “the problem of evil.” Afflictions witnessed or experienced, and acts of malfeasance observed or performed, lead a person inquiring into the possibility of the divine to wonder whether there could be a creator of the vast oceans and the undiscovered stars who is good, whose goodness commands respect and love and worship, whose eye is on the sparrow, and the child in Zaire, and the baby in the next room. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p202]
- Ultimately, then, a theistic solution to the problem of evil will depend on whether there is an evidentially justified revelation, a message God vouchsafes to an individual or a group of persons, that includes the promise of an afterlife. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p204]
- **Ralph Mcinerny:** Well, I think one ought to start with the problem of good. Why are there so many good things, why do so many good things happen to us and so forth? I don't mean that in a chuckleheaded way but I think that evil is a negation. So if you don't have a lively sense of the good you don't know what evil is. I mean, it's an absence of something, but there is a lot more present than there is absent, so good outweighs evil many tons of times. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world

Publications 1998, p204]

- I think we ought to start off that way and marvel at the goodness of our lives and of the universe and so forth before we start whining about the evil which is usually due to us anyway. I think it is an overblown thing. People pretend to be absolutely discombobulated because there was an earthquake in Lisbon or something and they have to write *Candide*. But most days there aren't earthquakes in Lisbon and maybe we ought to marvel at that. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p204]

• PANTHEISM

- **Great Question 13:** How do you view pantheism, the notion that we are all “part of” God, that God can be identified with the world?
- **Russell Pannier, T. D. Sullivan:** Theists maintain that God acts in the spatio-temporal universe. What exactly do they mean? One way of understanding the positive content of a metaphysical assertion is beginning with its negative content – what it denies. We begin with the latter. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p206]
- One thing theists certainly intend to deny is the proposition that God is literally identical with the universe. This concept of literal identity can be explicated in terms of what we shall call “strict identity.” Let “x” and “y” be referring expressions. To say that x is strictly identical with y is to say at least that, given a certain assumed semantical content, x and y designate the same entity. We can now be more precise about the meaning of the denial. Theists mean to deny that God is strictly identical with the universe as a whole, that God is strictly identical with any proper part of the universe and that the universe is strictly identical with any proper part of God. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p206]
- We cannot set out here any of the supporting reasons. Suffice it to say that some very plausible arguments proceed from three assumptions about God's nature: (1) God is an ontologically independent entity, in the sense that He does not depend for His existence upon anything else; (2) God is the ontological ground for everything else, in the sense that any entities distinct from God depend upon God for their existence; (3) God's existence is necessary, in the sense that if He exists at all, He exists necessarily. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p206]
- There are at least two strong, albeit nondeductive, arguments supporting an

affirmative response. The first invokes the idea of inference to the best explanation. It is difficult, though perhaps not impossible, to explain facts of this kind in any other way. The second takes the form of a practical argument. Expressed in the vocabulary of the individual believer, it can be (very schematically) put as follows: “My deepest desire is for spiritual integration and fulfillment. I have experienced in the past a significant degree of such integration and fulfillment. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p208]

- I believe that a necessary condition for those experiences is my own belief that the causal source of those experiences is God, the immaterial ontological ground of the universe. (That is, I believe that if I had not had this conviction, I would not have had the experiences.) The belief that the causal source of my experiences is God is epistemologically reasonable (although not strictly demonstrable). Hence, I ought to continue believing it.” Although we cannot argue the matter here, we think that the use of practical arguments in metaphysics is not only philosophically legitimate, but at times necessary. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p208]
- **Richard Swinburne:** No, I don’t think we are all part of God. It seems to me characteristic of the sort of scientific pattern of an explanation which I was drawing attention to that we explain all the diverse and manifold things around us by a simpler beginning of them. Just as the scientist explains the whole range of chemical interactions by postulating that there are only a few kinds of chemical substances which interact in simple ways and thereby explains the manifold by something which is outside it as its cause, it seems to me that the metaphysician ought to proceed accordingly and not identify God with the world but try and look for something simpler outside the world, which leads us to explain the world, and that is characteristic of theism. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p208]
- **Hugo Meynell:** I think theism is much more like pantheism than one might think. I’ve always liked Thomas Aquinas’ formulation: God operates in every operation of nature and will. God is that which is active in everything. What then is wrong with pantheism? It is one thing for God to be the agent in practically every event, apart from human sins; it is another thing for God to be identical with all those events. Another formulation I like is Spinoza’s distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*: God is *natura naturans*, the active principle working through nature. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications

1998, p208-209]

- ALVIN PLANTINGA: I don't believe in pantheism for a minute, because it seems to me an essential part of pantheism is the idea that God isn't a person, isn't a conscious, willing, intending being who has created the world, has plans, plans for me, for example, and to whom I can talk in the expectation of being heard. Pantheism is a totally different sort of view. I'm not even sure what it means to say that God can be identified with the world. Could a person be the same thing as the universe? I really don't see how. It doesn't make sense to me; from a rational standpoint, I find it very hard to understand. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p209]
- Somebody says, "everything there is, that is God." I don't know what is being claimed. It could be that what is being claimed is that God is the most impressive thing there is because he is the sum total of everything there is; or it could be that what is being claimed is something else, perhaps that God is the soul of the world, that the world is His body. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p209]
- JOSEF SEIFERT: Having reached the conclusion that God exists, we also see that pantheism is an untenable position. For that which exists necessarily cannot be identical with all the beings in the world of which we understand that they could also not exist and that they exist contingently. That which is all-perfect and of which we can say that it is being itself, goodness itself, wisdom itself, justice itself and the infinite perfection of these pure attributes, can never be identical with the imperfect, finite, limited versions and forms of being in which we find these qualities in all beings in the world. Therefore the absolute transcendence of God, who is infinite in all of His perfections, over all of the world, and His radical distinction from the world, is evident and is an evident condition of the "divine immanence" [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p209]
- in the sense of the indwelling and omnipresence of God in the world. For to be simultaneously present in all times, places, and creatures as the same identical God is possible solely for a being who is wholly transcendent to the world and different from it. Hence, the pantheistic idea that we are parts of God, or that God could be identified with the world, is untenable. As a matter of fact, we could agree with Schopenhauer who said that pantheism is only a polite form of atheism because to say that God is the world is to say the same thing as: there is no God. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p209-210]

- **Ralph Mcinerny:** To say that I, myself, am the cause of everything or some such version, or that I am part of the cosmic god is one of those fuzzy things but apparently it has an appeal. I'm sure there are a lot of sort of unreflective pantheists. Very often when people talk about death, they talk about returning, you know, to the ultimate capital of the world so that new coinage can be minted, or what have you. I just find that a very odd notion because what it tends to is materialism, it seems to me, or a real oddball kind of idealism. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p210]
- **William P. Alston:** Well, as you undoubtedly know, in the history of religion, experiences of God have been interpreted in various ways. Religious experiences have been interpreted theistically, pantheistically, in terms of some sort of nature mysticism, and all sorts of other ways. That again brings out the need for a diversity of sources or bases. If you are just going by personal religious experience, it obviously is open to a variety of interpretations and people do, no doubt, generally speaking, interpret it in terms of the religious belief system, the religious conceptual system, that they find themselves with. The experiences certainly reinforce this and, I think, quite properly. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p210]
 - **Divine Action I N The World And Human Histo Ry**
- **Great Question 14:** What is your view on the possibility of Divine action in the world and of the relation of Providence and history?
- **Richard Swinburne:** Well, if there is a God who has made us, loves us, cares for us, then clearly one would expect Him to interact occasionally with us. But one would also expect Him, because He values our having creative powers, our making a difference to things, and our influencing each other and helping each other, not to intervene in the world too often. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p212]
- God has entrusted us to each other. If parents have two children, an older child and a younger child, they may entrust the younger child to the care of the older child and they will not interfere in this arrangement too quickly because, if they do, the elder child will not have any serious responsibility and it is a good thing to have responsibility. But, on the other hand, they may interfere very occasionally if things get out of hand: if the elder child is too insensitive or cruel to the younger child. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p212]
- **Gerard J. Hughes:** We should be very cautious indeed in making claims

about what God can and cannot do, or even about what God would and would not do. I know of no philosophical argument which shows that God could not intervene in the world, producing an effect which owes nothing to the causal powers of created beings. The more interesting and difficult issues are concerned with whether it would be possible for us to know that some event is due to the direct intervention of God, and why God should wish to intervene at all. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p213]

- Equally, it is possible that some tragedies are just that, tragedies which serve no good purpose, but are the inevitable by-products of the workings of a world which is nevertheless good overall. To speak of divine providence, then, is an expression of confidence and trust in the goodness of the creator God, and is equally appropriate in adverse as well as in favorable circumstances. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p214]
- **Alvin Plantinga:** It is certainly possible for God to act in the world. In fact God acts in the world all the time by upholding it. If He weren't engaged in His upholding of the world, it would disappear like a candle flame in a hurricane. And of course God can act in history. How does He act in history; how does His part in what happens relate to our part in what happens? I don't know. God orchestrates history. He knows what is going to happen; He chooses a world which suits Him; out of all the possible worlds that He could have chosen, He chooses one that He approves of in the long run. And if you include in history what happens after the Second Coming, then, of course, in that part of it, what He does is much clearer, so to speak, than this present part of it. But as to just how providence and history are related now, in this dispensation, I don't know. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p214]
- **Josef Seifert:** If it is evident from the preceding argument that the world does not exist by necessity and that many of the species and natures and laws which govern the world are not of an absolute inner necessity, then it is clear that all of these non-necessary (contingent) existences and natures must be, in the last analysis, a divine creature. But if God creates and sustains them by a free action, then He certainly can also enter the world by a free action, both through divine providence in human history, by bestowing grace or by accepting sacrifices or sacrificing his own Son on the Cross, by renewing his sacrifice, by pardoning sins, and also in the form of miracles. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p214-215]

- To deny the possibility of divine action in the world, of providential, of miraculous or of sacramental divine interaction with the causal order of the world, presupposes either (a) atheism, or (b) the assumption of a totally closed causal order, or (c) a metaphysics according to which there are only necessary facts, no truly contingent ones. Even if we reject atheism, do we have to assume a causal order of the world that is closed and that does not stand open to possible divine interaction? Or is it intrinsically impossible to change nature because it obeys absolutely necessary laws of nature? . [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p215]
- In response to (a) we conclude: In view of the arguments for the existence of God, the first reason can be dismissed. In response to (b) we might point out that the idea of a closed deterministic universe can be criticized from a scientific point of view, for example in light of Heisenberg's uncertainty relation which claims that microphysical laws are only statistical in nature. Yet a more philosophical response to the above objection is needed (because the difference between strict and exceptionless rules and merely statistical rules as such do not have to do with freedom or divine interaction) . [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p215]

• **Part IV: WHAT CAN WE KNOW ABOUT GOD?**

- **OMNISCIENCE, OMNIPOTENCE, ETERNITY, INFINITY**
- **Great Question 15:** If God exists, what attributes can properly be described as divine attributes?
- **Gerard J. Hughes:** If one is asked "What is God like?," the quickest and shortest answer is to list some of the things which have traditionally been said about God; He exists eternally, He is unchanging, knows all things, is all-powerful, personal, good; He created the world out of love for it. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p221]
- I believe that God knows the free choices we actually make because we make them. I thus disagree with the view that God's knowledge is in no way dependent on what we do. What about free choices which we might have made but never in fact make? I would say that God knows all of these as possibilities; but in my view it is a mistake to say that God knows what we would have (as distinct from might have) freely chosen had things been different; where freedom is concerned, I do not believe there are any truths of that kind to be known, by God or anyone else. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p223]

- Apart from what God has done, it seems to me we have very little grasp of what God can or cannot do. Just as it is no limitation on God's knowledge to say that He cannot know where there is no truth to be known (as in "What would I have been doing now had I emigrated to Australia when I was twenty?" – a question to which there is no true answer, I would maintain), so it is no limitation on God's power to maintain that he cannot do what cannot be done. We know and understand some of the things which God has done; and that is too small a basis on which to make assertions about what is possible for God. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p223-224]
- **Alvin Plantinga:** I would say those are the sources of the knowledge we have about God's attributes. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p224]
- **Hugo Meynell:** The short answer is, in my view, whatever may properly be deduced from the thesis that God is that which conceives all possibilities, and wills those that actually obtain. One might say, well, we cannot apply terms in the same sense to God and to creatures, because that would be blasphemous. But if you take that principle too far, as David Hume in particular points out, you might as well join the atheists. If you say that God isn't good in anything like the sense in which the word "good" is used of creatures, or intelligent in anything like the sense in which we may be intelligent, then you might just as well say that God was bad as that God was good, or that God was stupid as God was intelligent. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p225]
- What's the way through this? The crucial thing here is a suggestion due to medieval philosophers, that God is in unrestricted act, that we are in very limited potency. We gradually develop in understanding from virtually nothing, and our wills are very restricted; but God is that whose understanding encompasses everything and whose will is almighty. God is either able to will this universe or another universe or no universe at all. Thus intelligence and will, it seems to me, have to be meant in the same sense as applied to God and creatures, as the medieval schoolmen used to say, univocally predicated of them; the difference is in their range and magnitude. Omnipotence, I think, follows from the fact that what sort of a world there is, and any contingent state of affairs, will be dependent on the divine action or, at the very least, the divine permission (this is where sin comes in). And omniscience, I would say, similarly follows from the fact that God conceives and wills everything. There are some ticklish problems, which have been

variously resolved by theologians, around the question of in what sense and to what extent God knows the future, or what is future to us, if future events are not completely pre-determined by present circumstances. But we can leave that question, I think, on one side, unless it actually comes up later on. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p225]

- **Josef Seifert:** [I answered this question in my earlier answer to Great Question 10, on the existence of God] but could add that all those attributes which are “pure perfections” (the clear philosophical discovery of which I take to be an equally epoch-making discovery of Anselm of Canterbury as the discovery of the ontological argument itself) must be attributed to God. Pure perfections are those of which we understand that they are not essentially limited, and therefore can and must be attributed to God. These so-called pure perfections differ from the mixed perfections which are only good under certain points of view and within certain limits. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p225-226]
- These perfections include: 1. the so-called transcendental properties of being which everything that is, and therefore also God, must possess: being itself, essence (res), to be something and distinct from nothing and from other beings (aliquid), to possess goodness (some value and positive importance in itself), some beauty (as the splendor of the good and of the true), intelligibility (verum), etc.; 2. many which not all beings possess but only some, such as life, personhood, knowledge, wisdom, justice, freedom, power, etc. These perfections culminate in the characteristics of persons such as knowledge and wisdom, most of all in the moral perfections, such as justice and mercy. All these perfections can and must be attributed to God and a god such as Zeus, who would not possess them, or not possess them infinitely, would not be God; 3. the pure perfections which we can and must attribute to God, including those exclusively divine attributes, which we can understand darkly in the intelligible mirror of the world: eternity as an all-presence of being in which nothing has to come to be or passes away; absolute infinity of all perfections; omnipotence; omniscience; perfect necessity of real existence, etc. These attributes are exclusively divine attributes and no other being can possess them. Yet they are also pure perfections. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p226-227]
- **Ralph Mcinerny:** Here again I am guided by two things and one would be the revelatory, as such, what God has told us about Himself, and second by

the philosophical tradition, what people have, on reflection, thought it was fitting or appropriate to attribute to God. And the great tradition has been very cautious about claiming to have anything like comprehensive knowledge of what God is like. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p229]

- On the other hand, it is part of the cosmological argument base that you find perfections among creatures, probably limited and restricted in various ways, but that we can imagine in unrestricted form, like wisdom or knowledge or love and, we figure, if you can think away the restrictions and flaws of their finite appearance, then you would have a way of talking or thinking about God. But that is done with a great deal of caution. There is the famous three-stage approach of Dionysus the Areopagite – Pseudo- Dionysus – that you affirm things of God, you say that God is wise and then you say, but God isn't wise, meaning not like Socrates, who became wise and might lose it, but He is Wisdom – you get the eminent way. That is an effort to think beyond finitude and we can only have limited success in doing that, obviously. [Roy Abraham Varghese: *Great Thinkers On Great Questions*, One world Publications 1998, p229]

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