



EDITORIAL

GOD CONCEPTS AND SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

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Philosophers of religion are of course very much used to assessing concepts of God on conceptual and evidential grounds, as when they examine the internal consistency of a God concept, or the extent to which it can withstand one or another formulation of the “problem of evil.” In this collection of papers, the focus of discussion is somewhat different: here, the authors consider how we might evaluate a God concept in the light of its bearing on our understanding of the nature of the well-lived, or “spiritual,” life, or in terms of its capacity to enable, in practical terms, the enactment of a given ideal of the spiritual life. And in general, we might suppose that it is possible to move back and forth between God concepts and accounts of the nature of the well-lived life, until we reach a point at which our God representation and ideal of life are in a state of reflective equilibrium.

The papers by Simon Hewitt and Tasia Scrutton begin from a conception of the well-lived life, defined in relational or political terms, and consider what might follow for our conception of God. These papers are nicely complementary, since each examines the bearing of ideals of the spiritual life on the question of whether God is to be conceived as immutable and impassible. The papers of Khai Wager and Mark Wynn also discuss the interplay between God concepts and ideals of the spiritual life, Wager exploring the structure and viability of a conception of the spiritual life that is grounded in a pantheistic conception of the divine, here using the work of Robinson Jeffers to bring out the implications of this view for lived experience, while Wynn considers the relevance of concepts of eternity for an account of the nature of the well-lived life, with reference to the experience of bereavement. Finally, Ryan Byerly’s paper examines how God concepts can provide a focus for spiritual practice, here drawing on empirical sources to support the claim that a God concept, when

embedded in the right practice, can be spiritually transformative, even in the absence of any belief that the concept tracks the metaphysical facts.¹

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