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GOD AND EPISTEMIC AUTHORITY

PRELIMINARIES ABOUT GOD

Some humans fabricate gods, and sometimes they do this in ways that reflect their own imperfect traits. Some humans, in other words, make gods in their own defective image. Perhaps they do this to give some objectivity or endurance to their intentions and desires. In any case, we see a related kind of fabrication in the area of the required evidence for God's reality. Some people have a bias in favor of some kinds of evidence, and infer that God would need to supply to humans evidence in keeping with their favored evidence. So, for instance, if I favor evidence shared by humans, I might hypothesize that God must provide evidence of God's reality that is shared by humans. In addition, if I favor evidence that is presentable to others, say by an argument, I might require that God supply evidence of divine reality that I can present to others, perhaps by an argument.

Just as fabricating gods can be, and often is, misguided, so also our ascribing our favored evidential requirements to God can be, and often is, misguided. It is not obvious, or even plausible, that God would need to conform to our favored evidential requirements. God may have purposes in supplying evidence of divine reality that differ from our purposes in gathering and using evidence. As a result, there may be an epistemic gap and even an epistemic conflict between God and humans. That is, God may favor a kind of self-revelation and evidence that does not fit with our preferred evidence for God's reality. In that case, God has the epistemic authority and humans do not, because God properly may decide what kind of evidence for divine reality is available. Humans will need to defer, then, even if many philosophers fail even to consider this important lesson. We shall see that due attention to what would be God's epistemic authority can benefit an epistemology of human knowledge of God.

Human inquirers about God often have much to say about their expectations for God (especially regarding suffering and evil), but they often neglect what would be God's expectations for human inquirers. This neglect hinders fruitful inquiry about God, because it omits what would be God's distinctive contribution to the inquiry, if God exists. In particular, it leaves humans with an inadequate conception of what would be the relevant evidence from God in the inquiry. As a result, one easily can overlook salient evidence from God that is available to humans but not (yet) acknowledged or appropriated by them.¹

In demanding that God meet our favored standards for evidence, we risk a kind of *epistemic idolatry*. We then make any standards God would have for evidence

¹ For a development of this position, see Paul K. Moser, *The Severity of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

subsidiary to ours. This would be to get things backward in the cognitive domain. God's standards for giving evidence of God's reality would merit priority over our preferred standards, because God, having perfect knowledge, would be in a position of (rightful) authority over us. Many cases against God's reality depend on a kind of epistemic idolatry. We shall illustrate this, after clarifying some expectations we should have for God. Without these expectations, we would lack the boundaries needed to inquire responsibly about God.

A God worthy of worship would be morally perfect and hence would seek a special kind of human knowledge of God: *curative knowledge* that goes beyond knowledge that God exists. Such curative knowledge would include human reconciliation to God to some degree, and therefore would be redemptive, or salvific, for humans to some extent. This knowledge would figure in God's aim to remove shame, distrust, hate, and selfish fear among humans in relation to God. It therefore would contribute to the reduction of experiential, psychological, and existential distance between humans and God. In addition, it would require that humans self-identify with God in curative ways toward others. The latter requirement is often neglected among writers on human knowledge of God.

If God would aim to cure self-exalting human pride, God would need to be subtle and elusive in divine self-revelation, in order to avoid encouraging human pride.² Self-exalting pride about having evidence for God's reality can obstruct others from God's curative endeavor, because it can turn people away from considering God as a truly good reality. So, a curative God would offer evidence of divine reality that does not encourage human pride and perhaps even challenges it. God's aim would be to cure such a "sickness," and the evidence of God's reality would follow suit. Blaise Pascal suggested as much in his *Pensées*,³ but the idea generally has been lost on philosophers and other inquirers. It is especially neglected in natural theology where allegedly transparent arguments for God's reality are offered as if God would be pleased with mere belief that God exists. A God worthy of worship, however, would be after something more profound in humans than mere belief that God exists: something curative and transformative in human character. Any quick and easy route to such mere belief could interfere with what God primarily seeks, owing to people coming to hold the false belief that they have "arrived" at pleasing God.

Can humans probe the question of an elusive God's existence in a manner that yields an evidentially adequate answer? The English term "probe" comes from the Latin term "*probare*," which means "to test" or "to prove." In English, we use the term to mean, among other things, (a) to test, examine, or investigate or (b) to prove, verify, or justify. Not all people share a single standard of evidential adequacy, of course, but we can proceed with the rough idea of salient evidence had by a person (but not necessarily by all persons) that is undefeated by opposing evidence. My having salient evidence does not require everyone else's having it too, as the evidence for my toothache, for instance, illustrates. Evidence is a truth indicator for a person, and it can be fallible, subject to defeat by other evidence, and variable among persons. So, a person's evidence for God's reality need not be shared by other people.

² See Paul K. Moser, *The Elusive God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

³ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (1669), trans. A.J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin, 1995).

Talk of “probing God” can be ambiguous, because “probing” can be a verb or an adjective. One question, then, concerns who would do the initial probing: a human or God? Of course, both could probe, but one or the other would initiate the process. In particular, God could prompt humans to probe God as a result of God’s probing them. Even if God probes first in human lives, God would seek mutual probing for the good of humans. In their sincere probing of God, humans would become sensitive to some important features of God and perhaps even cooperate with God in various curative endeavors. Accordingly, a number of Biblical writers enjoin humans to “seek” God and God’s kingdom and to “taste and see” what God is like (see Mt. 6:33, Ps. 34:8). This suggests that probing with the mind does not exhaust human probing of God. One could probe with one’s will, too, or with what biblical writers call “the heart.” Similarly, one could probe with obedient action toward God.

God’s probing of humans could include God’s “proving” God’s own reality to humans, perhaps by a direct self-manifestation to humans. (The word “proving” is potentially misleading here, because its main well-defined use occurs in logic and mathematics, and not in matters about God.) We have a possible wrinkle, however, if God has certain curative purposes toward humans. Suppose that God wants people not merely to believe that God exists, but to yield to God in faithful obedience, for their own benefit. In that case, the probing of God or by God could depend on some considerations regarding the volitional state of a person, particularly that person’s *willingness* to yield to God. God may withhold divine probing, then, if a person is ill-prepared for such probing or unwilling to take it seriously. One’s taking it “seriously” would include one’s being willing to yield to God as God upon one’s acquiring adequate evidence for divine reality and goodness. This kind of seriousness would go beyond one’s being a mere spectator regarding the question of God’s reality. It would give one a lived-engagement, and not just speculation, regarding that question.

A curative God would invite a question about the priority and even singularity of value, particularly the value God expects to be primary for humans. Remarkably, Jesus suggested that only “one thing” is necessary for humans (Lk. 10:38–42), and the apostle Paul offered a similar view (Phil. 3:7–8). The “one thing,” in keeping with the “first” commandment prescribed by Jesus (Mk. 12:28–30), concerns a person’s supreme love toward God, in contrast with a person’s many lesser loves. A person’s supreme love is that person’s primary love; it does not depend on, or owe its reality to, the person’s other, lesser loves. On the contrary, the lesser loves should fit in with the supreme love, for the sake of coherence in what one loves. Otherwise, lesser loves can steal the place of what should be one’s primary love.

When God is one’s supreme love, such love should be “wholehearted,” that is, pure or unmitigated relative to any conflicting loves.⁴ This kind of wholehearted love allows for lesser loves, such as love toward other humans, but it does not allow for loves that detract from one’s love toward God. In seeking God’s kingdom “first,” one makes it part of one’s supreme love, and, according to

⁴ See Søren Kierkegaard, “Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing” (1947) in *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, trans. H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 24-154.

Matthew's Jesus, God's kingdom focuses on God's "will." As his prayer goes: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done." So, God's will would have priority in one's supreme love for God. If we disagree with Jesus here, we may find God to be not curative, but grudging, untrustworthy, and unworthy of worship. We may focus on a lesser love that, when frustrated, appears to make God less than good. Such a misplaced focus figures in many interpretations of the problem of evil regarding God.

To be worthy of worship, God would have to aim to be corrective and thus curative in probing toward humans. From the standpoint of moral perfection and hence of worthiness of worship, God would be defective if God lacked a curative aim toward humans. It would not be enough, however, for God to promote specific human beliefs about God, because such beliefs are compatible with a harmful, anti-God moral character, life, and practice. God would need to care about, and to seek to correct where needed, one's motivational attitudes, such as desires and intentions, and one's actions that accompany belief that God exists.

Beliefs do matter, but they do not exhaust a human's moral standing, particularly relative to a God worthy of worship. Mature humans are moral agents and decision-makers, and not just bearers of belief. In addition, divine probing of humans would not be coercive of human decisions regarding God, pro or con. Such coercion would extinguish genuine human agency in deciding about God, and hence would undermine interpersonal relations between God and humans. Instead, God would seek human cooperation with God that includes freely willed fellowship with God. This God would be very different, then, from the god of deism, who would be aloof, casual, and perhaps even inactive in this area.

We should acknowledge a kind of reciprocity or mutuality in the curative process in question. It would not be enough for a curative God to show up and announce a cure on offer, even if some critics of theistic belief seem to assume otherwise. We get a hint from the Gospel of Mark: "[Jesus] could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief" (Mk. 6:5-6, NRSV; cf. Mt. 13:58). The suggestion is that a curative process from God would seek a positive human response for its realization. Arguably, the unavailability of such a human response can block the work of a curative God. We may think of this as a kind of mutuality or reciprocity that would be sought by a curative God. It is personal interaction that would be initiated by God but actively received by a human. The active reception would include the kind of positive response that various Biblical writers call "faith in God." The widespread neglect of this mutuality obscures the character of a curative God and the conditions for grounded faith in such a God.

According to *argumentism* about God, one's knowledge of God's existence requires one's having an argument for God's existence.⁵ Many inquirers about God take this view for granted. It is doubtful, however, that a curative God would self-reveal in accordance with argumentism. One problem is that arguments do not tend either to be curative or to contribute to what is curative in the way God would be. In addition, arguments tend to lead human attention

⁵ See Paul K. Moser, "God without Argument," in *Is Faith in God Reasonable?*, ed. Corey Miller and Paul Gould (London: Routledge, 2014), 69-83.

away from *direct* interaction with God, but a curative God would seek human benefit in such interaction. In particular, God would seek a direct I-Thou relationship between a human and God, but an argument would fall short of this and perhaps even interfere with it. Accordingly, a curative God would not be a mere explanatory postulate for humans, owing to direct divine interventions in human experience. A key lesson is that a curative God would be self-authenticating toward receptive humans in a distinctive way that calls for human cooperation.⁶

OBJECTIONS

Scott Aikin holds that God would need to provide evidence for God's reality in ways different from what we actually observe.⁷ He asks: "How can a God who hides or remains cloaked in mystery also be a good, just, or loving God? How could such a God be worthy of worship?" His answer: "It seems that God failing to be at least some of these things (or failing to be at all) is the best explanation." It would be a big task, however, to show that God's non-existence would be "the best explanation" here, because we would need to consider all of the possible explanations and find that an atheist explanation is "the best." It seems doubtful upon reflection that our coverage is actually that broad, because we tend to be limited in the explanations we anticipate. As a result, it would be more cautious to talk of "the best *available* explanation," where we limit our claim to the explanations available to us. In that case, however, we will have to face an obvious question: best available explanation *for whom*? You may have evidence that I lack, and therefore what is a best available explanation for you may not be for me. Aikin does not acknowledge the importance of this crucial point about explanatory and hence epistemic relativity. Even so, it counts against his argument.

Aikin summarizes his atheist argument as follows:

If we know God, we must know He exists. If we know God exists, then we won't have uncertainty. We are uncertain of God's existence – that's what the continued debate phenomenon [regarding God's existence] is. The best explanation for this is that God doesn't exist – were He to exist, you might say, He'd be easier to find and know for those who search for Him. It's a special version of the problem of evil, really, and the continued debate phenomenon [regarding God's existence] is the data. And so the explanation for continued debate is God's non-existence.

Aikin's comments about uncertainty are confusing at best. Knowing that *P* does not entail certainty that *P*; instead, knowing that *P* consists of justified true belief plus a fourth condition to avoid the Gettier problem. So, knowledge of God's existence need not remove uncertainty about God. It is a mistake, then, for Aikin to claim the following: "The challenge to the theist, then, is squaring the uncertainty and what seems a clear bad for humans from a theological perspective with God's goodness, love, and capacity."

⁶ See, Moser, *The Severity of God*.

⁷ Scott F. Aikin, "God and Argument," *Journal of Cultural and Religious Theory* (2015).

A God seeking human transformation and redemption could make use of human uncertainty in various good ways. Uncertainty could encourage humans to avoid the arrogant assumption that they have reached perfection in knowing God and therefore need no further transformation toward God's moral character. It also could encourage humans who have evidence of God's reality not to become arrogant toward others who lack such evidence. So, we should not assume uncritically that God would want humans to have certainty regarding God's reality. Otherwise, we risk falling into the kind of epistemic idolatry noted previously, and that would be a denial of God's epistemic authority.

Aikin takes exception to my view that some people have experiences that are evidence of God's reality, as follows:

The trouble is that there is wide disagreement about and variance in religious experience. There are those who (a) try to have religious experiences and subject themselves to all the rigors of religious ritual and abasement before the divine but never feel the presence of god, (b) those who have religious experiences but hold the experiences are non-theistic, (c) those who have religious experiences but hold that the god they reveal is significantly different from others, and (d) those who hold that the experiences have all the same content as the Moser-style-redeeming religious experiences, but who hold also that these experiences are hallucinatory, even in the midst of having them. These defeaters *come to light* in argumentative contexts, for sure, and we see why, under these conditions that arguments from religious experience are very weak testimonial arguments.

Aikin refers to what people "hold" regarding alleged religious experiences, and then adds that "these defeaters come to light in argumentative contexts."

Aikin's position rests on a serious mistake, because it misrepresents what defeaters are. One's *merely* holding or believing something does not constitute or entail a defeater, because defeaters must be epistemically significant in a manner that mere beliefs are not. A belief can be epistemically *insignificant* owing to its being altogether ungrounded or unjustified; it can be a product of, and supported by, mere wishful thinking. Accordingly, mere disagreement in beliefs does not yield epistemic defeaters. Otherwise, epistemically grounded beliefs could be undermined by something that is not epistemically significant at all; that, however, would be an untenable position. As for people who "try to have religious experiences ... but never feel the presence of god," humans should expect God to intervene when *God* deems this appropriate. It would be presumptuous for human to suppose that they can dictate or control the times of God's interventions.

Aikin continues his line of objection, as follows: "The trouble, it is clear, is that one must be able to explain why one's experience is veridical and all the other competing experiences are not. Appealing to the facts that one has the experience, is transformed by it, or feels it deeply is insufficient, since those features do not distinguish these experiences from their competitors in the relevant epistemic fashion." The key question now is: "must be able to explain..." *for what?* For first-order justified belief or knowledge that God exists?

The proposed explanatory requirement definitely does not hold for such justified belief or knowledge. Such a requirement, in that case, would confuse the *having* of justification or knowledge with the *explaining* of one's having justification or knowledge. Explaining why one's experience is veridical is not required by first-order justification or knowledge, even if it is required by one's explaining why one has justification or knowledge. So, Aikin risks a kind of epistemic level-confusion here. As a result, his argument against belief supported by religious experience is unconvincing.

Aikin seeks a disanalogy between mundane perceptual experience and religious experience, as follows:

We have reason to hold perceptual experience to have law-like conditions for veridicality because we have a rough idea of how it occurs, what the proper conditions for the experience are, and so on. Red apples are best seen in good lighting at a medium distance; movies require low lighting and one should be further back, and so on. Because we have no independent idea of their objects or systematic connection between religious experiences and its veridicality, religious experience has none of this character.... God may show up because of our obedience to and abasement before him, yet sometimes even our devotion and utmost obsequiousness aren't enough.

It is unclear how we are to understand "an independent idea of their objects" in this connection. Even in the case of mundane perceptual objects, we arguably lack such an "independent idea." We do not have the opportunity to leave aside our experience of red apples to identify what they are really like. Wherever we go, our sensory perceptual resources go with us. So, Aikin's talk of an "independent idea" is unclear and dubious at best.

Aikin continues his misgivings about religious experience as follows:

God speaks... but is it an auditory impression? God is present... but is He ... right next to me?... The more one says about religious experience, the more it sounds like the phenomenology isn't of a first-order experience, but of a cognitive phenomenology. That is, religious experience is more the phenomenology of what it is like to *believe that* there is a present, loving redeeming God. *Religious experience, when properly described, is more the experience of holding one's religious beliefs....* If that's the case, then, the experience provides no justification for religious belief. It is merely its reiteration.

The objection proposes that religious experience, contrary to a widespread view, is not first-order experience but is instead "more the experience of holding one's religious beliefs." The objection, however, ends up with a stronger claim, given its allegation that religious experience is "merely [the] reiteration" of religious belief.

Aikin's objection is puzzling at best. If religious experience is "merely [the] reiteration" of religious belief, then it has no qualities different from those in

reiterating a religious belief. Religious experience then amounts to my affirming that I hold a religious belief of some sort. There is then no quality of my experience that could prompt me to withhold judgment on what the experience actually is or involves. So, I could not be agnostic (in neither believing nor disbelieving) regarding my religious experience that seems to be of God. Many people, however, are agnostic about their religious experiences that seem to be of God. So, the view at hand is false, because we cannot reduce religious experience to mere affirmation that one holds a particular religious belief. One can have a religious experience but have no religious beliefs, including belief that one holds a particular religious belief. Aikin seems to contradict his own view in his previous acknowledgment of people who “try to have religious experiences ... but never feel the presence of god.” Clearly, these people are not just trying to affirm that they have a belief regarding God; they seek a religious experience. So, Aikin’s approach to religious experience fails.

Aikin favors ongoing debate about the existence of God. He remarks: “I believe the continued debate phenomenon [regarding God’s existence] is an acceptable state of affairs, ... because I believe it is more evidence (or meta-evidence) for the view that I not only believe is right, but I hope is right.” As we have noted, atheism is the view that Aikin believes is right, and now we learn that he hopes that atheism is right. His hope is puzzling, however, even if it echoes Thomas Nagel’s avowed hope that God does not exist.⁸ Even if one believes that God does not exist, we have to wonder why one would hope that a perfectly loving God does not exist. Such a God could bring significant good to humans, good that otherwise would not be available to humans. For instance, God could guarantee that humans would be able to survive death and thereby avoid the loss of value from their death. It is puzzling that one would hope that God does not exist and therefore that God does not save people from the loss of value from their death. This seems to be a misguided hope, as the final section illustrates.

COMMUNION AND AGAPĒ

What if God seeks, above all, to be with humans in communion of a curative sort, such as that exemplified by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane? In that case, much will need to change in human inquiry about God, because inquiry itself will need to become curative. The rough idea is that while humans inquire about God, they may need to open themselves to inquiry from God, including God’s expectations for them. In that case, they themselves would become an object of divine inquiry and assessment, relative to their being (or not being) suitably motivated inquirers about God. A curative God would care not just about questions raised by humans, but also about the motives for the questions and the intentions and hopes for having answers. In this regard, inquiry about God would become morally robust, relative to the standard of divine goodness.⁹

The English term “communion” stems from the classical Latin words “*communio*” and “*communio*.” The *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed. includes the following terms in its definition: mutual participation, possession of common qualities, union, community, fellowship, mutual association, intimate

⁸ See Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁹ See Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination* (1851), trans. H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 25-51.

engagement of a spiritual nature. Perhaps the phrase “intimate cooperative engagement of a spiritual nature” best captures a prominent Biblical notion of communion with God, if we understand this engagement to include a sharing of volitions and affections between God and a human.

In communion with God, a sharing of mere ideas or thoughts will fall short, because it will omit the sharing of such motivational factors as volitions (from the will) and affections (from feelings or emotions). The latter factors are crucial in communion with God owing to their central role in divine love (*agapē*), the basis for communion that a perfectly loving God would seek. Such a God would aim to motivate people to act out of love for others, and this would take people beyond reflection. One cannot have *agapē* for others without suitable volitions and affections toward others. If God would be worthy of worship and hence morally perfect, as my understanding of the title “God” implies, then God would be inherently loving toward all people, even toward God’s enemies. In that case, we should expect communion with God to promote divine love for others in a curative manner.

If God is morally perfect and has ultimate authority over all other persons, we should acknowledge God’s volitions and affections to be authoritative over human volitions and affections. We then should regard God’s volitions and affections to be the standard for humans, and thus humans should try to have their volitions and affections brought into conformity with God’s. So, if God unselfishly loves God’s enemies, as required for moral perfection, then humans should follow suit, in volitions and affections. Perhaps, however, humans lack the resources to follow suit on their own; maybe they need divine help, including divine power. In that case, they may need to seek and to ask to receive divine help. Actively seeking God, then, may be crucial to the curative process that brings humans into conformity with God’s volitions and affections.

Arguably, the curative process calls for human love, communion, and seeking toward God, because a certain kind of misplaced love needs to be cured in humans. In this perspective, love, communion, and seeking toward God would contribute to the cure in an irreplaceable way. Accordingly, John’s Gospel mentions a certain “crisis” (*krisis*) faced by God and humans, namely: “people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil” (Jn. 3:19). This may seem to be an unduly harsh assessment of people, at least in the eyes of many. It becomes plausible, however, if it intends to capture the reality of human self-centeredness, including selfishness, of various sorts that interfere with unselfish love toward others. If the curative process aims to heal such self-centeredness, then it must work at the level of what people love and seek, and it must relate people, via communion, to one who can empower their cooperatively overcoming their self-centeredness. Perhaps, in that case, humans tend to trust too much in themselves, and need to trust sincerely in one who can empower unselfish love in them toward others.

In the scenario under consideration, God and humans share a significant problem, namely: How can unselfish love toward others become freely located in, and commonly practiced by, humans who tend to be self-centered? Perhaps humans will freely bear and commonly practice such love only as they themselves directly experience and receive it. If so, one may argue that in this world humans will freely bear and commonly practice unselfish love only via

faith and hope in God, because such faith and such hope are the only means to receive God's unselfish love directly.

The love generated just by humans will fall short of the demanding love that would be expected and supplied by a perfectly loving God. The latter love can involve self-giving to the extent of death for others, and is, in many ways, more demanding than what is ordinarily called 'human love'. For instance, a morally perfect God would call for loving one's enemies in an unselfish manner, but this kind of loving is very rare among human conceptions of love without a perfectly loving God. Merely human love, then, seems inferior to the morally perfect love that would be characteristic of a God worthy of worship. In any case, divine love would not be coercive or mechanical toward a human, but would be freely relational, and it could be appropriated by humans in imperfect ways. Even when humans receive divine love via faith and hope in God, they can taint the process with their selfishness to some extent.

A curative God would want humans to receive and to practice unselfish love via direct reliance on its perfect source, God. Otherwise, a counterfeit, misplaced love would be a serious, ever-present threat to humans. A curative God would want the reliance in question to include trust and hope in God, because these are effective direct avenues to receive divine love without inflating human self-trust or pride in human accomplishments. In addition, a curative God would want people to practice, and not just to reflect on, the love received from God for the sake of others, including their enemies. So, the curative love under consideration would not be held selfishly if one cooperates fully with God's perfect will.

Human seeking of God would be active, and not be merely reflective, intellectual, or emotional. It would require one to exercise one's will in actions of various sorts, including the action of gathering available evidence regarding God. It also would require one's yielding oneself to God's will as one receives salient evidence of God's will. Such yielding is an intentional action, and cannot be reduced to mere reflection or emotion. Such actions figure in what we may call "active foundations for faith in God." This suggests a new emphasis about faith in God and its foundations: an emphasis on responsive, and responsible, intentional action rather than on something merely reflective or emotional. This emphasis should lead one toward God's epistemic authority and away from epistemic idolatry.

CONCLUSION

The curative God in question would be uniquely valuable to humans, if only because this God would promote the kind of unselfish love needed for resilient human community. In addition, this God would seek a kind of love among humans that can overcome human death, given that lasting unselfish love would be best for humans. It is puzzling, then, why anyone would hope that this God does not exist. Having called into question Aikin's case for atheism, we now can conclude with serious misgivings about any human's hope that God does not exist. The epistemic authority of God would offer no ground for that misplaced hope, and would instead recommend hope that we humans can receive the needed benefits from God.

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