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Lydia McGrew interviews Joshua Rasmussen.

Your book is titled *How Reason Can Lead to God: A Philosopher's Bridge to Faith*. Are non-philosophers as well as philosophers part of your intended audience?

**Yes, both. I want this book to touch—and even transform—everyone who seeks truth about God. As I wrote each page, I imagined different characters stepping onto a bridge. Some characters come to the bridge as young seekers, while others are seasoned professionals. I call this bridge, “the bridge of reason.”**

**No expertise is required to explore the bridge. Every step is composed of common experience and universal principles of reason. I use plain terms. No technical jargon. No appeals to authority. Every step is about something you can test for yourself.**

**Yet, the bridge goes past the edges of my field. Philosophers will recognize pieces that add to current conversations. To help readers who wish to go deeper, I've included “Going Deeper” sections that take the ideas a step further.**

**I've also included a special argument at the end. I propose a new way to deduce God's existence from God's nature. This argument is one example of what we can see on the *other side* of the bridge. I anticipate professionals and laypersons alike could also find this piece interesting and inspiring.**

Is there one “big picture” proposition that you would like someone who is not a philosophical specialist who reads this book to take away from it?

***That reason can reveal God.* Many people think there is a conflict between reason and God. They fear reason, or they flee God. I want people to see there is nothing to fear. By the light of reason, you can discover that reason is a majestic part of the most majestic being. True reason is God's light within your mind. Shine reason on anything, and you can see more about anything. Shine reason on God, and you can discover the depths and riches of God's nature. God is greater than we all imagined.**

Do you think that pastors would find it useful to have these sorts of arguments in their toolkit?

**For sure. Even more important than the arguments is the *strategy*. The book organizes major arguments for God into a bridge, with steps. Each step reveals something about God. Pastors can select any step that is most relevant to a particular conversation. Every piece of the bridge is an invitation for conversation and construction.**

**You can think of each step as foundational to a *kind* of argument for an aspect of God. For example, the chapter, *Foundation of Mind*, is about arguments for God's mind. This chapter provides ground materials for a variety of presentations. Pastors can bring their own life experiences to translate the materials into their own presentation.**

**I wish to add that I see this book as helping ministry leaders increase their reach. Many non-Christians don't feel understood. So how can we reach them? This book grows out of friendships and experiences with skeptics and former church-goers. I see their need, and I understand their values. I created this book with them specifically in mind. Every line in this book treats my skeptical friends with honor, because I want them to feel understood and appreciated. Many of them read pre-prints of this book, and they all expressed gratitude for the book and a feeling of encouragement. I believe this book can help ministry leaders reach their skeptical neighbors, friends, and the silent skeptics in the pew.**

Are there people whom you have known or interacted with who have moved from being atheists or agnostics to being theists on the basis of an argument like the one that you give here? Can you tell us about some of those instances?

**I love this question, because it gets at the transformational power of arguments delivered with love. I have many, many stories of people who moved from skeptic to believer on the basis of the arguments in this book. First, there's *me*. In the book, I share my own story of descending into doubt and then discovering arguments that transformed my thinking. Since then, I've had the opportunity to see many people come to believe in God after discussing these arguments with me or finding my work.**

**I'll share one story that typifies many. A few years ago, I received an e-mail from someone who said he didn't believe in God but was struggling to better understand an argument from cause and effect. My feeling right away was that he was sincere in his search and that it was only a matter of time for him to come to see that God exists. We corresponded for about a year, as I considered and addressed his questions. In each correspondence, I never once *treated* him as a skeptic. I only thought of him as a person who would love to know that God exists, if reason allows. Then one day, I received a special e-mail where he thanked me for helping him come to believe in God. I was delighted but not surprised.**

**In my experience, arguments help seekers see their own internal power to see. Once seekers feel free, respected, and encouraged, sight of God can often come easily.**

In your last couple of chapters you talk quite a bit about "kingly creatures," which is your term for creatures with rationality and free will who are able to have real causal influence in the world. This comes up first in response to the Problem of Evil. How do you see this notion of "kingly creatures" as producing a practical motivation for people to follow the argument of your book and to seek to know if there is a God?

**This question gets at the central point of the book. I don't want to merely tickle someone's mind. I want readers to see—*feel*—the value of their lives. We are kingly creatures in a special world. The purpose of the bridge of reason is to help people see the roots of their own eternal worth. Often academic books get bogged down in abstract moves, and it is easy to lose sight of the bigger picture. I want readers to come away feeling excited. The foundation of the world is greater than we have understood, and so is the significance of our lives. Seeing the greatness of the foundation of the world helps you see the value of your own life.**

What past philosophers and theologians and their arguments for the existence of God and his properties most strongly influenced your work here? How do you see your work in this book as going beyond or building on their work?

**When I was in high school, Norman Geisler's work was my gateway into the larger field of philosophy. Then I discovered materials ranging from Aristotle to contemporary philosophers, like Robert Koons and Alexander Pruss. These philosophers laid the groundwork for thinking deeply about *cause* and *effect*. Over the last fifteen years, I've sought to tighten and clarify connections between the *uncaused* and a *supreme* cause.**

**In this book, I provide a new pathway to an uncaused Cause (what I call "foundation"). When I was in graduate school, I noticed that many arguments for God were about the implications of *being uncaused*. By the light of these arguments, the uncaused could only be God. But why think anything is uncaused? To answer this question, philosophers have traditionally appealed to a grand principle of causation or explanation. But is that the only way? Then I saw another path to the uncaused. All we need is pure logic: we can show that reality *in total* is uncaused, since nothing could cause all of reality. We're in. From here, we see the puzzle that unlocks the whole argument of my book. The puzzle is about how *any* reality—of any size or shape—could be uncaused. This puzzle takes us into classic arguments by another door.**

**One more novelty is my argument from *possible* causes. I show how the mere logical *possibility* of causes of limited, contingent things can take us to an unlimited, non-contingent (and supreme) foundation.**

You refer to "the foundation" much more than to "God" in this book. In fact, even though your book is called *How Reason Can Lead to God*, you don't refer to the entity you are discussing as "God" until Chapter 11, as far as I can tell. Was that terminological decision deliberate, and if so, what function does it play in the book?

**Very nice observation! Yes, this terminology was intentional. I use other words for "God" until every step in the argument is in place. My reason is that I want to invite readers on a fresh inquiry. Everyone has a certain impression of the meaning of "God," and this impression can present obstacles to discovering a *real* God.**

**On some level, we all have limiting conceptions of God. Sometimes these conceptions turn away skeptics from taking arguments for God seriously. Rather than begin with any pre-conceptions, I simply begin with reason. Reason reveals characteristics of the foundation of reality. Once the full picture is in place, I use the term “God” to describe the reality revealed by reason. This reality, it turns out, is the most awesome God imaginable.**

Sometimes we hear a distinction between God as “a person” and God as “personal.” This comes up especially in presentations of classical theism, where it will be said that God is personal but is not “a person” or even “a being.” Would you agree with that distinction between “personal” and “a person”? Would you agree that God is personal? How does the concept of God as personal (as opposed to, say, a Force or impersonal foundation) inform your writing and reasoning in the book?

**Yes, I would say that God is more than a mere person. When we think of individual persons, we typically think of beings who have particular boundaries, like shape or size. These boundaries are too arbitrary to be ultimate. God, by contrast, is ultimate. God cannot be just another person among the many because God is the foundation for all persons and all possible personalities. Without God, no persons are possible. It is more helpful, then, to think of personhood as a bedrock feature of reality. Personhood infuses the foundation. Thus, God is personal.**

**Seeing God as personal is very inspiring. Personhood includes reason, emotion, and agent powers. So, if the foundation is personal, then reason, emotion, and agent powers are part of the foundation of everything. That gives our lives context. It provides a reason for great hope. It also gives me excitement as an author. For it gives my writing a higher purpose: to help people see their value in a greater light. If the foundation is perfect and personal, then there is every reason to think that God loves us, and created us for everlasting purposes and adventures. You can’t get that from impersonal forces.**

At one point you say that the perfection of the foundation successfully predicts every dimension of our world (p. 148). In your analysis, this includes materiality. Do you intend to maintain that the perfection of God *predicts* that God would create a mind-independent material world? Even if God wanted to make “kingly creatures” and a world in which they interact, couldn’t he have created spiritual beings who interact by some kind of psychic laws? A more moderate claim would be that the perfection of the foundation successfully *explains* every dimension of our world as we in fact find it, but that is not quite the same thing. Would you say that that formulation is not as strong as what you want to argue?

**I want to say something bold—so bold you’ll have to keep it secret. On one level, sure, we can be modest and leave open the strength of the prediction. The argument of the book doesn’t depend on what I am about to share. But since you asked, I’ll tell what I honestly think.**

**I think God’s perfect abundance predicts an overflow of creation, including the creation of complex forms, which we call “material.” You mentioned a *mind-independent* world. I**

**think nothing is purely mind-independent. A rock is no more mind-independent than your own thoughts. The visible springs from the invisible intentions and powers of a mind. Every motion of every form follows laws, which are themselves *thought-like* structures in God's mind. I think nothing happens without God, and nothing *could* happen. God is truly foundational to everything. And, God's perfection predicts every kind of good, including the beauty of a complex universe.**

How do you view your work in this book, which is an extended argument for transcendent theism, in relationship to Christianity and the Incarnation more specifically?

**This book provides a prelude for investigating God's specific works in history. I give a hint of the connection to Christianity in my discussion of the problem of evil. I tell a story of a world we could expect to unfold *if God exists*. I suggest that the greatest being would be interested in the greatest, true story of love and adventure. In this story, we can expect the greatest Character—i.e., God—to enter the scene and display a sacrifice of love. Since Christianity describes precisely such an event, my argument for God implicitly points readers to have a new look at this central event in human history.**

**My argument also uncovers attributes of God that independently match the God revealed in Christ. Someone who reads my book may be then inspired to pick up a book by someone who argues from history for the resurrection of Jesus.**

How do you view the divine characteristic of simplicity (which you discuss quite a bit) as related to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity?

**I see simplicity in God's *root* feature: absolute perfection. This feature sets God apart from all lesser deities by shaving off the complexity of arbitrary boundaries, configurations, wrinkles, or gaps at the root of reality. Perfection is not a composite of features. Instead, perfection *underlies* other features, including perfect knowledge, power, and goodness.**

**The simplicity of perfection doesn't shave off the Trinity. In fact, Oxford philosopher Richard Swinburne has argued that perfection *predicts* a triune relationship, since the highest quality of love requires at least three participants. Whether his argument is sound or not, my thought is that perfection leaves open the possibility of distinctions within God, so long these distinctions are not arbitrary limitations that detract from God's perfection.**

Do you ever find that someone drawn to theism by these kinds of arguments gets "hung up" at what one might call a deistical stage, unable to accept that this perfect being would perform miracles in the world or become incarnate, as Christianity says that God has done?

**In my experience, it is more often the other direction. People get hung up on claims of divine interaction because they are skeptical that any being underlies the laws of our universe.**

**But maybe even those stuck in a deistical stage, as you put it, are thinking of laws as maintaining existence *independently of God*. In that case, my arguments can help them, too. The arguments of this book go beyond the mere Deistic God. They reveal a God who underlies all things, including all laws and all events. Rather than get stuck, I think the arguments can help people get unstuck. They can help people see the historical arguments for God's works under a new light.**

**In fact, I have stories of people who began to take seriously arguments for Christianity after encountering the strength of theistic arguments. In one case, someone told me that after his friend moved away from atheism by an argument for God, he then sent his friend to some excellent work by the McGrews on the resurrection. A team effort!**

Most of your arguments in *How Reason Can Lead to God* are deductive arguments of pure reason from obvious things, such as the fact that there is something rather than nothing, the existence of our own minds, etc. (One exception is that it seems that you are offering a partially probabilistic answer to the evidential problem of evil.) In general, what do you think of non-deductive arguments for the existence and/or activity of God?

**Both forms have value. The reason I used deductive forms is to show the power of reason to uncover unbroken lines to God.**

**However, we can also translate deductive arguments into a probabilistic case. For example, we could treat God's existence as a hypothesis, and then consider what the hypothesis successfully predicts. If a perfect God exists, that predicts the existence of perfect rules of reason, principles of value, and the resources to produce a universe with kingly creatures. These predictions match reality. We can then consider whether any other hypothesis better matches all the data. The arguments of the book provide tools for testing other hypotheses and seeing the advantages of theism.**

What else would you like readers to know about *How Reason Can Lead to God*?

**There are two ways to read this book. If you are a skeptic of God, you can read this book as an inquiry into the *existence* of God. If you already believe in God, you can read this book as an inquiry into the *nature* of God, as revealed by reason.**

**As I wrote the book, I often prayed, "God, help me bring you glory." Then I would write more. At the end, I found myself drawn to worship God in a way I had never done before. If there is a theme take away, it is this: God is greater than we all imagined.**