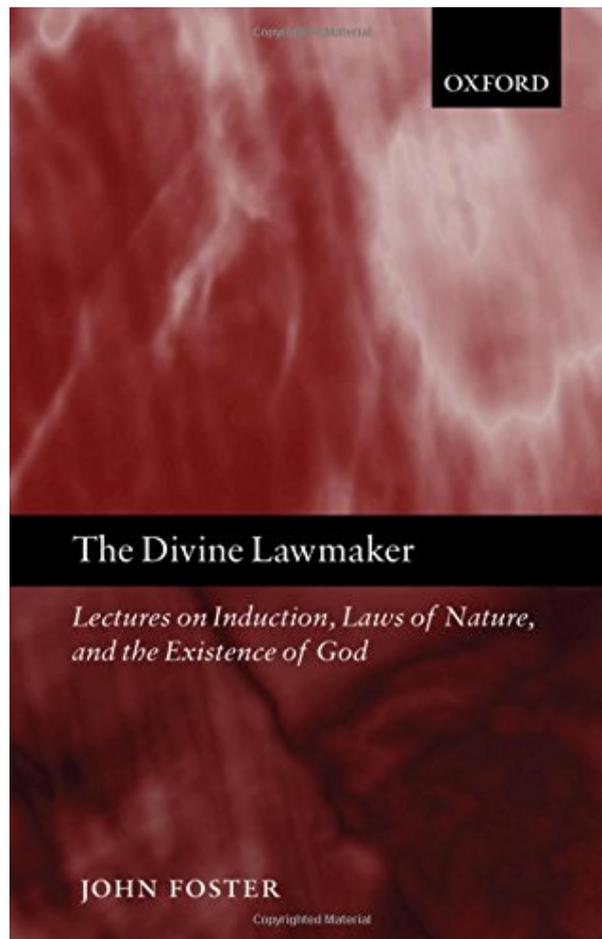
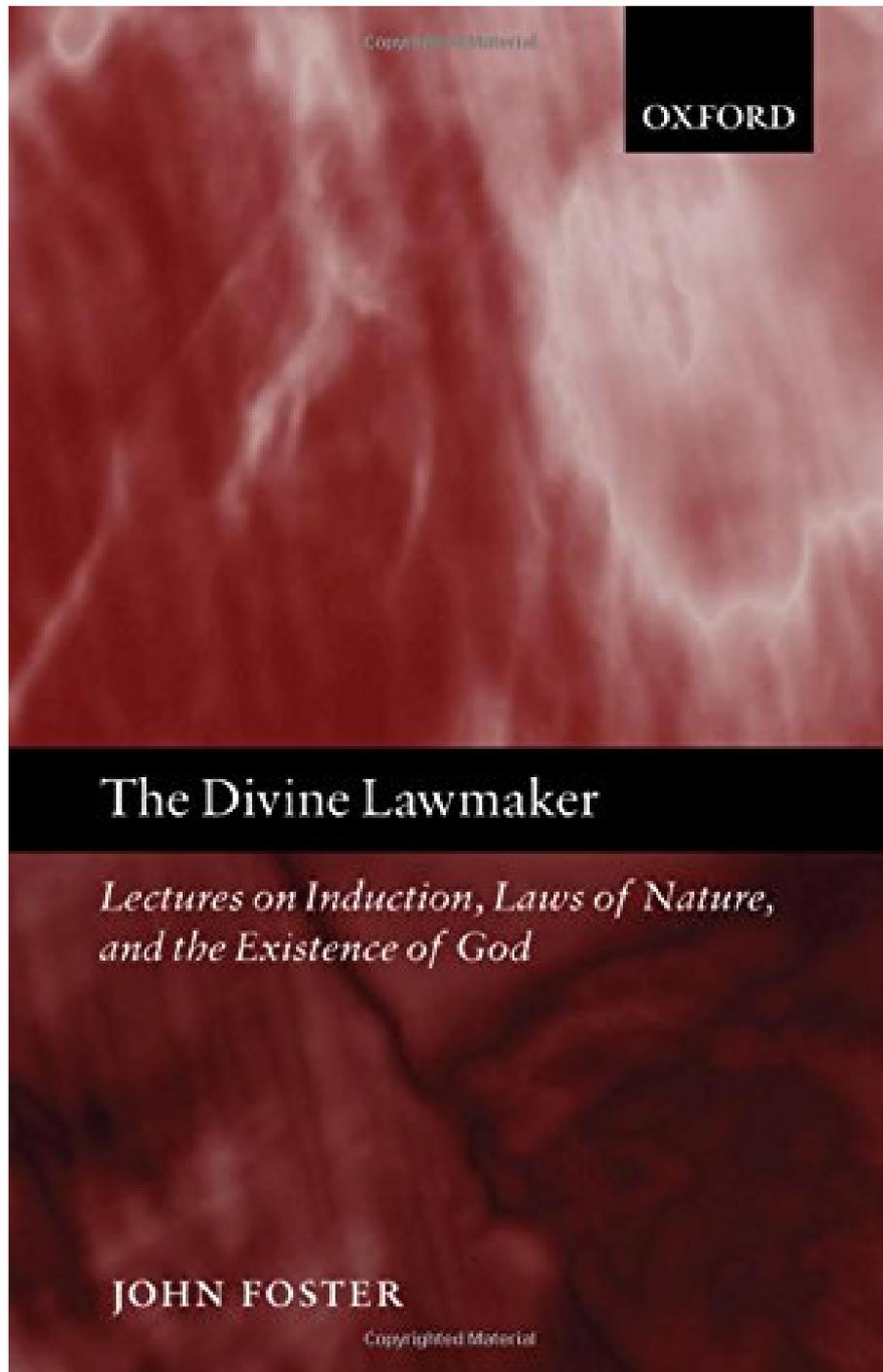


THE DIVINE LAWMAKER: LECTURES ON INDUCTION, LAWS OF NATURE, AND THE EXISTENCE OF GOD BY JOHN FOSTER



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Review

"John Foster...uses his philosophical background to analyze the question of the rationality of belief in God as a causal agent for nature's regularities...Foster is writing for the philosophically literate; The Divine Lawmaker will appeal to the specialist and professional philosopher of science or religion..."--Science & Theology News

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John Foster presents a clear and powerful discussion of a range of topics relating to our understanding of the universe: induction, laws of nature, and the existence of God. He begins by developing a solution to the problem of induction - a solution that involves the postulation of laws of nature, as forms of natural necessity. He then offers a radically new account of the nature of such laws and the distinctive kind of necessity they involve. Finally, he uses this account as the basis for an argument for the existence of God as the creator of the laws and the universe they govern. The Divine Lawmaker is bold and original in its approach, and rich in argument.

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A Beautiful Book

By TiZ

Foster presents here a solution to the problem of induction and an argument for the existence of God. He

argues that the past regularities of nature are best explained by the existence of natural laws, and that these are in turn best understood as regularities causally imposed by God. The existence of such laws allows for rational inductive inferences.

Foster's development of the theistic hypothesis (his preference for a single omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good God) seems to borrow from Swinburne, but there are differences.

I worry that there is no non-circular justification for the criteria for hypothesis choice that Foster relies on; Hume's problem of induction may re-emerge for inference to the best explanation. But perhaps it is no problem that inference to the best explanation is a fundamental form of correct reasoning which cannot be justified in a non-circular way (along with deduction), and the problem may be that induction faces an additional problem such that it is not a fundamental form of correct reasoning. (This has been suggested to me by a couple of people, and note Foster at Lecture 2, V).

Foster covers some of the most interesting and important topics in philosophy, including the problem of induction, laws of nature and the existence of God. Very few people compare to Foster in clarity and grace of writing.

This book may (or may not) be difficult for beginners, but it is strongly recommended for anyone seriously interested in induction theory, laws of nature and philosophy of religion.

10 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

A Sly Argument for Design

By P. Nagy

The Divine Lawmaker: Lectures on Induction, Laws of Nature, and the Existence of God by John Foster (Oxford University Press) presents a clear and powerful discussion of a range of topics relating to our understanding of the universe: induction, laws of nature, and the existence of God. He begins by developing a solution to the problem of induction—a solution whose key idea is that the regularities in the workings of nature that have held in our experience hitherto are to be explained by appeal to the controlling influence of laws, as forms of natural necessity. His second line of argument focuses on the issue of what we should take such necessitatorial laws to be, and whether we can even make sense of them at all. Having considered and rejected various alternatives, Foster puts forward his own proposal: the obtaining of a law consists in the causal imposing of a regularity on the universe as a regularity. With this causal account of laws in place, he is now equipped to offer an argument for theism. His claim is that natural regularities call for explanation, and that, whatever explanatory role we may initially assign to laws, the only plausible ultimate explanation is in terms of the agency of God. Finally, he argues that, once we accept the existence of God, we need to think of him as creating the universe by a method which imposes regularities on it in the relevant law-yielding way. In this new perspective, the original nomological-explanatory solution to the problem of induction becomes a theological-explanatory solution.

The Divine Lawmaker is bold and original in its approach, and rich in argument. The issues on which it focuses are among the most important in the whole epistemological and metaphysical spectrum.

The Divine Lawmaker is a slightly revised version of a series of lectures that Foster gave at the University of Oxford under the title of 'Induction, Laws of Nature, and the Existence of God'—a title that explicitly indicates the topics that form their subject matter.

Foster covers quite a lot of philosophical and theological ground. And, on the face of it, diverse ground. But there is a connection between the different topics. One of his main aims is to provide an argument for the existence of God—a personal God of a broadly Jewish-Christian type. Foster develops his arguments in four stages that include the topics of induction and laws of nature.

Foster begins by looking at the familiar problem of induction, claiming that certain ways of attempting to solve it do not work. The idea of induction occupies the first two lectures. Next—at stage two—Foster introduces and defends what he asserts is, in its core, the right solution to the problem of induction. It is a solution that the Australian philosopher David Armstrong has also proposed independently at virtually the same time—Armstrong presenting it in his 1983 book *What is a Law of Nature?*, Foster in his 1983 paper to

the Aristotelian Society entitled 'Induction, Explanation, and Natural Necessity'. Armstrong and Foster are at opposite ends of the metaphysical spectrum. Armstrong is the foremost modern champion of total materialism. Foster is one of the few modern defenders of a Cartesian conception of the mind; and, more exotically, Foster combines this mind-body dualism with an idealist view of the physical world (though claim is not developed in the context of this book). Both Armstrong and Foster find it amusing, and in a sense reassuring, that, with such contrasting metaphysical outlooks, they manage to converge on the same view in this understanding of induction and natural law.

Now this proposed solution to the problem of induction involves accepting the existence of laws of nature, and it involves recognizing these laws not just

as regularities in the behavior of things (consistencies in how the world works in different places and times), but as forms of natural necessity-as laws whose obtaining ensures that things behave and interact in certain regular ways. It is this that brings the discussion to its third stage in Foster's argument. Foster demonstrates that accepting the existence of laws of this kind, though facilitating a solution to the problem of induction, creates its own problem. The problem it creates is simply that, given the kind of necessity these laws involve, it is hard to see how to make sense of such laws-how the relevant notion of a law can be considered coherent. It is in relation to this new problem that, in the fourth and final phase of the discussion, Foster constructs an argument for the existence of God. For he argues that, given the problem of unintelligibility or lack of coherence, one can only achieve a satisfactory account of the coherence of laws if we entertain that there is a God of the relevant (broadly Jewish and Christian) type, and that it is God who is the creator of the natural world and the source of its laws. With the argument for theism in place, Foster concludes the discussion by looking again at the issue of induction, and showing how his earlier proposal needs to be reworked, in certain key respects, in response to the theistic necessity of holding moral and natural law. Foster's arguments, if one is able to follow them, may bolster faith and might seem irrelevant to those with nontheistic neutrality.

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