



36 Arguments for the Existence of God: A Work of Fiction (Vintage Contemporaries)

By Rebecca Newberger Goldstein

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From the author of *The Mind-Body Problem*: a witty and intoxicating novel of ideas that plunges into the great debate between faith and reason.

At the center is Cass Seltzer, a professor of psychology whose book, *The Varieties of Religious Illusion*, has become a surprise best seller. Dubbed “the atheist with a soul,” he wins over the stunning Lucinda Mandelbaum—“the goddess of game theory.” But he is haunted by reminders of two people who ignited his passion to understand religion: his teacher Jonas Elijah Klapper, a renowned literary scholar with a suspicious obsession with messianism, and an angelic six-year-old mathematical genius, heir to the leadership of an exotic Hasidic sect.

Hilarious, heartbreak, and intellectually captivating, *36 Arguments* explores the rapture and torments of religious experience in all its variety.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Exclusive: Rebecca Goldstein on *36 Arguments for the Existence of God*



Dinner party hostesses used to be warned to steer the conversation away from politics and religion. I used to wonder why, but I don't anymore. There are some differences that reveal rifts so deep that dialogue breaks down. Among these are the current debates that have been raging between God-believers and the so-called new atheists. It often seems that people on one side can't begin to grasp what the world is like, what it feels like, for those on the other side. When the person with whom one is conversing appears utterly opaque, then mistrust and contempt are easily aroused: How can he be saying that when the opposite seems so obvious to me? Is he stupid, dishonest, maybe just a touch evil? These are not the sort of suspicions that the gracious hostess wants intruding at her candle-lit dinner table.

But for me, as a novelist, it's differences like these, indicating entirely different orientations toward the world, which are the most tantalizing to explore. Arguments alone can't capture all that is at stake for people when they argue about issues of reason and faith. In the end, I place my faith in fiction, in its power to make vividly present how different the world feels to each of us and how these differences are sometimes what is really being expressed in the great debates of our day on the existence of God.

The title of the book is *36 Arguments for the Existence of God: A Work of Fiction*. I meant the subtitle to be understood as a sort of joke, but as a serious one, too. --Rebecca Goldstein

(Photo © Stephen Pinker)

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. An atheist with a soul is in for a lot of soul-searching in MacArthur genius Goldstein's rollicking latest (*Mazel*). Cass Seltzer, a university professor specializing in the psychology of religion, hits the big time with a bestselling book and an offer to teach at Harvard—quite a step up from his current position at Frankfurter University. While waiting for his girlfriend to return from a conference, Cass receives an unexpected visit from Roz Margolis, whom he dated 20 years earlier and who looks as good now as she

ever did. Her secret: dedicating her substantial smarts to unlocking the secrets of immortality. Cass's recent success and Roz's sudden appearance send him into contemplation of the tumultuous events of his past, involving his former mentor, his failed first marriage and a young mathematical prodigy whose talent may go unrealized, culminating in a standing-room-only debate with a formidable opponent where Cass must reconcile his new, unfamiliar life with his experience of himself. Irreverent and witty, Goldstein seamlessly weaves philosophy into this lively and colorful chronicle of intellectual and emotional struggles. (*Jan.*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review MacArthur fellow Goldstein, philosopher and writer, continues her many-faceted inquiry into the nature of genius and the intersection between religion and science, returning to fiction (*Properties of Light*, 2000) and ramping up her gifts for radiant humor and the transmutation of metaphysics, mathematics, and Jewish mysticism into narrative gold. Cass Seltzer, whose field is the psychology of religion, and who is madly in love with Lucinda Mandelbaum, the "Goddess of Game Theory," has written the surprise best-seller *The Variety of Religious Illusion*, achieving fame as "the atheist with a soul." But when his old flame, the fearless and irreverent anthropologist Roz, reappears, he is hurtled back to the past, launching a scintillating romp of academic ambition and spiritual conundrums with a cast of whirling brainiacs. There's Cass' edgy ex-wife, the French poet Pascale; Cass' idol, the ludicrous Jonas Elijah Klapper; and a mathematical prodigy, the son of the rebbe in the Hudson Valley Hasidic settlement where Cass' mother was raised. Goldstein is entrancing and unfailingly affectionate toward her brilliant yet bumbling seekers in this elegant yet uproarious novel about the darkness of isolation and the light of learning, the beauty of numbers and the chaos of emotions, the "longing for spiritual purity" and love in all its wildness. --Donna Seaman

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