My Cambridge Element, God and the Problem of Epistemic Defeaters, addresses one key big problem for belief in God; it’s this: modern, moderately intellectual mature believers face a variety of challenges to the rationality of their belief.

I call these challenges epistemic defeaters because they attempt to defeat one’s justification for believing, rationality in believing, or even knowledge that God exists. (These epistemic defeaters are opposed to, say, other challenges such as personal challenges in living out one’s faith, or social challenges making it difficult to live out one’s faith.)

Theists—believers in God—face many different epistemic defeaters. In this Element, I categorize four different kinds of defeaters—rebutting, undercutting, base defeaters, and competence defeaters—and give examples of each. I want to give the reader a sense of the breadth of defeaters facing belief in God, show how they work, and present an assessment of how compelling they are.

That’s my goal. I can’t address all the potential defeaters in detail, but in the Element I focus on a handful:

\* First is the Superfluity argument. So this is a kind of argument that says that a naturalistic, scientific understanding of the world can explain everything we see. We don’t need theism to explain anything else.

\* The second kind of defeater is the problem of unpossessed evidence. This is the problem that arises from the fact that there’s so much written, so much said about God, about the Bible, about other religions—so much evidence to evaluate, none of us have access to all of it. So it’s very hard for us to have a reliable sense of what the evidence suggests and there’s a good chance that there’s evidence out there that may well undermine what you think.

\* The third defeater is a series of genealogical debunking arguments and concerns about rationalization. These are arguments that say that our belief arises in different ways than we thought. Maybe evolution influences it, maybe we’re rationalizing our belief. These seem to provide challenges for our belief too.

\* Fourth, there’s a cumulative case argument that humans just aren’t very good at assessing religious claims. This cumulative case arises from a variety of locations: from the fact there is a disagreement about whether God exists and about other religions claims, there’s difficulty in assessing religious evidence, say, religious experience; there’s difficulty in assessing religious texts and what they are indicating, difficulty in assessing a variety of religions arguments; then there are distorting influences on our beliefs such as confirmation bias and motivated reasoning.

If you’re a professor, or a student, or really any person interested in better understanding defeaters for belief in God and some ways of responding to them, check out my Element: God and the Problem of Epistemic Defeaters, by Joshua Thurow.