

BOOKLIST starred review

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36 Arguments for the Existence of God: a Work of Fiction

Goldstein, Rebecca Newberger (Author)

Jan 2010. 416 p. Pantheon, hardcover, \$27.95. (9780307378187).

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*