Chad Meister, *Introducing Philosophy of Religion* Abingdon: Routledge, 2009; xi + 241 pp., $32.95, ISBN 978-0-415-40327-6

This is a good introductory textbook for philosophy of religion. It covers a decent range of topics, and has clearly been designed with pedagogical considerations in mind. Moreover, it manifests a self-conscious striving to give a non-partisan introduction to contemporary debates in the field.

The book is paired with a reader edited by the author—*The Philosophy of Religion Reader* Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, 716 pp, £28.99, ISBN 978-0-415-40891-2—and supported by a website that offers chapter outlines, PowerPoint slides (for lectures), and statements of learning objectives for each chapter. The match between the textbook and the reader is not perfect; there are more topics covered in the reader than are covered in the textbook. However, most of the works that are given extended discussion in the textbook are included—or excerpted—in the reader.

The textbook consists of ten chapters, together with an introduction, glossary, index and endnotes. Some readers will be annoyed that the index does not cover the endnotes; however, apart from this, the index is perfectly adequate. The glossary— which, together with the Philosophy of Religion Timeline from the first chapter, is also available on the website—is mostly quite good, though some of the entries could be improved. (The glossary has it that *a priori* knowledge is 'knowledge that is not based on experience' and *a posteriori* knowledge is 'knowledge that is based entirely on sense experience'. It is much more standard to suppose that *a posteriori* knowledge is 'knowledge that is based at least partly on sense experience'. The glossary also has it that a deductive argument is 'an argument in which, if the premises are true, the conclusion must follow'. However, on that account, it would follow that there could not be invalid deductive arguments.)

Each chapter concludes with a summary, a list of ten questions for review and discussion, a list of fifteen to twenty further readings, and a list of half a dozen or so relevant websites. The questions for review and discussion are well thought out, and the lists of further readings and relevant websites are well-chosen. Each chapter also concludes a number of text-boxes which contain: explanations of key terms, brief biographies, quotations, standard formulations of arguments, and so forth. I'm not sure that the text-boxes add anything significant to the text; on the other hand, I think that they do no harm (and perhaps students will benefit from them). Some of the chapters also contain figures, and there is a table in chapter two (displaying some central elements of the major world religions).

The chapters have the following titles:

1. Religion and the philosophy of religion
2. Religious diversity and pluralism
3. Conceptions of ultimate reality
4. Cosmological arguments for God's existence
5. Teleological arguments for God's existence
6. Ontological arguments for God's existence
7. Problems of evil
8. Science, faith and reason

In Chapter One, Meister tentatively proposes that 'a religion involves a system of beliefs and practices primarily centred around a transcendent Reality, either personal or impersonal, which provides ultimate meaning and purpose to life' (6). Meister's caution is well-advised; I doubt that Chinese Folk Religion, Confucianism, Daoism, and significant strands of Buddhism and Hinduism are 'centred around a transcendent Reality that provides ultimate meaning and purpose to life'. I think that it would be closer to the mark to say that 'a religion involves a system of beliefs and practices primarily centred around supernatural agents and/or structures that provide ultimate meaning and purpose to life'—but even that doesn't sit very well with, for example, some strands of Confucianism. Meister's subsequent discussion of religious beliefs and practices focuses primarily on considerations about 'realism' and 'non-realism'. Somewhat curiously, he classifies Richard Dawkins as a 'non-realist'—because he claims that religious beliefs are memes—a classification which seems to me to fail to take seriously the distinction between error-theory and non-cognitivism.

In Chapter Two, Meister claims that atheism says that 'all religions are false' (26)—but in Chapter Three he goes on to note that there are 'atheistic forms of Hinduism' (46). (This can be patched by noting that Hinduism—like Judaism—is both a religion and an ethnic identification.) While, in Chapter One, Meister tries hard to be even-handed in his discussion of 'realism' and 'non-realism', he gives up on this attempt in Chapter Two: 'And lest it be missed, religions do make claims—claims about reality and our place in it' (24). In Chapter Two, Meister comes out strongly against the possibility that one might reject the classical law of non-contradiction; however, it is well-known that there are no formal barriers to the development of paraconsistent logics. Meister is also very quick with the claim that all viewpoints are ultimately false: 'it is a self-refuting claim (for it too must be false)' (39). But, so long as we can make sense of the idea of nearness to truth, we can make sense of the idea that some false theories are better than others: perhaps the Madhyamika view is closer to the truth than any rival view.

In Chapter Three, Meister characterises contingent beings as beings that need not have existed, and that depend for their existence on something else. (53) I think that it is a *substantive* assumption that all contingent beings depend for their existence on something else; many non-believers have supposed that there could be brute contingent beings—beings that might not have existed, but whose existence is not dependent upon the existence of anything else. Also in Chapter Three, Meister claims that defenders of the Cartesian view that God is not limited by logic could hardly *argue* the point on rational or logical grounds: 'to do so would be self-contradictory and thus incoherent' (55). It is not utterly obvious that this is right. If God has decreed that logic shall govern all else then—unless and until that decree is revoked by God— logic does govern all else, and that includes our thinking and arguing about God!

In Chapter Four, Meister discusses three kinds of cosmological arguments: from contingency, from sufficient reason, and *kalam*. I shall only make one comment on his discussion of 'the argument from contingency':

1. There are contingent things in the world.

2. Not all things can be contingent things.
3. Since contingent things do exist, there must be some non-contingent, or necessary, thing.
4. We call this necessary thing (or being) God.

Meister says that this 'argument' is 'valid' (68). But it is not clear that this is so. If the argument runs like this:

1.	There are contingent things.	(Premise)
2.	It is impossible that all things are contingent things.	(Premise)
3.	(Hence) There are non-contingent things.	(From 1, 2)
4.	(Hence) God exists.	(From 3)

or like this:

1.	There are contingent things.	(Premise)
2.	It is impossible that all things are contingent things.	(Premise)
3.	(Hence) There is exactly one non-contingent thing.	(From 1,2)
4.	(Hence) God exists.	(From 3)

it is clear that the argument is *not* valid. (In the first case, 4 does not follow from 3; in the second case, 3 does not follow from 1 and 2.)

In Chapter Five, Meister discusses three kinds of teleological arguments: analogical, fine-tuning, and intelligent design. I shall make just one comment, on his discussion of the 'many universes' response to the fine-tuning argument. Meister writes: 'As Robin Collins has argued, even if there are an infinity of universes, it seems that they must be produced by some kind of 'many-universe generator' … that would, itself, need to be finely tuned. … For, he argues, even a simple mechanism like a bread maker needs to be well designed to produce loaves of bread. How much more so a universe maker that produces finely tuned universes like our own.' (98) I think that something must have gone wrong here. We are imagining that the 'many-universe' generator produces universes in which the constants that are finely tuned in our universe take on 'randomly assigned' values. Why would such a generator need to be 'finely tuned'? Intuitively, since there are no constraints on the values that characterise the universes that it produces, there is no reason at all for it to be 'finely tuned'!

In Chapter Six, Meister discusses Anselm's *Proslogion II* argument and Plantinga's 'victorious' modal ontological argument. I shall make just one comment, on his discussion of Michael Martin's 'special fairy' objection to Plantinga's 'victorious' argument. Meister offers the following response to Martin's objection: 'It is not possible that a special fairy exists since fairies are presumably physical objects (or essentially connected to physical objects). But no physical object can be a necessary being since it is possible that there are no physical objects whatsoever.' (122) One obvious response to this—which also has interesting implications for some cosmological arguments—is to run with a different modification of Plantinga's argument, commencing with the claim that *it is possible that the initial state of the physical universe is necessarily the initial state of causal reality*. If we consider this claim, then we have parity between Plantinga and some of his naturalist opponents: he

claims that it is possible that there is a maximally great being, and not possible that the initial state of the physical universe is necessarily the initial state of causal reality; they claim that it is possible that the initial state of the physical universe is necessarily the initial state of causal reality, and not possible that there is a maximally great being.

In Chapter Seven, Meister discusses theoretical arguments from evil, the existential problem of evil, and three theodicies. I shall make one comment on his discussion of 'the free will defence' (to 'the logical problem of evil'). According to Meister: 'Most philosophers have agreed that the free will defence has defeated the logical problem of evil. For even if one grants that compatibilism is true … as long as it is possible that incompatibilism is true, then the necessary conclusion of the logical problem of evil is undercut.' (134) I think that something has gone awry here. Surely, if compatibilism is true, then it is necessary that compatibilism is true! At the very least, I suspect that there is some kind of confusion between alethic modality and epistemic or doxastic modality at work in this part of the text.

In Chapter Eight, Meister discusses religion and science—conflict, independence or integration?—and religious belief and justification—fideism, the will to believe, Pascal's wager, properly basic belief. In his discussion of Pascal's wager, Meister mentions three objections: that belief is not directly subject to the will; that the wager doesn't tell you whether to bet on God, or Allah, or Krishna, or something else; and that the wager seems to be an 'unfitting' way of entering into a trusting relationship with God. I'd prefer the focus to be on other objections. On the one hand, Pascal has good responses to the first and third objections given here: he wants you to enter into whatever path of action you deem to be most likely to lead you to a proper relationship with God. (His own recommendation is going to Church, praying, hanging out with religious people and so forth; but it could be something else entirely that floats your boat.) On the other hand, there are serious objections to the wager argument: for example, if I decide that I shall wager for God when and only when I become the richest man in the world, then—by the logic of Pascal's wager argument—that decision will also have infinite expected utility for me (so long as there is some non-zero, non-infinitesimal, chance, however small, that I will become the richest man in the world)!

In Chapter Nine, Meister discusses the nature and diversity of religious experience, challenges to religious experiences as justifications for religious beliefs, and purported scientific explanations of religious experience. In his discussion of 'Freud's wish-fulfilment hypothesis of religious experience', Meister makes the point that it is no 'disproof of the content of an experience (or belief)' that it is caused by certain needs and desires. 'Suppose, for example, that one believes in the existence of a personal and powerful God because of a deep-seated need for a heavenly Father. Does that prove that a personal and powerful God does not exist? Certainly not.' (182) This response seems to miss the main point. If I discover that a belief of mine is caused entirely by my needs and desires, then what I have is an *undercutting* defeater rather than a *rebutting* defeater. If I find that my belief in God is entirely the result of my needs and desires then—absent any further considerations—I should not form the belief that God does not exist, but perhaps I should suspend judgment on the question whether God exists.

In Chapter Ten, Meister discusses conceptions of the self, reincarnation, karma, and various arguments for and against immortality. In his discussion of materialism, Meister claims that the identity theory has been in decline in recent years, and that functionalism has risen to prominence in its place. I'm not sure about this: certainly, the Australian view has long been that functionalism and the identity theory are entirely consistent with one another. (This is the view of Jack Smart, David Armstrong, Frank Jackson, David Lewis, and many others.) On a more substantive note: Meister gives considerable credence to reports about past lives, near death experiences, out of body experiences, astral projections, and so forth. I think that, at this point, it would have been good to introduce the *a posteriori* part of Hume's argument against miracles: after all, a huge pile of junk reports is still just junk. A critical examination of the literature on near death experiences suggests (to me) that there isn't even one *independently corroborated* report of someone who 'locates objects in the room during surgery which were not present while that one was alive/awake' or who 'describes events in another location which occurred during that one's surgery'.

There are some typographical errors in the text that could be tidied up in a revised edition. At p.18, Meister writes: 'I have given space here to non-realism … because, in lieu of the predominant work in the field, the remainder of the book is oriented towards a realist perspective'. But 'in lieu' means 'instead of'; what he wants is something like 'in view'. I suspect that the typo that students will like most occurs at p.198, where, at the beginning of the section 'Arguments for Immortality', Meister writes: 'There are a number of arguments put forth for those who believe in immorality'. Overall, though, the quality of the writing and editing is high.

This text and the accompanying reader are not the only pedagogical contributions that Meister has made to the field of philosophy of religion. For instance, he is also co-editor—with Paul Copan—of the *Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (2007, Abingdon: Routledge, ISBN: 0-415-38038-3), among other works. I have no doubt that we can look forward to more works of a similar standard in the future.