

Benton, M., Hawthorne, J. and Rabinowitz, D. (eds.) (2018) *Knowledge, Belief and God: New Insights in Religious Epistemology* Oxford: Oxford University Press, £55.00, ISBN 978-0-19-879870-5

This work is output from a three-year Templeton Foundation grant “New Insights and Directions in Religious Epistemology”. The aim of the work is to consider applications of recent developments in epistemology—knowledge first approaches; formal representations of credences; pragmatic encroachment invariantisms; social epistemological treatments of testimony, disagreement, expertise, and authority; and new treatments of defeat, humility, dogmatism and open-mindedness—to interesting topics in the philosophy of religion.

The editors group the sixteen new essays in the collection into four labelled sets of four:

Historical

1. “Hume, Defeat, and Miracle Reports” Charity Anderson (Baylor)
2. “Testimony, Error, and Reasonable Belief in Medieval Religious Epistemology” Richard Cross (Notre Dame)
3. “Duns Scotus’ Epistemic Argument against Divine Illumination” Billy Dunaway (Missouri—St. Louis)
4. “Knowledge and the Cathartic Value of Repentance” Dani Rabinowitz (Clifford Chance)

Formal

5. “Infinite Cardinalities, Measuring Knowledge, and Probabilities in Fine-Tuning Arguments” Isaac Choi (Sacred Heart)
6. “A Theological Critique of the Fine-Tuning Argument” Hans Halvorson (Princeton)
7. “Fine-Tuning Fine-Tuning” John Hawthorne (Southern California) and Yoaav Isaacs (Chapel Hill)
8. “Reasoning with Plenitude” Roger White (MIT)

Social

9. “Testimony amidst Diversity” Max Baker-Hytch (Oxford)
10. “Testimonial Pessimism” Rachel Elizabeth Fraser (Cambridge)
11. “Experts and Peer Disagreement” Jennifer Lackey (Northwestern)
12. “Know-How and Acts of Faith” Paulina Sliwa (Cambridge)

Rational

13. “Pragmatic Encroachment and Theistic Knowledge” Matthew Benton (Seattle Pacific)
14. “Delusions of Knowledge Concerning God’s Existence” Keith DeRose (Yale)
15. “Moderate Modal Scepticism” Margot Strohminger (Humboldt) and Juhani Yli-Vakkuri (Tartu)
16. “Phenomenal Conservatism and Religious Experience” Richard Swinburne (Oxford)

Each of these essays meets the aim of the work. Collectively, the essays are fresh, engaging, interesting, and nourishing food for thought. At the editors hoped, they breathe new life into some fairly well worn topics—e.g. miracles, faith, fine-tuning arguments, Pascal’s wager, religious diversity, religious disagreement, religious expertise, and religious experience—and raise some less familiar topics—e.g. disagreement between Aquinas and Scotus on testimony, disagreement

between Henry (of Ghent) and Scotus on divine illumination, Maimonides' views on repentance, and reasoning about infinite universes—to greater prominence. While I cannot comment on all of the essays here, I shall make a small number of remarks about some.

In his fascinating and original essay, Benton argues that if knowledge is appropriately stakes-sensitive—i.e., if one's belief that p can fail to be knowledge solely because the practical stakes are too high if p is false—then, because the practical stakes of believing bare theism are much lower than the practical stakes of believing atheism, even those whose initial evidence favours atheism have epistemic reasons that make it irrational for them to continue to be atheists (272). Moreover, according to Benton, it *may* be, given that the practical stakes of believing bare theism are much lower than the practical stakes of believing atheism, that those who initially have no strong epistemic grounds either way have a distinctly epistemic reason to favour theism (282). One obvious worry about this line of thought is that, given that the choice between belief in different gods is no less high stakes, even those whose initial evidence favours some particular version of theism have epistemic reason that make it irrational for them to continue to be any *particular* kind of theist. Benson suggests that one might respond to this concern by observing that, for those wrestling with the wager, the first step of interest involves the choice between bare theism and atheism: it is only after one has decided for theism that one needs to contemplate issues of plurality and exclusivity. But that's not an acceptable reply: an analogous response in the case of Pascal's original wager would rule out many gods objections by mere fiat. Good reasoning is not path-dependent reasoning: good reasoning requires us to put all of the options on the table at the outset, and then to reason responsibly about all of them.

Choi considers an objection, due to Nick Treanor, to the claim that the correct way to measure how much someone knows is to count how many claims that person knows. We can formulate an argument much like the one that Choi discusses as follows:

1. If the correct way to measure how much someone fails to know is by the cardinality of the set of true claims that that person fails to know, then the correct way to measure how much someone fails to know yields an invariant answer (some particular infinite cardinal).
2. Typically, how much a person fails to know is not invariant: for example, I am less ignorant than I was at age ten.
3. (Therefore) It is not correct to measure how much someone fails to know by the cardinality of the set of true claims that person fails to know.
4. It is correct to measure how much someone knows by the cardinality of the set of claims that that person knows if and only if it is correct to measure how much someone fails to know by the cardinality of the set of true claims that person fails to know.
5. (Therefore) It is not correct to measure how much someone knows by the cardinality of the set of claims that person knows.

Choi claims that this argument can be paralleled to its discredit:

1. If the correct way to measure how many books have not been written by the human race is by the cardinality of the set of books that have not been written by the human race, then the correct way to measure how many books have not been written by the human race yields an invariant answer (some particular infinite cardinal).
2. The number of books that have not been written by the human race is not invariant: there are now fewer books not written by the human race than there were in the past.

3. (Therefore) It is not correct to measure how many books have not been written by the human race by the cardinality of the set of books that have not been written by the human race.
4. It is correct to measure how many books have been written by the human race by the cardinality of the set of books that have been written by the human race if and only if it is correct to measure how many books have not been written by the human race by the cardinality of the set of books that have not been written by the human race.
5. (Therefore) It is not correct to measure how many books have been written by the human race by the cardinality of the set of books that have been written by the human race.

Moreover, Choi claims that this discredit impugns the Cantorian account of infinite cardinals that is taken for granted in the formulation of the version of Treanor's argument. However, I do not think that there is anything here that impugns the Cantorian account of infinite cardinals.

One fault in the second argument lies in the second premise, which assimilates two claims that ought to be kept carefully apart. On the one hand, the cardinality of the set of unwritten books is invariant; on the other hand, the set of unwritten books at later times is a subset of the set of unwritten books at earlier times. When we say that there are now fewer books not written by the human race than there were in the past, we are correctly interpreted to be saying that the set of presently unwritten books is a proper subset of earlier sets of unwritten books even though the cardinality of the set of unwritten books has not changed.

It is less clear what to say about the second premise in the first argument. Sure, there are many things that I know now—about, for example, politics, religion, and sex—that were not known by my ten-year-old self; on the other hand, there are many things that my ten-year-old self knew that I do not know. When I was ten, I knew the answers to every question in the *Junior Puffin Quiz Book*; now, for most of those questions, I draw a blank.

Perhaps we can justify the second premise in the first argument in the following way. Let P be the set of claims that my ten-year-old self and I both know; let Q be the set of claims that my ten-year-old self knows but that I do not; and let R be the set of claims that I know but that my ten year old self does not. If the cardinality of Q is less than the cardinality of R, then I am less ignorant than is my ten-year-old self even though the cardinality of the set of claims that I do not know is the same as the cardinality of the set of claims that my ten-year-old self does not know.

I think that the fourth premise in both arguments is mistaken. For finite sets, cardinality serves as the *sole* measure; but, for infinite sets, we use a mix of cardinality and subset considerations in measure-contexts. Assuming that we can count true claims known, and assuming that any person's knowledge is finite, cardinality alone will always be an appropriate measure for a person's knowledge; but, even if so, cardinality alone will not always be an appropriate measure for a person's ignorance.