

REVIEW: JONATHAN L. KVANVIG (ED.). *OXFORD STUDIES IN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION. VOLUME SIX.* OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2015. 320 PAGES; \$90.00/HARDCOVER.

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This collection features 12 articles from prominent philosophers in our time and offers readers a taste of the avant-garde philosophy of religion. Most contributors focus on specific puzzles surrounding Christianity. As the 12 articles discuss quite different topics without standing under any overarching aim, I shall mainly stay on the level of individual articles to do justice to this eclectic book.

Theologians traditionally appealed to God's aseity, the idea that God's existence does not depend on anything else, to justify the doctrine of divine simplicity. Gregory Fowler (Chapter 5) tries to show that God's aseity coheres with not only divine simplicity, but also "divine priority" by mobilizing Jonathan Schaffer's distinction between existence monism and priority monism. Fowler then uses the doctrine of divine priority to explain how it is possible for there to be exactly one God and for God to be the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Richard Swinburne (Chapter 10) examines the extent to which God's existence is necessary. It is believed that God cannot just happen to exist to deserve human worship. The maximalist view, which Swinburne faults for its ambiguity on God's properties, is that God's existence possesses metaphysical and logical necessity. Swinburne seeks an "intermediate" view of divine necessity. Assuming the incoherence of backward causation and simultaneous causation, Swinburne argues from God's essential aseity that God continuously necessitates Himself to exist. Alexander Arnold (Chapter 1) proposes that divine foreknowledge is compatible with creaturely free choice. By adopting the knowledge-first approach developed in recent epistemology and formulating the knowledge-priority view, Arnold argues that the essence of God's past belief that something would happen depends on the essence of God's foreknowledge that the world would be in a certain way, which in turn depends on the essence of some future fact that the world

will be in a certain way. The mystery of transubstantiation gets a Cartesian clarification from John Heil (Chapter 6). Heil develops Descartes's thought that two objects interact by their "surface" rather than their properties. Insofar as the surface of bread and wine are preserved in a perceptually indistinguishable manner, the substantial conversion from bread and wine to Christ's body does not call for a theory of "real accidents," those properties that allegedly continue to exist even after the substances in which they inhere cease to exist. To illustrate the substantial conversion involved in transubstantiation, Heil invokes the concept of "supernatural metabolism." Just like human metabolism that transforms the bread and wine into the human body, supernatural metabolism transforms the bread and wine into Christ's body. "It might resemble the relationship you bear to Vienna when you are thinking of Vienna," says Heil, "your standing in this relationship to Vienna depends on your being a particular way, but requires nothing of Vienna" (154–155). Christ can be thought of as supernaturally metabolizing the bread and wine by paying attention to them. As the core premises in these four articles all come from recent development in epistemology and metaphysics, an adequate assessment of their substance should wait on what lies outside this collection. As they stand, these four articles serve as innovative variations of Christian themes.

One might worry about the seriousness of claims about God such as those found in these articles. Perhaps all theistic beliefs about God are not true, fundamentally speaking. Jonathan D. Jacobs (Chapter 7) addresses this worry in his winning essay in the Sanders Prize. He tries to defend the possibility that all truths about God are not fundamental by arguing for the Ineffability Thesis—for any proposition P, both the negation of P and the negation of not-P are fundamentally true, where fundamental truth is understood as the perfect way to carve reality at its joints. According to the Ineffability Thesis, given any true proposition about how God is intrinsically, we can always say something clearer about something else. The claims that God is wise, loving, three in hypostasis, one in *ousia*, etc. can be importantly true albeit in a non-fundamental way. As Jacobs is merely interested in defending the possibility of the Ineffability Thesis, he has little to offer with respect to religious disagreements that practically arise just in case people are not sure whether the truth of certain claims about God is even non-fundamentally true.

This silence on practical religious conflicts might naturally lead us to wonder how much leeway one can have with Jacobs' Ineffability Thesis. Can someone live a religious life without even taking the claim that God exists, realistically construed, to be fundamentally true? Laura Ekstrom's article (Chapter 4) tackles exactly this concern. Some people adopt doctrinal agnosticism provided that they value affective commitment and religious experience. After all, to belong to a community where people feel accepted is rewarding. But Ekstrom finds this

position where one acts as if God exists deeply incoherent and insincere, asking provocatively “wouldn’t it be preferable to build a community of people without the surrounding religious structure” (106)? If believers have doctrinal commitments and regard others in the same affiliation as like-minded, religious agnostics will deceive others, thereby insidiously harming spiritual intimacy in the fellowship. Puzzled by the identity of a person claiming to live a religious life, stand in awe of the divine presence, care for other people yet not to believe the claim that God exists, Ekstrom wonders whether this is a theist with doubts, or an atheist with hope, or someone just psychologically unsettled. While Ekstrom finds psychological unsettlement unlikely to be held for long, we must keep in view that there is no universal threshold of tolerance for existential uncertainty.

Three articles are devoted to the problem of evil, long considered by many to be the most challenging problem for Christian theism. Bruce Langtry (Chapter 8) observes that a proponent of the problem of evil faces a meta-ethical dilemma. Either one holds “wrong-making properties” and “right-making properties” as second-order properties, or one does not. If the latter, one shall accept that there are infinitely many properties that are right-making and wrong-making such that the weight of evil against goodness is infinity divided by infinity, which yields no numerical value that can count against God’s goodness. But if the former, Langtry uses the example of Lisbon earthquake and Bayes’ theorem to argue that it is logically possible for actions possessing wrong-making properties to have its wrongness nullified or considerably reduced by contextual factors. Langtry’s discussion involves technical sophistications not easily accessible for a general audience. N. N. Trakakis (Chapter 11) probes into the “ecclesiological” problem of evil to reconcile the church’s holiness and sinfulness. Having surveyed four common explanations and found all of them inadequate, Trakakis draws from Martin Luther’s “simul doctrine” to propose that only after acknowledging the sinfulness of the church does it become possible for the church to perceive its sins. Trakakis could have left out the question about the necessity of church reform, which might as well include confessing sins of the church. The problem of evil gets most intense with the problem of hell. As hell is a source of ultimate, maximal, and eternal suffering, going to hell is the worst that can ever happen to anyone. Philosophers have contended that a God who institutes hell must be positively evil. R. Zachary Manis (Chapter 9) argues that a belief in hell is not “spiritually edifying.” It seems to discredit the human freedom of faith and infuse unfruitful fear into the love of God. The love for God and one’s neighbors then becomes a means of avoiding hell. In light of the problem of hell, atheism might be the real message of hope. While Manis underestimates believers’ ability to grow from these issues in light of scriptures, his article can keep religious motivations in check.

Whether religious faith can be enhanced or undermined by reason and evidence has been a central concern for Christian apologetics. Gregory W. Dawes (Chapter 3) examines the Aquinian account of faith. He argues that the basis of faith is not evidential. Although rational arguments and evidential concerns can predispose people toward faith, a belief held in proportion to reason and evidence would not be valuable for salvation. Here Dawes' observation about demons' beliefs in God's existence, which perfectly accord with evidence yet lack salvific value, is very illuminating. Nor is the basis of faith, *pace* Alvin Plantinga, properly basic, as this fails to account for the absolute certainty of faith compared with other basic beliefs in face of rational challenges. The basis of faith, according to Dawes, is a motivated will to accept God's authority simply because of God. Notice that the circularity involved suggests an affective commitment without which rational discourse about faith in God cannot be meaningfully substantive.

Christina van Dyke (Chapter 12) examines the Aquinian beatific vision, according to which only when God joins with the human intellect as the intelligible form and illuminates the human intellect can humans cognize God directly. Perfect Human happiness consists in an unchanging contemplation of God. This contemplation does not take the form of discursive reasoning, not does it require the assistance of our senses which merely familiarize us with particulars. Although the resurrected bodies have sense perception, we would never want to exercise them at all. Van Dyke notes the high cost of Aquinas's beatific vision. With respect to epistemology, vision of divine essence will eliminate any indirect role the body might play in knowledge acquisition. With respect to ethics, the ultimate satisfaction of contemplating God makes moral virtues irrelevant to any situation. She holds that Aquinas's beatific vision represents a transcendence rather than fulfillment of human nature. This article is bravely insightful as it situates Aquinas against the tide of embodiment value that proliferates in recent philosophical literature.

Michael Bergmann's highly original essay (Chapter 2) is very thought-provoking. He argues that theists can rationally demote atheists, as atheists do not have or cannot properly respond to what Bergmann calls "theistic seemings." Theistic seemings are the appearances of theistic reality and can arise from diverse sources except for rational proofs. While some atheists also have theistic seemings, only theists have a second-order seeming that grants the first-order theistic seemings a felt veridicality. Although it would be nice for theists to have an explanation that covers all instances of why atheists do not have or cannot properly respond to theistic seemings, the honest answer is that theists do not have such a universal explanation. Bergman urges that to rationally demote, theists must not assume that atheists bear certain problems. There are large numbers of atheists who are intelligent, virtuous, wise and mature. Atheism can also be

internally and externally rational. What the theist can only insist is that atheists lack a particular kind of evidence, namely theistic seemings. Although it can sound offensive and arrogant to hold that theists have a special way of knowing things which atheists lack, Bergmann thinks that it is possible for theists to demote atheists respectfully. But arguably this can be very hard, especially if theists have a belief system according to which atheists are somehow culpable for their lack of theistic seemings. Bergmann sees doubts of theistic seemings as irrational states where a gift of faith is needed to overcome the doubts. But clearly doubts can be rational. It seems that Bergmann owes us an account of why those who have theistic seemings accept theism. After all, it is possible for theists to live in different theistic realities with different conceptions of what counts as rational doubts.

I expect that both theistic and atheistic readers can learn from this collection. It opens newer grounds on the problem of evil, proposes neater ways to understand Christian doctrines and presents so many interesting issues in practicing a religious faith. In this entire collection, however, only one paragraph in Ekstrom's article speaks to the significance of prayer for faith. One article solely on prayer would have made this collection more informative of what a loss of faith can mean for believers. For the purposes of planning the next volume, it is also worthwhile for the editor to consider incorporating the perspective of gender studies on religion. Besides, for a more eclectic taste, the book could have included some discussion of other religions. As it is, the book seems a thorough defense of Christian theism against both internal and external challenges.