

Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 16 | Issue 1

Article 12

1-1-1999

Jordan & Howard-Snyder, eds., FAITH, FREEDOM AND RATIONALITY: PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION TODAY

David Reiter

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

Recommended Citation

Reiter, David (1999) "Jordan & Howard-Snyder, eds., FAITH, FREEDOM AND RATIONALITY: PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION TODAY," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 16 : Iss. 1 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol16/iss1/12>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

posits God as a "father-substitute," and she interprets Kierkegaard's God-relationship as "a relationship to a fatherly other" (105). Evans, on the other hand, writes of the relationships of the developing self to parents, lovers, the state, ideologies, etc., as relations to "God-substitutes" (93). Which interpretation one chooses makes all the difference.

The fifteen essays which comprise this volume challenge the reader to view Kierkegaard's thought through the multi-faceted prism of postmodernity. *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity* does not relieve the tension of inwardness and political involvement, and it does not answer the critical question of faith. But it does succeed in revealing the persistence and importance of these central Kierkegaardian concerns in our day.

Faith, Freedom, and Rationality: Philosophy of Religion Today edited by **Jeff Jordan** and **Daniel Howard-Snyder**. Rowman and Littlefield, 1996. Pp. xiv, 287 \$58.50 (cloth).

DAVID REITER, University of St. Thomas

This volume, dedicated to William L. Rowe, is a collection of eleven essays by a number of leading philosophers of religion. It demonstrates the richness and breadth of issues treated by contemporary philosophy of religion (notably, none of the essays are concerned with Rowe's evidential argument from evil).

Philip L. Quinn provides an edifying discussion of Kierkegaard's account of the Divine command to love one's neighbor as oneself. On this account, any person qualifies as a neighbor, and so this command is radical in demanding a love which is both affectionate and universal. Robert Audi argues persuasively for logical compatibility, and even a significant positive harmony, between scientific conceptions of mind and theism. J.A. Cover and John O'Leary-Hawthorne, also concerned with compatibility issues, argue that materialist theories of mind do not comport well with a "robust conception" of human freedom.

Eleonore Stump defends (against recent work by David Widerker) the claim that libertarian freedom does not entail the principle of alternative possibilities. James Ross's piece is a unique and provocative argument for the claim that human freedom cannot be understood independently of theological considerations such as Divine redemption. William J. Wainwright considers Jonathan Edwards's view that God creates the world to display His glory. Wainwright argues that this view is both attractive and defensible. While Edwards's position entails that God must create, Wainwright argues that one could embrace Edwards's core claims without being committed to the unpalatable consequence (accepted by Edwards) that God must create the actual world.

Peter van Inwagen provides a helpful exploration of the implications of Clifford's principle that it is always wrong to believe *p* on insufficient evidence. Norman Kretzmann exposit a cosmological argument from Aquinas which provides good evidence for the existence of an "ultimate universal explanatory principle."

Martin Curd defends an argument which purports to show that miracles (according to the "standard modern concept") are impossible. The argument is based on two premises: 1. Event E is a miracle only if E is an exception to a law of nature, and 2. L is a law of nature only if there are no exceptions to L. But Curd's discussion raises the question: how interested should a theist be in the question of whether or not SM-miracles (i.e., miracles according to the standard modern concept) are possible? Perhaps a theist should be quite interested in the question of whether it is possible for an event to occur which is specially indicative of the existence and nature of God, but it is not obvious that such events would need to be SM-miracles.

Three of the volume's eleven articles are authored by former professors of Rowe (Alston, Ross, and Nakhnikian). I shall restrict the remainder of my comments to two of these three articles.

William P. Alston provides a careful and very interesting exploration of the belief/acceptance distinction and its application to religious faith. Leaving out many helpful details, Alston's account of the distinction can be summarized by saying that while accepting a proposition is a voluntary mental act, believing a proposition is neither voluntary nor a mental act. And unlike accepting p, believing p involves, among other things, a tendency to feel that p is the case, whenever one considers p.

Moving to Alston's account of faith, "faith that" p (which should be distinguished from "faith in" a person or group of persons) differs from belief that p in two respects: 1. Faith that p necessarily involves a "pro-attitude" toward p's being true, whereas one may believe that p even if one strongly wishes that p were false. And 2. "'Faith that' has at least a strong suggestion of a weak epistemic position vis-a-vis the proposition in question. One would say that one has faith that Jim will be promoted only when one's evidence is less than conclusive." (12) So if S has faith that p, this suggests that S is in a weak epistemic position with respect to p (whereas belief that p does not suggest this). Alston sees both features exhibited in Hebrews 11:1 "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." But I think it is unclear that this verse exhibits the weak epistemic position feature. One could take "seen" here literally, so that faith would be "conviction concerning invisible things." But Alston is apparently taking "seen" in the epistemic sense so that faith is here defined as "conviction concerning things not known." But this is problematic, since it appears to render Hebrews 11:3 self-contradictory: "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command..." At any rate, one of Alston's conclusions is that faith that p can be realized in either belief that p or acceptance that p.

Near the end of the article, Alston asks: Are adherents of the Christian faith required to *believe* (as opposed to merely *accept*) the doctrines of Christianity? (I shall refer to this as "the belief requirement.") As evidence, Alston considers two biblical passages and quotations from traditional creeds and confessions. His comment on Hebrews 11:6 "For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him," is the following:

But the Greek verb translated "believe" in the Revised Standard Version, from which I quote, and in many other translations is *pisteuo*,

the verbal form of the noun *pistis*, "faith." In English we lack a verb cognate of "faith," and this leads translators to settle on "believe" as the nearest English verb. But once we come to realize that it is not always belief that constitutes the cognitive aspect of faith, we can see that a better translation would be "have faith that he exists" (as in the Good News translation). Propositional "faith" can involve either belief or acceptance. (22)

Alston may be correct that "have faith that he exists" is a better translation, but it does not follow that this verse does not support the belief requirement. For while we know that A-faith (i.e., faith as defined by Alston in this article) does not require belief, we do not know (at least not without considerably more discussion) that the author of Hebrews is working with the A-faith concept. (And I have already suggested a possible discrepancy between A-faith and the way "faith" is used by the author of Hebrews.) While Alston's brief discussion does not establish that the belief requirement is incorrect, it may be sufficient to show that it is not obviously correct (I should mention that this is all Alston claims for his discussion). And more importantly, I think Alston does establish his larger conclusion that an appreciation of the belief/acceptance distinction will enrich epistemology in general and the epistemology of religion in particular.

In the final article of the book, George Nakhnikian critiques Alvin Plantinga's 1967 and 1983 defenses of the epistemic rationality of theistic belief. According to Nakhnikian, both defenses are failures, but in my opinion, Nakhnikian's evaluations are not well-argued. Plantinga's 1967 defense tries to show that belief in God is on an epistemic par with belief in other minds with respect to propositional or discursive evidence. Plantinga tentatively concludes that (in the absence of further differentiating considerations) if belief in other minds is rational, then belief in God is rational too. Nakhnikian's main "objection" to this is simply his assertion that these beliefs are not on an epistemic par, because it is not obvious that belief in God is rational (while it *is* obvious that belief in other minds is rational).

In his discussion of Plantinga's 1983 defense (where Plantinga argues that belief in God is analogous to perceptual belief), Nakhnikian misrepresents Plantinga as holding that all rational adults are theists: "Plantinga is convinced that all adult rational beings would, on reflection, acknowledge that they are all theists by nature..." (236) But my main complaint against Nakhnikian is that he repeatedly objects to Plantinga's position on the basis of unsupported assumptions. I will provide just one glaring example. At the conclusion of the article (almost immediately after criticizing Plantinga for being dogmatic!), Nakhnikian states that: "It is in principle impossible to explain the nature of human cognition with reference to theological concepts." (238) While Nakhnikian relies on this claim as a partial basis for rejecting Plantinga's position, he does not explain the exact meaning of this claim, nor does he provide any argumentation in support of it.

I have identified some points where I differ with the authors of this interesting and profitable volume. Nevertheless, I recommend it to all interested philosophers, and perhaps especially to those interested in epistemological and metaphysical issues in the philosophy of religion.