

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Knowledge, Belief, and God: New Insights in Religious Epistemology*, edited by Matthew A. Benton, John Hawthorne, and Dani Rabinowitz. Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. x + 345. \$74.00 (hardcover).

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This book is comprised of sixteen new essays in religious epistemology and is divided into four parts with four chapters each: “Part I: Historical,” “Part II: Formal,” “Part III: Social,” and “Part IV: Rational.” The papers are very good, and the book delivers what its title advertises: lots of new insights in religious epistemology. I recommend it to anyone who wishes to dig into cutting-edge religious epistemology. Most of the papers are suitable for the graduate level or higher.

With sixteen papers, I risk saying nothing of substance about any one of them by trying to say something substantive about all of them. So, I will devote more time to certain papers. However, my saying little about a paper should imply nothing about my view of its quality and more about my own areas of specialty and ability to say something interesting about it. Readers can also turn to the editors’ introductory chapter for synopses of each chapter.

Part I opens with Charity Anderson’s paper, “Hume, Defeat, and Miracle Reports.” Like many, I am familiar with Hume’s argument against miracles. But I hadn’t made clear the connections between his argument and concepts in recent epistemology. This is what Anderson does. She provides a careful discussion of Hume’s argument by drawing from recent literature on testimony, formal epistemology, epistemic defeat, and knowledge-first. Her ability to bring all these topics to bear on Hume’s argument is impressive. Part I also includes papers by Richard Cross on Aquinas’s and Scotus’s religious epistemologies, Billy Dunaway on Duns Scotus and Henry of Ghent’s debate about the necessity of divine illumination for knowledge (with an interesting discussion of the safety condition), and Dani Rabinowitz on repentance in historic Jewish philosophy (with applications of Williamsonian epistemology).

Part II is more technical, with three papers applied to the fine-tuning argument. However, I think the main points in all the papers can be



followed, even if one cannot follow the most difficult parts. Roger White explores whether an infinite universe (with infinite and diverse religious believers) creates a bigger problem of religious diversity than the regular problem of religious diversity we observe here on Earth; after taking the reader on a philosophical journey, White concludes, "No."

Isaac Choi explains how one person could know more than another person, despite their both having an infinite number of beliefs. He then applies his explanation to the so-called "normalizability problem" for the fine-tuning argument. Of note is Choi's rejection of Cantor's principle of correspondence for infinite sets. (This will surprise some, given its seeming orthodoxy, but Choi shows how this rejection can solve a lot of problems and is not without precedent among mathematicians.)

John Hawthorne and Yoav Isaac's paper illustrates the power of Bayesian epistemology. By formulating the fine-tuning argument using Bayesian tools, we see both a forceful fine-tuning argument and also how misguided and weak many of its prominent objections are. It was fun to see them swat away objection after objection. Also, the three appendices of their paper should not be ignored since they break a lot of ground.

Lastly, Hans Halvorson presents a challenge for the fine-tuning argument. Although some parts of his paper are more technical, the main argument is built around the insight that we should take into account not only the low probability that the universe would be fine-tuned, but the low probability that God would make the universe in need of fine-tuning.

Part III includes three papers on testimony and one on the nature of faith. I have the most to say about Max Baker-Hyitch's paper, so I will save that for later in this review. Rachel Fraser draws from philosophy of language and distinguishes two theories according to which a testifier can fail to transmit belief to a testiffee: 1) the testiffee might lack requisite emotional capacities or 2) the testiffee might lack causal contact with the object that the testimony is about. Both theories, if true, would explain why some hearers of religious testimony might fail to gain religious belief by way of that testimony.

Jennifer Lackey distinguishes between two models of expert testimony: the expert-as-authority (where an expert's testimony replaces all other reasons the subject has) and the expert-as-advisor (where an expert's testimony is evidence that is to be weighed with the other evidence the subject has). She argues that we should reject the former (along with Linda Zagzebski's argument for it) and replace it with the latter. This has implications for how we view religious experts.

Paulina Sliwa's paper is on the nature of faith. Just as we can understand the moral virtue of kindness in terms of acts of kindness (and *knowing how* to perform kind acts), she argues that we can understand faith in terms of acts of faith (and *knowing how* to perform acts of faith). Sliwa marshals many interesting thought experiments to support her view, applies her account to religious faith, responds to objections, criticizes Lara Buchak's

account of faith, and ends with reflections on how her account applies to religious practice and Pascal's wager.

Part IV includes one paper about the epistemology of modality and three papers on the justification or warrant of religious belief. Margot Strohming and Juhani Yli-Vakkuri criticize Peter van Inwagen's argument for skepticism about the metaphysical modality that underwrites premises of certain arguments in philosophy of religion. However, they then defend a Williamson-based modal epistemology that still casts significant doubt on those same arguments.

Matthew Benton discusses the "Old Pascalian Problem" (the traditional Pascal's wager), as well as the "New Pascalian Problem," which arises from the relationship between pragmatic encroachment—the view that practical concerns can directly affect whether one knows—and religious epistemology. Much of the discussion revolves around the striking claim that it is harder to know that atheism is true than it is to know that theism is true because of the practical costs of believing the former and the practical benefits of believing the latter.

Swinburne defends a version of phenomenal conservatism—the view that an appearance that *p* provides *prima facie* justification for believing *p*. Using his characteristically methodical style, Swinburne carefully defines his terms and then places phenomenal conservatism *within* a Bayesian framework. An implication of Swinburne's discussion for religious epistemology is that a seeming that God is present can justify believing theism, but a seeming that God is not present does not justify believing atheism. He writes, "an experience which is not an experience of [God's] presence . . . is no greater evidence of his non-existence, than having an experience which is not an experience of a unicorn is evidence that there are no unicorns anywhere in the universe" (337).

I will now delve more deeply into the papers by Keith DeRose and Max Baker-Hyatt. In "Delusions of Knowledge Concerning God's Existence," DeRose seeks to "express, explain, and to some extent defend my suspicion that hardly anyone, if anyone at all, knows whether God exists" (288). On his view, beliefs that God exists, even if true, don't amount to knowledge. (In other words, they lack *warrant*, the property which turns true belief into knowledge.) DeRose's paper is partly autobiographical and reads like an honest and open-minded investigation. I enjoyed it and was led to reconsider whether my own theistic belief is warranted.

First, DeRose notes that religious experience is likely the best candidate for producing knowledge that God exists. (Philosophical argument, he thinks, is insufficient.) Second, he argues at length that the religious experiences people actually have will not do the job. For example, his *own* religious experiences are not sufficient for his theistic belief to be warranted (294). He then notes that people who *used* to take themselves to know, but then later de-converted, will think that their prior religious experiences were not so strong after all, and that "there was some element of insincerity, lack of genuineness, or even phoniness, in the certainty they

had earlier projected to the world" (295). He's skeptical of people's present self-ascriptions of knowledge because he's seen enough de-converters later give negative evaluations of their prior self-ascriptions of knowledge (296).

Here is an objection to the content of DeRose's suspicion. Surely, if God exists, at least *someone* knows that God exists: God. And if one of the major monotheistic world religions is true, then some major prophets will likely know that God exists. If Islam is true, no doubt, Muhammed knew that God exists. If Judaism is true, then Abraham and Moses no doubt knew that God exists. If Christianity is true, then Jesus, Peter, Paul, Mary, and other members of the early church knew that God exists. So, we should only think that nobody knows God exists if Christianity (and Islam and Judaism) are false.

Now, perhaps DeRose meant to restrict his claim to humans who are alive today. Maybe Moses knew that God exists, but what about you and me? I'll suggest a way by which we *could* know that God exists, but I'll be in a better place to do that *after* my discussion of Baker-Hyitch's paper, to which I now turn.

Baker-Hyitch's "Testimony amidst Diversity" was my favorite paper in the volume. I have the most to say about it, perhaps because it most overlaps with my own research. He first notes that many religious beliefs are based primarily on testimony. He then investigates whether such beliefs are unreliably formed (even if they are true). He examines three ways to interpret "reliability"—as *sensitivity*, *safety*, and *statistical reliability*—and argues that testimony-based religious beliefs could have all three of these epistemic goods. It follows that *if* certain religious beliefs are true, then they probably are reliably formed. (*Very roughly*, S's belief that p is *sensitive* if and only if if p were false, then S wouldn't believe p. S's belief that p is *safe* if and only if S couldn't easily have falsely believed p [or propositions similar to p]; S's belief that p is *statistically reliable* if and only if S's belief is produced by a statistically reliable process. More precise, but lengthier, definitions are on 185.)

At this point, it will be useful to place Baker-Hyitch's paper in the larger dialectical context of the religious epistemology literature. This will help us to appreciate both the predecessors of some of its ideas and also the ways in which Baker-Hyitch breaks new ground. In *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford University Press, 2000), Alvin Plantinga famously argued that *if* Christian belief is true, then it is probably warranted. Plantinga drew attention to his now well-known view that the warrant of Christian belief depends on its truth. In Plantinga's terminology, the *de jure* (positive epistemic status) question about Christian belief depends on the *de facto* (truth) question. If Christian belief is true, Plantinga argues, then the Holy Spirit is likely to be involved in the formation of many Christian beliefs. And if *that* is so, Plantinga argues, then such Christian beliefs are likely to meet his proper functionalist conditions on warrant.

We can see that by arguing that certain religious beliefs would be reliably formed *if* those beliefs were true, Baker-Hyitch is drawing from

Plantinga's useful (and now seemingly obvious) point that *de jure* questions about religious belief can depend on *de facto* questions. We can also see that Baker-Hytech breaks ground in at least two ways. First, since he is not wedded to a *proper functionalist* theory of warrant, he can instead ask whether religious belief, if true, is likely to have other positive epistemic properties than those mentioned in Plantinga's proper functionalist theory, such as safety, sensitivity, and statistical reliability. This is important since many epistemologists are interested in these properties and also think they are necessary for warrant. Second, Baker-Hytech explores whether those forming their religious beliefs by way of *ordinary human testimony* would have these positive epistemic properties; he doesn't imagine them forming their beliefs by way of the direct testimony of the Holy Spirit or some other divine method. So, we see how Baker-Hytech owes some of the framing of his discussion to Plantinga's but also moves beyond it.

The main reason Baker-Hytech considers for thinking that religious belief is unreliably formed, if based on human testimony, is that such testimony-based processes produce beliefs in a great number of contradictory religious systems. In reply, Baker-Hytech carefully argues that many religious beliefs—especially monotheistic ones—would be sensitive, safe, and formed by statistically reliable processes (if true). He imagines Jane, who believes Christianity primarily on the basis of her parents' testimony and the Bible (185–186). Baker-Hytech notes that, given Christianity's truth, it is likely that the beginning of the testimonial chains that resulted in Jane's Christian beliefs was God's activity in the early church. He then carefully argues that this makes it probable that Jane's Christian belief would be sensitive, safe, and statistically reliable. In the process, Baker-Hytech again breaks new ground. For example, when exploring sensitivity, he examines both impossible as well as possible worlds; when exploring safety, he is sensitive to the various bases one might hold fixed when examining nearby worlds; when assessing statistical reliability, he is sensitive to work on the generality problem. His effort, to me, was convincing.

Baker-Hytech then argues that the testimony-based religious believer can avoid defeat that comes from awareness of religious diversity. A *monotheistic* religious believer, like Jane, could have a good argument that her belief is likely to be reliably formed *if true*. The reason is that if there is an "extremely powerful, knowledgeable, and morally good deity," then it is likely that that such a being would have "ensured the reliable testimonial dissemination of the core tenets" of that religion (196). Nontheistic religions would have no deity playing that role. Jane would thereby have a symmetry breaker between herself and believers in nontheistic religions.

Lastly, despite all the nice things Baker-Hytech says about a testimony-based believer like Jane, he reveals a downside: Jane could not have *reflective knowledge* of her religious beliefs, i.e., she can't know that she knows. He writes,

[W]hile there is good reason to think that the truth of any one of the major monotheisms makes it overwhelmingly likely that God acted specially in

order to bring about revelatory events at the beginnings of the relevant testimony chains, it is far from clear that the truth of any of these belief-systems makes it especially likely that God would engage in special promptings intended to result in second-order beliefs (199).

Even if Jane's Christian belief *is* reliably formed, Baker-Hytch argues, she would still have no reason to think that her belief is reliably formed.

Now to discussion. I'll first make a point about the *scope* of the believers to which Baker-Hytch's argument will apply. If Christianity is true, then, as Plantinga argues, a great many Christian beliefs are not formed by ordinary human testimony. Rather, the Holy Spirit's own testimony and instigation will be involved in Christian belief formation. Now, this point is minor since Baker-Hytch's argument is still worth considering for those Christian and non-Christian religious believers who *do* only believe by way of ordinary human testimony. Plantinga's view tells us nothing about the warrant-status of Christian beliefs that were not directly instigated by the Holy Spirit. And even if the Holy Spirit is at work in the formation of *every* Christian belief, it's still worth exploring what the warrant-status of Christian belief would be if the Holy Spirit weren't so active and was instead only directly active at the beginning of the testimonial chain.

My second point is an objection. I challenge Baker-Hytch's claim that Jane has no reason to think that her belief is reliably formed, even if it is based on human testimony. Baker-Hytch takes himself to have argued that <if Christian belief is true, then it is probably reliably formed>. There is nothing that prevents Jane from being apprised of Baker-Hytch's argument for this conditional. Suppose also that Jane's belief that <Christianity is true> *is* reliably formed (as is supposed in Baker-Hytch's scenario). Then Jane can perform a simple *modus ponens* inference and conclude that her Christian belief is probably reliably formed. So, Jane can have good reason to think her belief is reliably formed; hence, it seems that reflective knowledge *is* open to her. So, I agree with nearly all of Baker-Hytch's claims, but I don't agree with the one that claims that Jane couldn't have reflective knowledge.

Lastly, let us return to DeRose's paper. Plausibly, if Christianity is true, then the apostles *knew* God exists. Many Christians today, like Jane, are directly linked by testimony to some of those apostolic knowers; the testimonial chain is only one link long in the case of Jane reading her Bible, and it is a bit longer in the case of Jane hearing from her parents. Furthermore, if Baker-Hytch's arguments are correct, then Jane's Christian belief is probably safe, sensitive, and reliably formed. The combination of these properties, along with its testimonial origin, provides a good case for thinking Jane's Christian belief is warranted, and hence, that she knows God exists. So, even if DeRose is correct that religious experience (and philosophical argument) is not enough for theistic knowledge, Baker-Hytch's argument suggests that ordinary testimony is enough.