

**Kelly James Clark and Michael Rea (eds.)**

*Reason, Metaphysics, and Mind: New Essays on the Philosophy of Alvin Plantinga.*

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This book is the product of a conference on the occasion of Alvin Plantinga's retirement from the University of Notre Dame in May 2010 (he has since continued teaching at Calvin College). Wisely, for both the conference and the book, it was organized to have eight lectures and responses to them rather than as a less-focused litany of papers. Additionally, a ninth lecture by Nicholas Wolterstorff, without a response, is reproduced in the book, and the editors also provide an introduction. The lectures are not intended to be direct reflections on Plantinga's work, but rather original research in fields that Plantinga's *oeuvre* has opened up. Another connecting thread is that the contributors are all friends of Plantinga, or people he has taught or mentored.

The book starts with Michael Bergmann's account of the problem of evil. More specifically, Bergmann seeks to reconcile commonsensism with skeptical theism, since any form of skepticism would seem to be contrary to the common sense acceptance of certain beliefs. There is a deeper problem lurking, however. Skeptical theism seeks to absolve God of the evil in the world by pointing out that we are not in a position to know God's motives for allowing such evils to take place. The theist's position—that God can use evil, even great evil, to bring about a redeeming good—expresses skepticism toward the claim that the evil present in a contemporary act or state of affairs will produce evil in a future state of affairs. But as long as *that* is rejected, it translates to our own actions as well: how do we know that the good acts we perform will lead to a good state of affairs, or that the evil acts we perform will lead to an evil state of affairs? And if God can allow evil so that good may result, why can't we? 'Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—'Let us do evil that good may result'? Their condemnation is just!' (Rom. 3:8 NIV) The skeptical theist must maintain that a current evil state of affairs will have an ultimate good result (that God will bring about), but that we can only act with the current evil in mind. Bergmann argues that there is no genuine incompatibility here, and that when we analyze the issue in more detail, the problem reveals itself to be merely superficial. Stephen Wykstra offers some criticisms of and corrections to Bergmann's argument, but from a position not far removed from Bergmann's.

The second article, by Thomas Flint, argues that the concept of accidental necessity actually comes in several different types. This has a great deal of relevance for Molinist studies, primed by Plantinga's 'rediscovery' of middle knowledge. Flint's focus is on the necessity of past events, and what restrictions (if any) this places on contemporary choices of free agents. Thomas Crisp provides some criticisms, to which Flint responds.

Next is Trenton Merricks's exposition on singular propositions, something relevant to the modal realism defended by Plantinga in *The Nature of Necessity*. Merricks goes over several objections to the prevailing position on singular propositions, concluding that the prevailing position is in fact false. David Vander Laan, largely in agreement with Merricks, offers a few points of fine-tuning to the latter's account.

Ric Otte's essay, 'Theory Comparison in Science and Religion', offers some interesting points. He suggests that much work in philosophy of religion today addressing how the evidence of

evil should affect our assessment of the plausibility of Christian theism employ the ‘Standard View’, which in turn consists of two assumptions. First, the ‘Core Assumption’ holds that in assessing the probability of a hypothesis, we should not assess the hypothesis as a whole, but instead focus on ‘some central propositions that are entailed by’ the hypothesis, ‘and look at the relevance of the evidence to them’ (87-88). Otte, however, gives a few reasons for rejecting the Core Assumption: for example, if used in science, it would lead to unacceptable results. Another assumption common to contemporary philosophy of religion studies is the ‘Probabilistic Assumption,’ that rationality requires the individual to adjust his beliefs in response to objective (or perhaps epistemic) probability. This also fails, since, i.e., it cannot take into account non-propositional evidence, which is certainly relevant to what rationality dictates we should believe.

With the two assumptions failing, the Standard view fails as well. Otte proposes likelihoodism in place of Bayesian probability assessments, as likelihoodism ‘does not require any knowledge of the prior probabilities of the hypotheses’ (95). He then assesses the rationality of Christianity on the evidence of evil both with the Standard View and without it. Bas van Fraassen comments particularly on Otte’s appeal to Plantinga’s *sensus divinitatis*, a sense by which one gains knowledge of God, parallel to how our physical senses provide us with knowledge of the physical world.

Chapter 6 is Ernest Sosa’s ‘Descartes and Virtue Epistemology’. Sosa has contributed papers to several books on Plantinga, and many of them show the development of his epistemology and his continued focus on Descartes: obviously the present essay is no exception. Plantinga has presented his naturalized epistemology as a rejection of the internalist foundationalism championed by Descartes, but Sosa suggests that Descartes cannot be shoehorned into this category. Rather, he sees Descartes as something of a virtue epistemologist. This makes the theories of knowledge advocated by Descartes and Sosa very similar to Plantinga’s in some senses. For example, Sosa’s discussion of aptness and meta-aptness (119-20) is very reminiscent of Plantinga’s distinction between design and purpose in the second chapter of *Warrant and Proper Function*. Raymond VanArragon comments on further connections between the Sosa/Descartes epistemology and Plantinga’s supernatural naturalized epistemology.

Plantinga is famous for saying that Christian scholars should pursue their interests without having to stop every now and then to make their investigations palatable to those who do not share their convictions, since this would stand in the way of serious philosophical reflection on Christian doctrines. His reflections on the problem of evil, therefore, put it in a distinctly Christian context by employing Christ’s atonement. Accordingly, Eleanore Stump’s essay on the atonement fits well in this collection. She focuses primarily on the satisfaction and substitution theories, most associated with Anselm and Aquinas respectively, before pointing out their flaws and the difficulties they have in accounting for the elements of the problem that the atonement presents. E.J. Coffman responds by defending the Thomistic position against some of Stump’s objections.

Up next is Peter van Inwagen’s account of ‘Causality and the Mental’. As Plantinga has defended mind-body dualism, van Inwagen presents some of his ‘extreme ideas about ontology’—specifically about the physical, the mental, and causality—and how they relate to the issue of mental causality. His three theses are ‘that mental and physical states have no causal powers, that there are no events, that there is no such relation as causation’ (169). He believes his positions on these subjects allow him to avoid some of the major objections to physicalism, although it is questionable whether a devout physicalist would find van Inwagen’s assurances comforting. Robin

Collins provides some comments, specifically challenging whether van Inwagen's three theses really do all that he claims of them.

Dean Zimmerman argues in favor of 'simple foreknowledge' to bring us back to the issue of Molinism. One of the primary objections to simple foreknowledge, which rejects the counterfactuals on which Molinism relies, is that it is not providentially useful. In order for God to choose one state of affairs over another, he has to know what *would* happen under both circumstances—these are the counterfactuals that simple foreknowledge denies. Zimmerman adroitly argues that simple foreknowledge can be reframed in such a way as to give it significant usefulness in providential matters. In doing this, he contrasts his view not only with Molinism, but with theological determinism, and the open theism position that denies any foreknowledge on God's part whatever. The open theist wants a God who *risks*, but Zimmerman argues that simple foreknowledge meets all the qualifications that the open theist would want. Zimmerman's paper is thus 'the record of [his] reluctant journey' (176) toward the view that open theism does not offer significant benefits over simple foreknowledge, while simple foreknowledge does offer benefits that open theism cannot. Donald Smith objects to some of the arguments Zimmerman presents against more standard views of simple foreknowledge.

The final chapter, and the final presentation at the conference, is by Nicholas Wolterstorff, who has been close friends with Plantinga since 1950. Wolterstorff's essay is an excellent account of how Plantinga changed the face of philosophy, showing us where philosophy was in the 1950s and 60s, and the unique contribution that Plantinga has brought to it by someone who has lived through it all from a very close vantage point. A version of this essay was published in *Faith and Philosophy* 28/3 (2011).

This volume, as a whole, is an excellent contribution to those interested in any of the fields Plantinga has revolutionized: philosophy of religion, metaphysics, epistemology, etc. The only downside, and a very minor one, is that most of the essays include a short postscript of the authors' replies to their commentators. Unfortunately, it is placed at the end of their essays and *before* their commentators', thus requiring the reader to skip ahead a few pages, and then to skip back. But this minor formatting issue should not get in the way of the reader's appreciation of the outstanding scholarship on display in this volume. It serves to encourage us to further research the topics discussed, the philosophical works of the contributors, and those of Alvin Plantinga himself.

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