

**Colin Ruloff, ed. *Christian Philosophy of Religion: Essays in Honor of Stephen T. Davis*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015. Vii + 374 pp. \$65.00 (hbk).**

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This collection includes essays on a wide array of topics in philosophy of religion and philosophical theology. Since the papers are presented in honor of Stephen T. Davis, it is no surprise that the book reflects the eclectic interests of the honoree. Davis has written influential articles, chapters, and books on the Trinity, Incarnation, resurrection, atonement, the divine nature, the metaphysics of human persons, arguments for God's existence, religious epistemology, revelation, and Scripture—so it is fitting to find papers on these topics brought together. So not every essay may be of interest to a reader (unless they happen to have as wide-ranging of interests as Davis), but there is something for everyone (or at least anyone interested in philosophy, theology, religion, or biblical studies).

The book is divided into four sections. The first section, "Doctrine and Christian Belief," includes papers on redemption, Incarnation, and resurrection. The second section, "The Nature of God and Christian Belief," discusses the Trinity and several divine attributes such as simplicity, aseity, and immutability. Section three, "Reason and Christian Belief," has essays on religious epistemology (including some novel approaches concerning testimony and the role of narratives), natural theology (specifically the moral argument for God's existence), and arguments defending substance dualism against materialism. The final section, "Scripture, Theology, and Christian Belief," deals with the role of the hiddenness of God in Scripture (and its impact on the problem of evil), revelation, and authority. The diversity of topics makes this collection great for scholars interested in one of these areas, but it may also help students and novices in such areas get their feet wet with serious yet accessible works.

In this review, I want to focus on two chapters that I believe can yield fruitful and interdisciplinary discussion (many other chapters do so as well, but I merely highlight these two since they were particularly interesting to this reviewer), and I will then briefly mention some connections between certain chapters and current work in contemporary philosophy of religion and philosophical theology.

Let me first consider Brian Leftow's chapter "Against Materialist Christology." A materialist Christology is any view that takes God the Son either to have some material object as a (proper or improper) part or to be constituted by some material object (whereas a dualist Christology denies this). His discussion primarily focuses

on the version that identifies God the Son with some human body B (a view labelled 'ID' for the identity thesis), though he shows that some of these arguments can be applied to the other variants of a materialist Christology. Leftow offers a barrage of arguments against ID. For one, he advances an apparent conflict between the data of Scriptural revelation and ID. Scripture states that God is spirit (John 4:24, Colossians 1:15) and that no one has ever seen God (John 1:18), where such statements seem to imply that God is immaterial. However, if ID is true, then God is not spirit and can in principle be seen since God the Son, being identical to B, can be seen. In defense of ID, why not suppose that the text is referring to God the Father? Here is Leftow's response:

But [God the Son] spoke of the Father as Father quite freely, and so when He uses "God," not "Father," plausibly He means to refer to God, not the Father, or if the two are in some way one to refer to that one under the concept of God, not under the concept "Father" expresses (67).

But this piece of Biblical exegesis is too quick. After all, there are occasions in which Jesus is recorded as asserting utterances including 'God' which seem to refer to the Father—such as the cry from the cross "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me" (and even though he is citing the Psalms, it seems to be a plausible interpretation that he is appropriating the line and declaring this to the Father). Or perhaps 'God' in the relevant texts refers to the divine nature (construed either as a concrete entity or as an abstract entity).<sup>1</sup> What would be helpful is closer exegetical examination of the relevant texts to see whether the interpretative spin Leftow provides must be accepted, otherwise the tension he raises is not as problematic as he makes it out to be.

Consider another alleged problem for ID. The human body B that ID theorists identify with God the Son (henceforth, 'GS') died. But GS could not have ceased to exist (the Trinity doesn't temporarily become a Binity), so Leftow claims that various problems then arise for ID—such as having to accept double Incarnational events, gappy Incarnational existence, or the lack of the Spirit's role or assistance in resurrecting B (to name some of the problems). However, even if GS = B, it is open to ask whether B is essentially a body (or if B must be a living body such as an animal, whether an animal is essentially an animal). However, such a claim has been denied (at least suggestively) by Merricks,<sup>2</sup> the only defender of ID (as far as I'm aware). If B is not essentially a body, then not only can GS survive incorporeally, but so can B. So a full critique of ID would require additional metaphysical discussion of the relevant modal claim.

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<sup>1</sup> The divine nature—taken as abstracta—might be regarded as a collection of properties; if so, then it is not a substantive claim to say that the divine nature cannot be seen or is immaterial, since even a human nature—taken as abstracta—would also be immaterial and such that it could not be perceived.

<sup>2</sup> Trenton Merricks, "A New Objection to A Priori Arguments for Dualism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 31 (1994): 81-5.

One final argument from Leftow's interesting chapter will be discussed. What would happen to B if GS became discarnate (suppose the death event took place), but immediately after B's life was restored without GS being incarnate as B? The ID theorist might say that since GS has left, then so has B (and hence it is incorrect to state that "B's life was restored" but rather we should claim that another life very similar to B's is brought about). But Leftow claims that this is implausible, for "[e]very material part of B remains intrinsically just as it was...[God the Son's] decamping makes no physical change in any part or relation between parts" (70-1). However, an ID theorist that has sympathies with animalism (whether of a hylomorphic variant or not) might claim that a substantial change can take place even if there is no empirically detectable change—that is what happens when a living body dies and a corpse takes its place. Or those who accept a non-branching psychological continuity theory of personal identity can say that a new person/substance can spring into existence when fission occurs even without any intrinsic changes. Or that is what would happen, under some theories of Incarnation, if God the Son were to decouple himself from the living body (or soul + body composite)—for a new person would come into existence even though the living body (or soul + body composite) underwent no detectable changes. So the ID response to this problem should not be immediately regarded as implausible.

Given the large number of arguments marshalled against the various versions of materialist Christology, there is plenty of room for further investigation into each argument and the various exegetical, theological, and philosophical issues that arise. Leftow, then, has done a great service in giving us much to think, talk, and write about.

Another discussion-provoking chapter is the contribution by Dale Tuggy, "On the Possibility of a Single Perfect Person." Although most Christians accept the doctrine of the Trinity (as explicated in the early councils and creeds) on the basis of revelation or tradition, some contemporary philosophers such as Steve Davis and Richard Swinburne (as well as historical thinkers such as Richard of St. Victor) have proffered arguments to show that the Godhead must contain within itself a plurality—i.e., that a single perfect person is impossible. Here is one way of making the case for such an impossibility. Suppose God exists and is perfect in the way that a perfect being theologian would conceive of God. The key claim is that a perfect being needs to experience "peer love," which is "a kind of interpersonal relationship between friends who in some sense regard one another as equals" (133). To miss out on peer love would be a kind of deficiency or lack that a perfect being could not have. As such, the enjoyment of peer love by God requires either that God necessarily creates such a peer or that necessarily there is an uncreated peer. Since many in the tradition of perfect being theology regard God as freely choosing to create in the sense that he did not have to create at all, then it follows that the enjoyment of peer love by God requires that necessarily there is an uncreated peer. But prior to creating anything, there is only God. Hence, there is a plurality in God.

Without much surprise, Tuggy (who is not a Trinitarian in the traditional sense) denies the premise that a perfect being needs to experience peer love. His main contention is that there seems to be no good reason to accept such a premise. Swinburne and Davis, *inter alia*, suggest that missing out on such a high good such as peer love would make God less than perfect. However, Tuggy avers that there are

some goods that God can lack and yet nevertheless be perfect—for example, the great good of being the creator and sustainer of “a loving community of worshipful human beings” (135). If God could not miss out on *any* great good, then God would have to create a universe with humans, which is contrary to the traditional claim that God freely creates. Indeed, there are some goods (even some very great goods) that God can lack without being deficient in a way that threatens divine perfection. Being a biological parent is surely one of them, and it is a good that God lacks but doesn’t threaten divine perfection. Hence, the defender of the necessary plurality in the Godhead will have to distinguish between which goods do so threaten and which ones do not. Again, this will require some continued theological and philosophical exploration into the nature of a perfect being.

Moreover, Tuggy asserts his inability to find any contradiction in a “Lone God Scenario”, in which there is a unipersonal, perfect being. Here is his description of the scenario:

A perfect, divine person exists but doesn’t create (or otherwise generate or give existence to) anything else. He’s just there, timelessly beholding and loving himself, but not anyone else. He’s a perfectly loving being—just as much as he would be were he to whip up some creatures, so as to have an object of love beyond himself. He’s all-knowing, and so can perfectly imagine what it’s like to love another. But he doesn’t experience any such relationship, as only he exists. This god is perfect, yet perfectly alone (ibid.).

However, there is a difference between seeing that there is not a contradiction and not seeing that there is a contradiction. Now Tuggy does consider the view that suggests that persons or selves are necessarily relational, and hence it would be incoherent to talk of a single person (whether divine or not). What must be shown is that a self is essentially relational (in the sense that it must be, in some sense, properly related to something other than itself), and Tuggy claims that “no one has done this, anywhere in the vast theological literature” (142). Although there are theological discussions concerning “being as communion” (cf. the Trinitarian work of John Zizioulas) or persons as substances-in-relation (cf. the personalist Thomism of W. Norris Clarke), Tuggy’s piece does well in inviting further considerations to bolster either the key premise of the argument for divine plurality or the case for the incoherence of the Lone God Scenario.

Finally, I want to mention some of the chapters that can serve as excellent introductory essays to current controversies in philosophy of religion and philosophical theology. First, William Lane Craig’s chapter “God and Abstract Objects” is an example of rigorous metaphysics and its connection to understanding the divine nature. The bulk of the chapter involves criticisms of Quine’s indispensability argument (and its variant by Burgess and Rosen) for abstract entities. One might think metaphysical discussions concerning abstracta are irrelevant to theology, but if the arguments for the existence of abstract entities succeed, then divine aseity may be threatened. Whether or not aseity is threatened by the existence of abstract objects has led to much recent work, some of which can be found in Paul Gould’s (ed.) *Beyond*

*the Control of God?* and Craig's forthcoming *God Over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism*.<sup>3</sup>

Linda Zagzebski's chapter "Faith and Testimony" provides her own approach to an assurance model of testimony by distinguishing between theoretical reasons and deliberative reasons, and she explores its relevance to the notion of faith. This chapter serves as a nice introduction to issues that she expands on in her book *Epistemic Authority* as well as some of the current philosophical discussions on the nature and value of faith (cf. Callahan and O'Connor *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*).<sup>4</sup>

Kelly James Clark's "Narrative and Natural Theology" and Marguerite Shuster's "The Hidden Hand of God" are accessible for those unfamiliar with contemporary issues regarding the problem of evil and divine hiddenness, and both exhibit the value of thinking of narrative generally or the narrative of Scripture in religious and philosophical discourse. The role of narrative has become influential in discussions concerning evil and divine hiddenness, and readers might be interested in moving next to Stump's *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* or Adam Green & Stump's *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief: New Perspectives*.<sup>5</sup>

Scholars and students will benefit greatly from this book, but *Christian Philosophy of Religion* will also serve as an excellent gateway to some of the major topics and controversies in current philosophy of religion and philosophical theology—both in its content as well as in methodology (a wide variety of approaches in philosophy, theology, and religious studies is exhibited in this collection). Davis has spent a career advancing novel arguments and views, and though he may not have convinced us of all of them, he has forced the Christian academic community to think harder and to refine carefully one's own positions and reasons. So this book justly honors the man as it forces its readers to do the same.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Gould, ed., *"Beyond the Control of God"? Six Views on the Problems of God and Abstract Objects* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014); William Lane Craig, *God Over All, Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Linda Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012); Laura Frances Callahan and Timothy O'Connor, *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Adam Green and Eleonore Stump, eds., *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief: New Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).