

Book notes

EDITED BY MARTIN STONE

Eleonore Stump and Michael J. Murphy (eds.) *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998). Pp. xvi + 485. £15.99 Pbk.

Based around the study of the central issues of the philosophy of religion, this volume contains a comprehensive collection of classic texts and contemporary articles. Together, these works provide an accessible and expansive introduction to English-speaking philosophy of religion. The editors' policy of introducing the subject by means of topic rather than by individual or chronology makes the volume suitable for a wide range of undergraduate courses. The topics selected not only include standard subjects in philosophical theology such as the divine attributes, but also subjects like divine hiddenness, the nature of revelation and the problem of hell. These are accompanied by sections on the proofs, religious epistemology, and that proverbial old chestnut, the problem of evil. Lest it be thought that the volume presents a very particular view of the philosophy of religion, a view which reflects a distinctively Christian bias, the editors, quite sensibly, devote large sections of their anthology to questions concerning pluralism, gender issues and ethnic diversity. The inclusion of these topics within the confines of the volume can be said to present an inclusive approach to the problems and issues of the philosophy of religion. Such an approach will no doubt be welcomed by those teachers and students who are not entirely at home with the orientation of contemporary English-speaking philosophy. The editors preface each of the sections with clear and instructive commentary, gently introducing the issues and pointing out areas of difficulty and intractability. A guide to further reading is provided, thereby offering the student a means whereby he or she can pursue the issues at further length. The volume is well produced by Blackwell and, given its length, attractively priced. It will no doubt be adopted by many undergraduate courses in the philosophy of religion.

[M.W.F.S.]

James F. Sennett *The Analytic Theist: an Alvin Plantinga Reader*. (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998). Pp. xviii + 369. £15.99 Pbk.

Very few would doubt the influence that Alvin Plantinga has had on the direction of contemporary philosophy of religion. In areas such as philosophical theology, religious epistemology, and so-called 'Christian philosophy', the voice of Plantinga is much in evidence by virtue of its articulate defence of seemingly redundant theses, and its advocacy of novel theories and positions. Sennett's edited collection of essays and excerpts (many of them already acclaimed as standard works in their fields) provides the most comprehensive overview of Plantinga's work to date. His volume will be welcomed by most students, teachers and researchers in the philosophy of

religion. The impressive sweep of Plantinga's achievements are on full display. We meet his much cited reformulation of the ontological argument, his endlessly discussed version of the free will defence, as well as his interventions into more specific topics in philosophical theology. For much of the last twenty years, Plantinga's work has been in religious epistemology. His attack on foundationalism and his sceptical criticism of the claims of natural theology under the guise of 'Reformed epistemology', receive full attention in the volume with the reprinting of most of his seminal essays. This section is especially timely given the near completion of Plantinga's *magnum opus*, the three volume work on warrant. While Plantinga's general reputation as an epistemologist, metaphysician and philosopher of religion is secure and probably lasting, his contribution to the development of so-called 'Christian philosophy' will always be the object of controversy. The last section of Sennett's volume treats this aspect of Plantinga's work, reprinting his famous or infamous (depending on your point of view) lecture 'Advice to Christian philosophers'. Given that this lecture advocates the development of a 'philosophy' which is first and foremost to be put at the service of the 'Christian community' (whatever that may be), this section will be of less interest to readers who do not share Plantinga's confessional beliefs or his views on the scope and point of philosophy. It is clear from the editor's introduction, perhaps regrettably so, that he sees this aspect of Plantinga's thought as one of the most important, (see xvi). The editor's enthusiasm for 'Christian philosophy' often leads him to praise Plantinga in terms that are reminiscent of the worst excesses of unreflective hagiography. That said, Sennett's tome is sure to find to place on the shelves and in the hearts of most philosophers of religion for having made accessible, in a commodious form, the work of an individual who was caused us all to think and think again.

[M.W.F.S.]

Brian Davies O. P. (ed.) *Philosophy of Religion: a Guide to the Subject*. (London: Cassell, 1998). Pp. x + 400. £19.99 Pbk.

Given the profusion of introductory books and anthologies on the philosophy of religion, one is tempted to ask publishers to call a general moratorium on their production in order that we can all draw breath and reflect upon their efficacy and use. Such a desirable state of affairs is unlikely to come about, however, given the commercial pressures that exist within academic publishing. It appears that all publishers seek the much coveted prize of producing a textbook that will dominate 'the market'. If we must accept such textbooks and anthologies as a fact of modern academic life, then we need to have in place criteria by which such books can be judged and compared. Perhaps the best way to judge any textbook is to examine how well it succeeds in accomplishing the aims and objectives it sets for itself. Brian Davies's volume aspires to be different from most other anthologies in that it seeks to be seen as a reliable historical guide to philosophical speculation about God from the ancient Greeks to the present day. To this end, the volume begins in Section I with five short pieces that aim to narrate the story of the engagement of 'philosophy' with 'religion' from the Greeks to the demise of foundationalism. By no means an easy task to accomplish, for one is left with the impression that the forty-one pages devoted to it by the editor is far from sufficient. There is a pressing need for this type of historical material in an accessible and balanced anthology, and it is to be regretted that Davies and his companions do not offer more exacting guidance in

this area. The volume would surely have done a great deal to justify its existence had it sought to make its contents palpably different from other recent textbooks and guides. As it is, its treatment of these historical issues is far too skimpy to be of much use.

The next sections of the volume encompass standard topics such the existence and attributes of God. There is much to commend in some of these sections, with the contributions by Paul Helm and Gerard Hughes S.J. standing out as models of simple and illuminating instruction. The remaining sections deal with religious language; creation, providence and miracles; the problem of evil; faith and revelation; philosophy and Christianity; morality and religion; life after death; world religions; and science and religion. While not without interest, these sections are too light and devoid of analytic content to be of real use in the instruction of the student beginner. And it is difficult to see how they might present further guidance to those already partially acquainted with the issues. In sum, while Davies's volume is not wholly lacking in merit, its gaps and omissions and refusal to dwell at length on the historical issues militates against a full acceptance of its publishers' brag that it is '[a] concise and comprehensive single-volume introduction to the philosophy of religion'.

[M. W. F. S.]

Allison P. Coudret, Richard H. Popkin and Gordon M. Weiner (eds.) *Leibniz, Mysticism and Religion*. (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998). (International Archives of the History of Ideas, Vol. 158). Pp. vii + 198. NLG 180. £61 Hbk.

This interesting collection of essays attempts to challenge and then to change existing perceptions of Leibniz and the religious and mystical dimension of seventeenth-century philosophy. Treating such formerly *recherché* topics as Leibniz's occult sources, his interest in mysticism, the Kabbalah, Chinese philosophy, and his general attitude to 'enthusiasm', the authors provide a new set of insights into Leibniz's thought and the cultural context in which the philosopher lived. Their lively conclusions will attract a good deal of comment and discussion, not only among specialists of Leibniz but among more general students of seventeenth-century religious philosophy. The individual essays bring forward the discussion of primary texts and materials. In this respect the essays by Stuart Brown 'Some occult influences on Leibniz's *Monadology*' and Donald Rutherford 'Leibniz and mysticism', seek to challenge existing representations of Leibniz's philosophical intentions and theological allegiances in the *Monadology* and elsewhere. Moreover, there is much disagreement among the authors, making the volume a forum for conjecture and debate. This tendency is especially evident in the contributions by Daniel J. Cook 'Leibniz on enthusiasm' and Ursula Goldenbaum 'Leibniz as a Lutheran'. What emerges from the pages of debate is a portrait of Leibniz as religiously curious; a man with an insatiable appetite for all kinds of religious knowledge whether it be derived from the traditional methods of theological demonstration or from the esoteric quarters of mysticism. While this book will appeal to Leibniz scholars, it will also be of value to readers interested in the more general question of the relation between science and theology in the seventeenth century.

[M. W. F. S.]

James L. Halverson *Peter Aureol on Predestination: a Challenge to Later Medieval Thought*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998). (Studies in the History of Christian Thought, Vol. 83). Pp vii + 188. NGL180. £78 Hbk.

As is well known to students of medieval thought, by 1300 theologians and philosophers had established a consensus concerning predestination, stating that God predestines without regard to human causes but reprobates with regard to sin. In the fourteenth century this consensus was shattered, first by those who argued that God also predestines on account of human causes, and then by those who asserted that God does nothing of the kind. The first part of Halverson's book examines the theology of the much ignored but highly gifted thinker Peter Aureol (c. 1288–1322), who broke with the older tradition on predestination. The second part traces the impact of his theology on late medieval thought. Given the importance of these issues to a proper understanding of philosophical theology in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Halverson's book is to be welcomed. It contains copious and lengthy quotes from Aureol's texts and offers sensible commentary on them. While not entirely at home with the more philosophical aspects of the predestination debate, Halverson shows himself to be adept at sketching the context in which these debates took place. He is well informed about the late thirteenth-century antecedents to discussions found in Aureol, and he makes a series of interesting connections between Aureol and other thinkers of the time. In the second part of the book Halverson shows that Aureol's work is deserving of greater time and attention, since his work can be said to be part of a more general reaction to 'traditional' teaching on predestination, a reaction that was to reach fruition in the Reformation. While the book occasionally infuriates with its wooden and awkward style of writing, it nevertheless puts forward an interesting and convincing picture of Aureol. Of particular interest is Halverson's account of late medieval voluntarism and its connection to many important debates in theology and moral psychology. It is to be hoped that Halverson's timely book will provoke others to examine Aureol's contribution to later medieval thought at greater length.

[M.W.F.S.]