
IN ADDITION TO AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY WRITTEN BY THE editors, this volume contains eleven essays comprising five sections: ‘Testimony and Miracles,’ ‘Design,’ ‘Evil,’ ‘Pascal’s Wager,’ and ‘Faith and Disagreement.’ In the introduction Chandler and Harrison provide a helpful overview of the eleven other essays along with a description of how the essays both contribute to a long tradition of philosophical questioning about God and religion (with emphasis on the conversation that has ensued since Hume) and exemplify certain contemporary trends in analytic philosophy of religion. They also comment, unsurprisingly, on the benefits (as well as potential pitfalls) of formalization in philosophy of religion. The arguments in the eleven essays differ both in the degree to which they depend on formalization and in the level of complexity of the formalization involved. The essays also differ in the degree to which controversial assumptions about probability or decision theory (e.g., subjective Bayesianism, a “structure-description” approach to inductive logic, etc.) are assumed or are needed for the arguments to succeed.

At the end of the introduction, the editors comment on what they take the future direction of philosophy of religion to be—highlighting the importance of “the diversity of religious conceptions available” (19) and the fact that the purview of the questions addressed in philosophy of religion is expanding. I take the editors to be correct in making both these claims, although it is difficult to see how many of the essays in this volume contribute in any substantial way towards moving philosophy of religion in either of these directions. That being said, the volume does provide a useful introduction to a number of important ways in which
probability is being used to address long-standing questions in the philosophy of religion and is a valuable resource for those interested in learning about the use of probability in the philosophy of religion.

The first section, ‘Testimony and Miracles,’ includes essays by Benjamin C. Jantzen, Timothy and Lydia McGrew, and Luc Bovens. In “Peirce on Miracles: The Failure of Bayesian Analysis,” Jantzen takes up and defends some of the objections C. S. Peirce offers against a Bayesian approach to assessing historical testimony, while in the McGrews’ “The Reliability of Witnesses and Testimony to the Miraculous,” a Bayesian approach to assessing witness reliability and the accuracy of testimony about miracles is defended over a Condorcet approach. The section ends with Bovens’ essay, “Does it Matter Whether a Miracle-like Event Happens to Oneself Rather than to Someone Else?” Bovens frames the matter as a debate between the “loggerheads” William James, who answers the titular question in the affirmative, and William Alston, who answers in the negative. Bovens seeks to “vindicate James against Alston” (73) by focusing on the evidential role played by the protocol (i.e., the information generating process) through which the evidence is acquired. In considering how different individuals may acquire information about a miracle-like event, Bovens identifies two such information-generating processes by which one might acquire information about the occurrence of a “miracle-like event.” The first, the Beatist protocol, is the protocol of an individual who learns of the occurrence of a miracle-like event by consulting a reliable, in-the-know third party (referred to by Bovens as a prophet) about whether or not a miracle-like event has happened to someone the prophet knows. (A feature of the Beatist protocol included to make the formulation easier is that the prophet will share, at most, the name of only one individual to whom a miracle-like event has happened.) The second, the St. Paul protocol, is the protocol of the individual who is not interested in whether or not a miracle-like event has happened to someone else, and learns about the occurrence of a miracle-like event because the miracle-like event happened to him
or her. Bovens goes on to show that the evidentiary force of learning about the occurrence of a miracle-like event is greater on the St. Paul protocol than on the Beatist protocol. He also shows that on the St. Paul protocol the occurrence of a miracle-like event happening to oneself will impact one’s credence level more than it would if the miracle-like event had happened to someone else. (It seems hard to see how this could be otherwise, considering that on the St. Paul protocol one is not interested in whether or not miracle-like events happen to others.) From this Bovens concludes that “it is perfectly reasonable to let miracle-like events that happen to myself have more evidential value than miracle-like events that happen to someone else,” and that “this vindicates James over Alston” (73).

Bovens is certainly right in claiming that protocols can and should play a role in the evidential force of the information acquired. This is particularly true in situations where one can’t help but receive information via a particular protocol. Bovens is also certainly right in claiming that on the St. Paul protocol the evidentiary force of learning that a miracle-like event has happened to oneself will be greater than it would be on the Beatist protocol, and that on the St. Paul protocol the evidentiary force of learning that a miracle-like event has happened to oneself will be greater than the evidentiary force of learning that a miracle-like event has happened to someone else. However, I do not take these facts to “vindicate James over Alston.” This is because what determines whether or not one obtains information about miracle-like events through a Beatist protocol or a St. Paul protocol is one’s interest in whether or not miracle-like events happen to others and one’s willingness to allow the occurrence or non-occurrence of such miracle-like events to count as evidence for or against God’s existence. Another way to put the problem is that the important points of disagreement between James and Alston are over which protocol is the correct one to adopt in the first place. If one assumes that both protocols are equally respectable options, the interesting normative questions go unaddressed. In addition, given that openness to new evidence is typically considered an epistemic
virtue and often, to a certain extent, even an epistemic duty, one could reasonably argue that we all have reason to be Beatists because the Beatist is looking for evidence in more places than the St. Paulist. A successful argument for this claim would seem to vindicate Alston over James.

The second section—‘Design’—contains articles by David H. Glass and Richard Swinburne. Glass’ “Can Evidence for Design be Explained Away?” explores ways in which biological and cosmological evidence can confirm the hypothesis that living organisms are the result of design by God despite the existence of alternative (and potentially true) explanations of the evidence. While needlessly complex in places, Glass’ article provides a well-informed overview of contemporary design arguments, and a good example of ways in which Bayes’ theorem can be used to assess how strongly some set of evidence confirms a design hypothesis. In “Bayes, God, and the Multiverse,” Swinburne addresses the question of whether or not the existence of a multiverse would render the hypothesis that God designed the universe unnecessary. Swinburne concludes that it does not, in large part because he takes the hypothesis that the universe is designed by God to be much simpler than the hypothesis that there exists a multiverse of the type that would include universes fine-tuned for life. Like some other recent work in philosophy of religion, the role of simplicity plays a crucial role in determining how likely it is that God exists.¹ I take there to be much more interesting work to be done in addressing what role simplicity—and other factors that may be used to determine the “intrinsic probability” of God’s existence—should play in determining the credence one should give to the hypothesis that God exists. Swinburne’s well-articulated view on the matter at the very least provides a good starting-point for such an examination.

Section three, ‘Evil,’ includes papers by Richard Otte and Michael Tooley. In “Comparative Confirmation and the Problem of Evil,” Otte makes the strong claim that neither evil nor our ignorance of a good reason for God to permit evil should be taken by a theist to be evidence against God’s existence at all (or, at least that this is the case if one adopts either a Likelihoodism or Bayesianism about the nature of evidence). Tooley makes a strong claim in the opposite direction in his essay, “Inductive Logic and the Probability that God Exists: Farewell to Skeptical Theism,” stating that “relative to evidence that consists simply of facts about the evils to be found in the world” the existence of God is extremely unlikely (146). Tooley’s argument breaks roughly into two steps. First, Tooley makes a case for Carnap’s “structure-description” approach to inductive logic, and, second, he utilizes this approach to inductive logic to construct an inductive argument from evil in which the conclusion is that the likelihood that God exists is very low.

Section four, ‘Pascal’s Wager,’ opens with the essay, “Blaise and Bayes” in which Alan Hájek carefully formalizes and critically assesses the different versions of Pascal’s Wager. The section closes with an essay by Paul Bartha, “Many Gods, Many Wagers: Pascal’s Wager Meets the Replicator Dynamics,” in which Bartha uses decision-theoretic tools to try and “resolve many of the difficulties associated with the many-gods objection” (189). Both Hájek and Bartha’s essays are excellent examples of how probability and decision theory can be used to advance philosophical discussion.

The final section, ‘Faith and Disagreement,’ contains essays by Joshua C. Thurow and Lara Buchak. In “Does Religious Disagreement Actually Aid the Case for Theism?” Thurow begins his case by arguing that there are situations in which the Equal Weight View—i.e., roughly, the view that in cases of disagreement with an epistemic peer one ought to give equal weight to both one’s own position and the position of one’s peer—does not lead to both parties suspending judgment, but rather to both parties
holding the same positive position. To motivate this position, Thurow gives the case of two detectives, Gary and Isaac, who disagree about whether or not Kelly is guilty of murder. Gary and Isaac both agree that a certain body of evidence e makes it quite likely that Kelly is guilty of murder. Both also know of a witness who claims to have seen Kelly elsewhere at the time of the murder, and both agree that if the witness is reliable, this overpowers the body of evidence e and makes it quite likely that Kelly is innocent. However, Gary and Isaac disagree about the trustworthiness of this witness. Isaac trusts the witness and thus thinks Kelly is innocent, while Gary does not trust the witness and thus thinks Kelly is guilty. Gary and Isaac have all the same evidence and both take themselves to be epistemic peers when it comes to assessing the implications of bodies of evidence like e as well as when it comes to assessing the trustworthiness of witnesses. What should they believe? Thurow says that Gary and Isaac should recognize that their disagreement about Kelly’s guilt “stems entirely from their disagreement about the trustworthiness of the witness” (212) making that disagreement in some sense the more fundamental disagreement. Thurow goes on to argue that on the Equal Weight View (EWV) Gary and Isaac should suspend judgment about whether or not the witness is reliable, and that once they have suspended judgment about the reliability of the witness that they should both believe that Kelly is guilty because “[b]oth Gary’s and Isaac’s overall evidence, once they have suspended judgment about the trustworthiness of the witness, favors the claim that Kelly is guilty” (212).

This last move—which is crucial for Thurow’s intended application for theistic belief—strikes me as mistaken. The reason for this is that if Gary and Isaac are being consistent, they would both agree that the following two conditions are true: (1) if the witness is reliable, then I should believe that Kelly is innocent, and (2) if the witness is unreliable, then I should believe that Kelly is guilty. While these two statements are logically compatible with believing, (3) if I suspend judgment about the reliability of the witness, then I should believe that Kelly is guilty, given (1) and (2),
accepting (3) seems to be an odd position to take at best. If we assume that in suspending judgment about the reliability of the witness both Gary and Isaac assign a credence somewhere in the neighborhood of .5 to both the claims that “The witness is reliable” and “The witness is unreliable,” then it seems problematic to say that they should affirm the consequent of (2) when they think that the antecedent of (1) is roughly as likely to be true as the antecedent of (2). To be fair to Thurow, he puts forward his theory with modesty, writing: “While intuitions differ on whether or not Gary and Isaac should suspend judgment, in my informal polling more people agree with me than disagree. While not guaranteeing that my view is right, this minimally shows that we ought to take it seriously; and thus that it is worthwhile to investigate what would follow from it for the EWV” (222). The second part of Thurow’s article provides some initial speculation of what might follow in the case of theistic belief if this view is right. Thurow’s conclusion is a mild one—if this take on the EWV is right, then it may end up that we should all rationally be theists or atheists. But it would take a good deal of work to sort out how such a thing would occur.

The volume ends with Buchak’s interesting essay, “Can it be Rational to Have Faith?” in which she addresses the relationship between faith and practical rationality with the aim of developing “a unified account of statements of faith concerning mundane matters and those concerning religious faith” concluding that “there need be no conflict between faith and rationality” (225). This article—like the rest of the volume—provides much food for thought for both the earnest believer and the earnest religious skeptic.

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