

BOOK REVIEWS

Kirk Lougheed (ed.), *Four Views on the Axiology of Theism: What Difference Does God Make?*

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Debate surrounding the axiology of theism has blossomed in recent years, and Kirk Lougheed is establishing himself as a key figure within the growing movement exploring the comparative value of world-views. Lougheed's edited collection of essays, *Four Views on the Axiology of Theism: What Difference Does God Make?*, is an accessible and well-written work that contains contributions from four exceptional philosophers, along with the responses of each contributor to the work of the other three. This structure is one of the best features of the book; it generates a collaborative and spirited discussion in written form. The collaborators Lougheed has drawn together are certainly well-qualified for the task, and the result is a philosophically exciting and engaging read that provides a refreshing and insightful exchange about the integral question of whether or not it is better that God(s) exist(s).

Lougheed begins with a clear and helpful introduction that sets the scene by conveying a comprehensive overview of the field, laying out the current debates and offering useful and succinct summaries of each chapter. Lougheed's style is easy to follow, even for the reader who is new to the topic of axiology. As well as effectively describing an up-to-date account of the debate, Lougheed voices several important concerns about methodology, including a worry about counter-possibles: specifically, the issue of whether the axiological question is worthy of discussion, since surely if God exists, God exists in every possible world. Drawing on Guy Kahane's earlier work, Lougheed develops the counter-possible concern and proposes that we can overcome it by viewing scenarios as *epistemically possible worlds*. Lougheed also helpfully distinguishes between *rational preference* and *axiological judgment*. These preliminary considerations are crucial to bear in mind and give the reader a deeper understanding of the subsequent chapters. In line with other pioneering philosophers of religion, Lougheed stresses the importance of exploring the axiology of a variety of belief systems rather than simply comparing theism to atheism, recognizing that alternative concepts of God and a variety of non-Abrahamic religions ought to be given the attention they deserve within the debate.

Each contributing author gives a preliminary explanation of the different views in the axiology debate. This enables each chapter to be well-contextualized even when read out of order, while resulting in some overlaid explanations if the book is read from start to finish. I will now give a brief overview of each chapter along with some of the responses posed to each.

In chapter 2, Michael Almeida, the first of the contributing philosophers, considers the axiological question through the lens of the comparative value of theistic worlds. Specifically, Almeida wonders whether it would be better if the pluriverse includes a God. He proposes that theistic modal realism – the view that an Anselmian God exists ‘from the standpoint of every world’ (20) – offers unrivalled theoretical advantages since unlike alternative world-views, it provides a full explanation for the whole of creation. After offering a comprehensive explanation of theistic modal realism, Almeida responds to three potential challenges: Jonathan Bennett’s objection of modal fatalism, the challenge of the impossibility of divine ultimacy, and the challenge from moral indifference. Almeida counters each of the objections effectively and concludes that theistic modal realism is more axiologically compelling than its alternatives because it ‘offers us theoretical advantages unmatched by the discovery of a host of lesser gods scattered throughout the pluriverse’ (20). Moreover, he claims that the existence of an Anselmian God in the pluriverse is the best possible outcome, since this provides explanatory completeness. In response to Almeida, Travis Dumsday maintains that, if all possible worlds exist, surely there would be many ‘hellscape’ – worlds that contain extreme everlasting suffering; Perry Hendricks suggests that establishing narrow impersonal pro-theistic positions is an easy feat; and Graham Oppy proposes that perhaps evil in the pluriverse does not exist necessarily.

Chapter 3 illustrates to the reader just how challenging the axiology question can be when evaluating diverse views like polytheism and pantheism. In this chapter, Dumsday provides a thoughtful discussion of the axiologies of pantheism and polytheism with the aim of expanding the ‘contrast classes’ (the world-views that we compare when exploring the axiological question). Dumsday acknowledges that his hypothesis is a modest one and aims only to provide a ‘plausible lay of the land on which other interested parties can build’ (59). As Dumsday notes, there are so many different versions of polytheism and pantheism that it is impossible (or at least extremely difficult) to make general claims about the axiology of each world-view. After providing a helpful conceptual groundwork, he adopts a specific non-personal version of pantheism to discuss whether it is better that a pantheistic God exists. He then offers an axiological evaluation of personal, non-naturalist polytheism. His conclusion is that we ought to be agnostic about both world-views. As Dumsday himself observes, it would be fruitful to acknowledge that several recent types of pantheism are personal in nature. I am inclined to disagree with Dumsday’s modest opinion that his conclusion is ‘rather uninspiring’ (71). Rather I think his work *will* inspire others to inquire further into the axiologies of pantheism and polytheism. In response to Dumsday’s chapter, Almeida raises concerns about the coherence of the metaphysics of pantheism, and Hendricks and Oppy question whether pantheism comes with particular benefits/detriments relating to rights violations, after-life, and universe governance, among others.

Hendricks’s chapter defends pro-theism through the lens of sceptical theism. Hendricks compares the axiology of sceptical theism with theism and anti-theism, tackling the question of whether sceptical theism undermines both personal and impersonal anti-theism. Interestingly, he aims to demonstrate that it undermines both. Crucially, if Hendricks is correct, it means that every individual ought to be a pro-theist. The main claim Hendricks uses to argue his case draws on Eleonore Stump’s notion that there are unsurpassable goods that theism enjoys but that atheism does not: specifically, the unsurpassable good of everlasting life with God. According to this line of argument, ‘the good of being in union with God’ (105) is a good that cannot be trumped. Responding to Hendricks, Almeida argues that there are strong reasons to reject the standard sceptical theist’s concept of evil, which leaves the door open for some world in which one has good reason to prefer a godless world; Dumsday recommends specificity about the type of theism one is endorsing, as Hendricks seems

to assume a Christian afterlife; and Oppy worries that sceptical theism leads to another, unconvincing type of scepticism.

The final chapter is Oppy's attempt to argue for narrow anti-theism. He contends that since, in his opinion, theism is impossible, it makes no sense for him to desire God's existence. Oppy highlights the important point that one cannot desire something that one believes to be impossible. He takes the strategy of evaluating big pictures, 'philosophical theories of everything' (141), and argues that we cannot rationally desire impossible big pictures. In response, we might claim that there is value in considering impossible big pictures (I could rationally consider, for example, whether I would rather the Tooth Fairy or Father Christmas exist, or whether I would rather be omniscient or omnibenevolent). Though it reduces the axiology debate to a complex game of 'would you rather', it is an interesting inquiry, nonetheless. Hendricks, taking this line of thought, claims that we can still consider our desires for fantasies, even if they are impossible (the axiology of impossible big pictures becomes an exercise in dreaming the impossible dream, to paraphrase the Man of La Mancha). Almeida suggests that we could reframe the axiology debate by comparing the value of (i) a world where we *discover* that we live in a world in which God exists and (ii) a world in which we discover that we live in a world in which God doesn't exist. Dumsday argues that the axiology question has an upshot that Oppy doesn't consider – that it can help others to determine their axiological preferences.

Overall, this book invites the reader to enter an academic conversation with a group of outstanding scholars. It is a superb addition to the literature and a worthwhile opportunity to read the responses of each primary author to the critique and feedback from other contributors. The replies provide a useful dialectic, and the arguments presented in the text are original, interesting, and diverse. Accordingly, this book will be of immense value to philosophers of religion interested in the burgeoning wealth of literature on the axiology of world-views. With any luck, it will encourage others to become involved in the ongoing discourse and propel this area of study into the forefront of the philosophy of religion. I would even go so far as to say that one in which this book exists is a better world than one in which it does not.

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Jordan Wessling *Love Divine: A Systematic Account of God's Love for Humanity*

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It is clear that divine love is an important philosophical and theological topic. Divine love is foundational to reflection on the nature of God driven by reason and reflection on the concept of a perfect being. Divine love is also central to specifically Christian theological