

Charles Taliaferro and Elsa J. Marty, eds.
A Dictionary of Philosophy of Religion.
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Charles Taliaferro and Elsa J. Marty have produced an excellent resource for students, scholars, and general readers in the philosophy of religion. The philosophy of religion is such a rich area in the history of philosophy, with the works of so many thinkers touching on the subject matter in myriad ways, and so many intriguing ideas, arguments, and themes extending across many thinkers, movements, and eras, that a dictionary providing a snapshot overview of the whole subject area is to be warmly welcomed.

The entries in this volume are written by a wide variety of scholars from a diversity of backgrounds. The material covers the philosophy of religion, very broadly conceived, and includes not only subjects that one would normally regard as belonging to traditional philosophy of religion, such as the arguments for God’s existence, the problem of evil, the nature of religious experience, and the relationship of religion to morality, but also material from theology, science, and world religions, where relevant. Most of the entries are short (and perhaps intentionally err on the side of brevity) consisting of at most a few sentences, which befits the title of “dictionary” (rather than encyclopedia), yet some entries are longer as demanded by the complexity of the topic (some examples are those on the fine-tuning argument, humility, Ricoeur, and transubstantiation). Topics covered range over terms, essential concepts, philosophers, theologians and other key thinkers, historical movements, and the diversity of religious traditions.

The entries are written in a straightforward style and are obviously crafted to be accessible to the non-specialist and general reader. Here for example is the entry on natural theology: “Reflection and argument on the natural world to learn about God’s nature and will. Natural theology differs from revealed theology, which reflects on God and the world on the grounds of what is believed to be divine revelation, e.g., the Bible or the Qur’an.” And the entry on epiphenomenalism: “The thesis that the physical world affects the mind or the mental, but not vice versa. On this view, the mental is like the sparks caused by a machine or the suds of a beer or the foam of a wave in which the key causal contributor is the machine, the beer or the wave.” And finally the entry on theodicy: “From the Greek *theos* ‘god’ + *dikē* ‘judgment’ or ‘right.’ A theodicy is an account of why an all-good, all-powerful, all-loving God allows (or does not prevent) what appears to be the evil of or in creation.” These three contributions provide a flavor of the style and length of the entries. About a quarter of the entries are longer, and there is helpful cross-referencing throughout.

In the area of reference publishing these days, one mostly sees encyclopedias or works that contain longer reference pieces (e.g., essays), so a dictionary is a welcome addition to this literature. It is a resource that one can pick up and get an answer from immediately, without having to work through a longer article. Both formats have their place, of course, but students, pastors, and general readers will find the dictionary format especially useful. I suspect that

specialists may occasionally read an entry in this volume and wish for more exposition, or note where additional points could be made, but further elaboration would cause the contributors to stray from the dictionary format. There are other works that provide fuller discussions, and both should be part of one's library!

The editors have attempted to make this as comprehensive a reference work as possible by including a helpful introduction which provides an overview of the discipline of philosophy of religion, including brief expository overviews of the concept of God, the arguments for God's existence, the problem of evil, religious pluralism, and atheistic challenges to religion. They note along the way an interesting but probably little known historical fact: that the first use of the term "philosophy of religion" seems to have been in the work of the English philosopher, Ralph Cudworth (1617–1688). The Introduction also helpfully provides what is a very extensive list of journals, book publishers, and other venues, where topics in the philosophy of religion are either fully or partly the focus, and this impressive list is a reminder once again of how popular the subject is today. There are a number of reasons for this popularity, but, as one of my colleagues once pointed out to me, an important reason is that the philosophy of religion is the one area of philosophy in which people have a quite natural interest, and where they find the questions and topics of discussion of great practical significance, something that is not always the case with other areas of philosophy, notwithstanding the best intentions of philosophy instructors. In keeping with the theme of being a one-stop resource, the book concludes with an extensive bibliography arranged according to the main areas of the discipline.

This book is the first dictionary of philosophy of religion that I know of to appear in many years. It takes its place alongside two similar, but different, works that nicely complement this one: Anthony Thiselton's *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Philosophy of Religion* (Baker 2002) and C. Stephen Evans's *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics and Philosophy of Religion* (InterVarsity 2002). Anyone who studies or teaches the philosophy of religion, or who has a general interest in the subject, will find Taliaferro's and Marty's book a very welcome, indeed indispensable, addition to their libraries.

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