

**Andrei A. Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa, eds.** *Alternative Concepts of God: Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine*. Oxford University Press 2016. 288 pp. \$74.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780198722250).

God has been understood, by the prevailing approach of the Abrahamic traditions, as ontologically distinct from the universe. The ontological relation between God and the universe has been usually seen, by contemporary analytic philosophers of religion, through the lens of this *traditional theistic* conception of God. However, this conception is not the only possible—and may be not even the best—one. Just to mention two other possibilities, *Pantheism* identifies God with the universe and *panentheism* suggests that God properly includes, but is not identified with, the universe. In fact, there is a relatively wide spectrum of alternative conceptions of God which have been badly neglected in contemporary philosophy of religion. *Alternative Concepts of God* is a brilliant attempt to compensate for this drawback. The book is a collection of fifteen papers by a group of prominent philosophers. Many different views about God's relationship with the universe and their implications have been discussed in this book.

The collection is divided into five parts. Part I is devoted to the discussion of pantheism. It opens with Peter Forrest's defense of 'Personal Pantheism.' Analogously to non-reductive physicalism that identifies a human person with her body without reducing the mental to the physical, Personal Pantheism identifies God with the whole universe (which can be considered as the divine body) without denying that God has intellect, senses and will (23).

Karl Pfeifer's contribution sketches a panpsychistic account of pantheism. His proposal is based on two foundational elements: First, he suggests that 'God' is a mass noun (like 'gold' and 'butter'), rather than a count noun (like 'cup' and 'pencil'). God can be metaphorically understood as referring to a substance of which (everything in) the universe consists (43). This understanding motivates pantheism. Second, Pfeifer argues that intentionality—which is, according to him, 'the mark of the mental'—is nothing but (a specific type of) physical dispositional properties of objects (44). This opens up the possibility that mentality can pervades everything. Pfeifer builds up his panpsychism relying on this possibility.

John Leslie's begins with a discussion of the most fundamental philosophical question: 'Why does the world exist?' (50). It exists, he argues, because there is an ethical requirement for its existence; because it is a good thing to exist. Leslie justifies this answer by endorsing the Platonist thesis that a need for a thing to exist has itself a creative power (at least in some cases). It can bring that thing into existence or can guarantee its eternal existence (53-6). An immediate consequence of this view is that the world must be constituted from those things whose existence is good. But 'no entity,' Leslie believes, 'could be better than an infinite mind which eternally contemplated everything worth contemplating' (57). He argues, moreover, that the existence of such a mind, given its omnibenevolence and omnipotence, entails the existence of infinitely many more minds of the same type, and nothing else. These minds contemplate infinitely many mathematical facts and 'the structures of infinitely many universes, perhaps obeying infinitely many slightly different physical laws' (58). Such a totality forms Leslie's idealist pantheistic concept of God.

Naturalistic pantheism (NP) identifies God with a universe that 'at its basic level consists entirely of the basic entities of physics, and its laws are only those of physics' (66). Brian Leftow argues that God understood in the sense of NP is not worth worshiping. Therefore, NP cannot provide a tenable concept of God.

Part II of the book is devoted to three essays that develop or critique versions of panentheism. Yujin Nagasawa presents a version of modal panentheism (MP) that is implied by the

conjunction of modal realism—i.e., the thesis that ‘all possible worlds exist to the same extent that the actual world does’—and the thesis that ‘God is the totality of all possible worlds’ (MP) (91). In his insightful essay, Nagasawa argues that by endorsing an alternative interpretation of the notion of greatness we can show that MP, like traditional theism, is based on the Anselmian definition of God (92-4). Nagasawa shows that MP preserves many properties that are traditionally attributed to God—e.g., omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, eternity, omnipresence, etc. (95-6). It solves, moreover, some of the most challenging problems in the philosophy of religion—e.g., the problem of evil, the fine tuning problem, the timing problem for the beginning of universe, etc. (96-100).

John Bishop and Ken Perszyk provide a careful analysis of the difficulties that different problems of evil produce for different concepts of God. They themselves propose and argue in favor of a version of euteleological pantheism which identifies God with the ultimate supremely good *telos* (end, purpose) of the Universe (119). Their approach is, however, brilliantly criticized by Marylyn McCord Adams in the following chapter. Evaluating different understandings of the notion of final cause (130-5), she argue that there is no tenable euteleological conception of God. She suggests Bishop and Perszyk to ‘bring personal omni-God back again’ (143).

Part III deals with some further alternatives to traditional theism. Inspired by John Foster, Charles Taliaferro defends a version of theistic idealism. He starts by telling a short story about ‘an intellectual climate change at Oxford’ through which ‘the once monolithic ordinary language philosophy’ (defended by Gilbert Ryle and his progeny) gives way to allow some sort of theistic idealism (defended by John Foster) (147-8). By contrast with the mainstream naturalistic philosophy of mind, Taliaferro argues for not only the ontological distinction of the physical and the non-physical (mental) but also the primacy of the latter over the former (150-7). This position provides a strong motivation for idealism in the sense that all that we recognize as material exists in virtue of mind and mental experiences. However, these experiences are not self-sustained; they (and the whole cosmos) are sustained by God’s mind (161). That is what makes Taliaferro’s idealism theistic.

J. L. Schellenberg’s thought-provoking essay aims at providing a temporally stable conception of God that is both less detailed than the well-known alternative conceptions of God—e.g., pantheism, panentheism, etc.—and less vague than those conceptions which put God entirely beyond any detailed representations and indeed beyond human thought—e.g., John Hick’s idea of the ‘Real’ (165). Schellenberg’s proposal is *ultimism*. On this view, God is ‘a reality ultimate in three ways: metaphysically, axiologically, and soteriologically’ (166). Schellenberg offers an evolutionary argument to show that the ultimistic conception of God is more favorable than the traditional personal conception of God (173-5).

The possibility of religious fictionalism is sympathetically considered by Robin Le Poidevin. In this framework, the truth-value of religious claims—including the claims about God’s attributes—are determined by virtue of the content of a relevant fiction, rather than by virtue of the way the world is independent of our linguistic behaviors, beliefs and religious practices.

The focus of Part IV is God’s causal relation with the world. Willem Drees defends a non-spiritual pantheistic conception of the divine that is intended to be consistent with ‘a science-inspired naturalism’ (211). He accepts that the divine must have at least two metaphysical and axiological functions. But his naturalistic pantheism renders the divine as a Ground of existence—rather than a personal Creator of the universe—and as a view *sub specie aeternitatis*—rather than a Supreme judge (210).

In an engaging essay, Andrei A. Buckareff points out that there is a tension between theological realism about divine agency and the traditional conception of God as an immaterial

being who is not located in space-time. Hugh J. McMann provides a worth contemplating account of the role of God—as creator or primary cause of all that exists—in how our free actions come about. He rejects any kind of theological determinism, but still believes that God is the primary cause of our actions and decisions.

The final part of the collection contains two naturalism-friendly essays. Inspired by Samuel Alexander, Emily Thomas develops a version of emergentism—i.e., the view ‘that the universe exhibits a hierarchy of emergence that may have developed through evolution’ and God is or will be emerged from the universe (256).

The collection ends with Eric Steinhart’s essay on the shared framework of different versions of religious naturalism. He argues that all religious naturalists endorse the theses ‘(1) that all religiously significant objects are natural and (2) that some natural objects are religiously significant’ (274). Moreover, they argue for the existence of some natural creative power within (at least some of) these five contexts: (I) the *concrete* context which is associated with nature in the largest and deepest sense, (II) the *physical* context which is associated with our universe, (III) the *chemical* context associated with our solar system, (IV) the *biological* context associated with the earth, and (V) the *personal* context with individual human animals.

In sum, this collection successfully clarifies the advantages and disadvantages of some of the most significant alternative concepts of God over the traditional theistic concept. It opens up a way for some concepts of God from Eastern religions or mystical interpretations of Western religions to come under discussion in contemporary analytic philosophy of religion that is currently under the dominance of the traditional Abrahamic (or, more precisely, Christian) conception of God. The collection is highly recommended to everybody interested in philosophy of religion. All the articles are worth reading.

**Mohammad Saleh Zarepour**, University of Cambridge