

**William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 627 pp. \$150.00
(hbk)**

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Analytic theology has, since its inception, been a metaphysics-heavy enterprise. Indeed, a brief perusal of the contents of *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (i.e. a predecessor to the present volume under review) reveals as much. My noting this emphasis on metaphysics is not a criticism, for the fruits of Christian analytic metaphysics have been widespread indeed. Nevertheless, developments in epistemology have been at least as significant in many respects as those in metaphysics, and thus, the comparative rarity with which they emerge in discussion in contemporary theology is unfortunate.

Such a lament, however, has in recent times become less apt, for with the release of *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, we now have a text which ably introduces its audience of theologians, scriptural scholars, and philosophers to a broad class of epistemological concerns for theology. No one writing in analytic theology should remain wholly ignorant of its contents, which hail from many of the best epistemological and theological minds today.

Due to constraints of space, in this review I provide a sampling of one of the best articles from each of the four sections included in the handbook. I begin with Sandra Menssen and Thomas D. Sullivan's "Revelation and Scripture", followed by Jason Baehr's "Virtue", Scott M. Williams's "John Duns Scotus", and close with Harriet A. Harris's "The Epistemology of Feminist Theology".

In "Revelation and Scripture" Sandra Menssen and Thomas D. Sullivan develop a framework from which a non-believer might assess the Christian revelatory claim. That claim, as construed by Menssen and Sullivan, includes the proposition that Jesus is God's revelation, as are the propositions of the various creeds.

Along the way, Menssen and Sullivan provide much helpful advice to the non-believer interested in understanding Christian faith. For instance, they point out that many facts, which they call CUE-facts (i.e. Conditional Upon Explanation), are the sorts of propositions that one would accept only if a reasonable explanation for their truth might be advanced. And plausibly the Christian revelatory claim consists of many such facts. Moreover, Menssen and Sullivan emphasize that a framework for evaluating evidence might additionally reveal other places to look for further evidence of Christianity in the way that Mendeleev's development of the periodic table of elements pointed him to the discovery of further elements. Keeping such features in mind while assessing evidence for the truth of Christian claims is indeed wise counsel.

Despite the many helpful points made along the way, I found this chapter lacking in the following ways. First, in the discussion of the method a non-believer ought to adopt in evaluating the Christian revelatory claim, Menssen and Sullivan advance an understanding of inference to the best explanation (IBE) that needs to be significantly expanded. To see why, they describe IBE as committed to the idea that when one hypothesis explains the data (Christian revelatory claim) better than an alternative, we may justifiably infer that the hypothesis is *probably* true. This principle obfuscates an epistemically important distinction between believing that p is probable as opposed to believing p simpliciter or having some degree of belief n in the truth of p . Given the very quick dismissal of Bayesian epistemology in this section, such an obfuscation seems at least unfortunate.

Second, throughout the chapter Menssen and Sullivan presuppose that the faith of Christianity is fundamentally doxastic. This comes out especially clearly in the section concerning the epistemic standards relevant to assessing the Christian revelatory claim where they defend the claim that “we are to *wholeheartedly* believe” the Christian revelatory claim as a requirement of Christian faith. This is supposed to be a difficulty since such belief is required even if the Christian revelatory claim is only marginally more probable than not (i.e. at least, say, .51 probable). However, the idea that Christian faith fundamentally requires belief-that, as opposed to acceptance-that or hope-that, needs significant defense (as Lara Buchak’s chapter on faith makes admirably clear).

Lastly, this chapter does not fully address the question of whether one might be able to correctly assess the evidence of Christianity without first *being* a Christian. Many theologians, I imagine, would wonder whether one can rightly assent to Christian doctrine without first having been brought into relationship with the Holy Spirit. If such a relationship is a necessary condition on faith, then it is unclear how the non-believer’s assessment of evidence is to actually bring them into relationship with God. That is, if this theological stipulation is correct, then the account provided by Menssen and Sullivan yields that a relationship with God requires a right assessment of evidence, which further requires a relationship with God. In other words, explanatory circularity is crouching at the door, and some further clarification is needed to cast it away.

When we turn to questions concerning the place of virtues in epistemology, there are few (if any) theoreticians better suited to answering them than Jason Baehr. In his contribution to the volume, Baehr argues that *moral* humility (MH) is an intellectual virtue within the domain of theistic inquiry. The argument proceeds in a fairly straightforward manner. First, Baehr defines MH as “a habitual or practiced awareness and responsible acknowledgement of one’s broadly practical limitations, weaknesses, and mistakes” (228). He then calls attention to the moral vice of human pride (HP), which has four elements that serve to undermine our epistemic reliability when dealing with questions of theism; namely, self-righteousness, self-sufficiency, radical autonomy, and epistemic closedness. Next, Baehr conceptually illustrates how MH helps to reduce the bad epistemic effects of HP, thereby demonstrating that MH is in fact an *intellectual* virtue (i.e. a character trait that makes it easier to get to truth (221-222)) in the case of theistic inquiry.

Although I have very few qualms with the general thrust of Baehr’s argument, there were nevertheless a few worries worthy of note. First, in his discussion of epistemic closedness, Baehr, following several philosophers before him, focuses on remarks by Thomas Nagel to the effect that his objection to the existence of God amounts to frustration with the existence of some sort of cosmic authority. Though Nagel is an apt example to which

theistic philosophers can appeal to illustrate the epistemic effects of HP, I think it is worth discussing, at least, cases of HP that are less transparent to a person characterized by HP. Indeed, such a characterization is probably the most common form of HP for many people in the church and academy, and thus, a caution of such covert forms of HP would be beneficial.

A more serious concern, however, has to do with the definition of MH offered by Baehr. There is a degree of intuitiveness in defining humility in terms of recognizing one's limits, but it is worth asking whether such a definition would provide a reasonable description of the sort of humility characterized by Jesus in Philippians 2. Perhaps a being with no limits might trivially count as possessing MH on this construal, but I doubt that Paul's characterization in Philippians 2 is meant to suggest to his audience that they should imitate Christ's trivial trait of humility. A better alternative, it seems to me, would be to characterize MH as a virtue of *not* attending too much to oneself or being disposed to prioritize others in some way, as opposed to positively attending to one's limits. Nevertheless, for mere humans at the very least, something like MH is indeed a virtue of sorts, even if it is not to be identified with humility as I have suggested. And if so, Baehr's discussion still reveals some important links between the realm of moral virtue and its impact on intellectual virtues in the area of theistic inquiry.

Scott M. Williams's chapter on John Duns Scotus presents, in a brilliantly succinct and informative manner, the contours of Scotus' influential yet too often misunderstood theology. Within that discussion, we find a presentation of Scotus' controversial doctrine of univocity alongside his commitment to a clearly articulated construal of analogy. According to Williams, Scotus does not reject doctrines of analogy (i.e. something he has been falsely represented as doing by certain theologians to whom Williams refers in the chapter), but rather, his doctrine of univocity clarifies that in virtue of which analogies hold. To understand this, let us begin with the doctrine of univocity. According to Scotus, there is a univocal simple concept which goes into the construction of complex concepts and in virtue of which such concepts are analogically related (i.e. rendering the doctrine a semantic thesis rather than an ontological one). For instance, the concepts *finite being* and *infinite being* are both modes of being and are concepts constructed out of the simple concept of *being*. Thus, *being* bears a univocal relation as it is in the two complex concepts of which it is a part. Nevertheless, this is a relation holding between semantic entities and not between some "extra-mental thing" (423). Where does analogy come into play then? The analogical relation is what holds between the two complex concepts, *finite being* and *infinite being*. Thus, it is a modification of some univocal content that renders two complex concepts analogical. In other words, univocity does not eliminate analogy, but rather, makes analogy possible.

Another helpful discussion is to be found in Williams's articulation of Scotus on faith. Clearly, Scotus endorses some sort of cognitive account of the nature of faith that involves belief (or something like belief) that the articles of faith are true. Of particular interest to contemporary epistemologists is an ever so brief discussion of something like a doctrine of assurance in Scotus. When asked whether someone can know demonstratively that they have the true faith, Scotus answers that they cannot. What is it that prevents such knowledge? It is the requirement that such a person know that they have faith which is *true*. When asking the question again but revised to remove the qualification of truth as applied to faith, Scotus then allows that someone *can* know that they have faith, and he also allows that they can *believe* that they have the true faith. This discussion exhibits a sensitivity to avoiding well-known difficulties of levels confusion in epistemology and indicates that some

Scotist retrieval theology might provide fodder for interesting theological reflection on such topics.

Harriet A. Harris's "The Epistemology of Feminist Theology" is at once both extremely helpful as a partial survey of the field of feminist epistemology and irenic as a gadfly of sorts, suggesting that feminist theologians might discover "life and truth" if only they would embrace the paradoxes located at the interface of such dual concepts as subjectivity and objectivity, complexity and simplicity, or fecundity and mortality (603).

In preparation for that argument, Harris begins by offering an admittedly imperfect, though useful, taxonomy of feminist epistemology. As she depicts the terrain, feminist epistemology comes in four different forms. Liberal Feminism (LF) is distinctive insofar as it ascribes differences between male and female "to psycho-social causes" (592). Experience and Women's-Voice Feminism (WVF), on the other hand, reject the "basic sameness between men and women" characteristic of LFs, and they go on to claim that epistemic advantages accrue to those with the female experience (593). WVFs go even further insofar as they claim epistemic advantages for all marginalized groups in a hope to avoid over-generalizing women's experiences (593). And finally, Poststructuralist Feminists (PF) argue based on their claim that "meaning is constituted through language" that the "notions of 'women' and 'women's experience' are false universals, thereby undercutting both liberal and experience feminisms" (596). I recommend careful study of this taxonomy and the commentary provided by Harris to anyone unacquainted with much of contemporary work in either feminist epistemology or theology.

Despite the excellent introductory material, when we turn to the section entitled "Vigilant Subjectivity and Epistemology", we find a discussion where more engagement with contemporary philosophy is needed. Here, we find Harris claiming that "Pursuit of knowledge or truthfulness involves creating norms that abstract from our differences" in a way that is supposed to threaten the fit of vigilant subjectivity with epistemology (598). But the idea that abstracting from differences is essential to epistemology (or even epistemology restricted to a focus on knowledge) overlooks nuances present within many significant epistemological camps, such as, for instance, those interested in responsibilist forms of virtue epistemology or egocentric construals of epistemic rationality (i.e. which build subjective assessments of evidence and experience into the very notion of rationality). At least mentioning these camps of analytic epistemology where vigilant subjectivity and epistemology already come hand in hand would have been quite relevant.

One other minor missed opportunity emerges in Harris's discussion of Charles Taliaferro's work on subjectivity and Nicholas of Cusa (594-596). Although the discussion of philosophical and feminist insights in that section are useful and good, the topic of "God's Absolute Sight as embracing all modes of seeing" as opposed to coming as a divine view from nowhere, would have benefitted from a more direct engagement with *theology* (594). First, engagement with the divine attribute Linda Zagzebski has dubbed omnisubjectivity would have promised a potential way to reconcile Taliaferro's "view from everywhere" with some feminist concerns regarding the sweeping aside of the power relations embedded in our knowledge structures. But second, one also wonders what sorts of implications the doctrine of the Incarnation, along with an appreciation for what it entailed for Christ, might have for concerns about the power relations involved in knowledge structures. Perhaps such topics could be taken up by someone else at a future time.

I regret that I could not provide anything like a comprehensive review of the forty-one articles contained in this fine volume. Despite that, I hope that the above discussions illustrate how well the articles in this handbook balance high-level sophistication with accessibility. This balance is no doubt due in large part to the conscientiousness and patient work of the editors of the volume. We owe a great debt, then, to William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino for putting together such a fine work of scholarship and bringing the world of contemporary epistemology into serious conversation with contemporary theology.