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BOOK REVIEWS

Reason, Metaphysics, and Mind: Essays on the Philosophy of Alvin Plantinga, edited by Kelly James Clark and Michael Rea. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 220 pages. \$85.00 (hardcover)

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In May 2010, hundreds of Alvin Plantinga's colleagues, students, and admirers gathered at the University of Notre Dame for a conference celebrating his career and retirement. The conference made abundantly clear a fact of which readers of this journal are no doubt aware: Plantinga's contributions to philosophy over the past half-century have been seminal and wide-ranging. Nearly all the talks descended from an original contribution that Plantinga made at some point in his career (naturally, each talk had other ancestors as well); and the topics ranged from pure metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of mind, to alloys of those philosophical areas (and still others) and religion. This made for a variegated and rich conference. Naturally enough, the richness of the conference is reflected in its proceedings, recently published under the title *Reason, Metaphysics, and Mind: New Essays on the Philosophy of Alvin Plantinga*. My remarks on each contribution will, perforce, be much briefer than I'd like.

Certain themes or issues that have been close to Plantinga's heart (and mind) made multiple appearances at the conference, and so lend a natural structure to the volume. Two of the papers, Thomas P. Flint's and Dean Zimmerman's, are concerned with complete divine foreknowledge: the former with whether such foreknowledge is consistent with free creaturely action and the latter with (1) whether such foreknowledge is consistent with God's rational deliberation and choice and (2) whether such foreknowledge could, all by itself, offer God any "providential advantage." Flint, in "The Varieties of Accidental Necessity," addresses a schematic version of the usual argument for theological incompatibilism (that is, for the claim that divine foreknowledge of free creaturely action is impossible), one which makes use of the notion of accidental necessity, of something's being in some sense *fixed* or *settled-and-done*. Flint emphasizes that the argument schema he is considering is schematic, in part, because



the term “accidentally necessary” doesn’t pick out a single notion. Flint catalogues several different notions of accidental necessity in his characteristically careful and thorough way; he highlights those that have been employed frequently in the literature, as well as one that he thinks has not been given its due. Flint’s main point is cautionary: once we notice these various notions and the variety of arguments to which they correspond, we should be careful not to attribute to the Molinist (or anyone, for that matter) a reply to *all* the varieties solely because she gives that reply to *one* of the varieties. The Molinist can reasonably take the arguments case-by-case.

Zimmerman, in “The Providential Usefulness of ‘Simple Foreknowledge,’” sides with David Hunt, who has argued that there is no impossibility in deliberating about whether to make *p* true, and rationally choosing to make *p* true, when one already knows that *p* will be true. One can so deliberate as long as one “brackets” one’s knowledge of *p*. And one can so rationally choose, Zimmerman argues, in at least two ways: either one can choose based on some reason *other than* one’s knowledge that *p* will be true (effectively “bracketing” one’s knowledge of *p*), or one can choose based on one’s knowledge of *p* together with a desire not to “rock the boat” or “change the future.” As Zimmerman notes, only the former seems to befit God. So an advocate of complete divine foreknowledge can consistently maintain the rationality of God’s choices, but only if she assumes that God “brackets” some of what he knows when making decisions—in particular, when deciding to make *p* true, he must bracket his knowledge that *p* is true.

Similarly, Zimmerman argues that there is no impossibility in making a decision based on a belief which depends on a future event that in turn depends on the original decision: such explanatory loops are peculiar, but not impossible. Nonetheless, Zimmerman contends, such loops don’t befit God. As Zimmerman claims, “it is impious to suppose God is unable to explain why he makes momentous choices” (181). (Donald Smith, whose commentary on Zimmerman’s paper appears in the volume, disagrees; so does David Hunt. They contend that there is no objectionable explanatory circle here, and so nothing that isn’t fitting for God.) So an advocate of complete divine foreknowledge can consistently maintain the explicability of God’s choices, but only if she assumes that God “brackets” some of what he knows when making decisions—in particular, when deciding to make *p* true, he must bracket his knowledge of any propositions whose truth depends on that of *p*. All this raises questions: how are we to understand this “bracketing” when it comes to God? Given Zimmerman’s strictures on explanatory loops, what foreknowledge, if any, *can* God make use of in his decisions? Importantly, can such foreknowledge provide God with any practical reason and/or any way to avoid risk that would be unavailable without that foreknowledge?

To address these questions, Zimmerman introduces and defines the notion of a “stage” in God’s knowledge. This notion provides a rigorous

account of God's "bracketing" certain knowledge and allows us to see more easily what it takes for a series of divine decisions, some of which are based at least in part on God's knowledge of consequences of others, to be rational and explicable. Zimmerman then helpfully characterizes the difference between theological determinism, Molinism (the thesis that God has comprehensive middle knowledge), and Simple Foreknowledge (the conjunction of the thesis that God has complete foreknowledge with the thesis that God has no middle knowledge) in terms of what stages there *are* in God's knowledge. And the question of whether complete foreknowledge offers any providential advantages over its absence can now be put this way: won't the stages in God's knowledge be just the same whether He has such foreknowledge or not (such foreknowledge mattering only for whether the ordering of stages is solely explanatory or temporal as well)?

No, not obviously, as Zimmerman notes. The stages are likely different as well. If God lacks foreknowledge, then when God is deciding which state of affairs to actualize at *t*, he will not have available any knowledge of free creaturely activity at *t* or later. But if God has foreknowledge, then when God is deciding which state of affairs to actualize at *t*, he can utilize his knowledge of free creaturely activity at *t* or later *as long as that activity does not depend on God's decision about which state of affairs to actualize*. So if, say, God wants to test Adam and Eve simultaneously, but does not want to risk them *both* freely failing the test, there's nothing he can do to satisfy both those wants if he lacks foreknowledge. Armed with foreknowledge, on the other hand, God can "test the waters" by deciding to test Adam at *t*, and then rely on his foreknowledge that Adam won't fail the test (supposing he won't) to decide that He will test Eve at *t*. This does not involve God's decision in an explanatory circle since Adam's passing the test does not depend on God's decision to test Eve.

Zimmerman, however, concludes his essay with the fascinating suggestion that those deniers of God's foreknowledge of free creaturely action who are A-theorists (in the philosophy of time) can recover *some* of the advantages of simple foreknowledge in *some* cases (in Minkowski space-time): God can decide which foliation of Minkowski space-time is a partition into sets of *truly* simultaneous events. Thus, God can so arrange things that Adam's and Eve's tests are simultaneous relative to some inertial reference frame, but such that Adam's test truly precedes Eve's test. This would allow God to utilize His knowledge of the result of Adam's test in deciding whether to test Eve. As Zimmerman intimates, this will work only for those cases (like Adam's and Eve's tests) in which the pair of events do not affect each other because no causal process is fast enough to connect them; if, on the other hand, one is in or on the forward light-cone of the other, and they simply *happen* not to be causally related, then the adherents of Simple Foreknowledge have an advantage than can't be mimicked by its deniers, at least if a "genuine foliation" never contains a pair of co-present events, one of which is located on or in the

forward light-cone of the other. I would add that even in the cases for which Zimmerman's solution is designed, it's not obviously successful: what if God wants Adam's and Eve's tests to be *genuinely* simultaneous but nevertheless to avoid the risk of mutual non-compliance? (Why? God only knows.) Then no amount of gerrymandering will help a God who lacks foreknowledge.

Three of the volume's essays deal with epistemological issues: Richard Otte's "Theory Comparison in Science and Religion," Ernest Sosa's "Descartes and Virtue Epistemology," and Michael Bergmann's "Commonsense Skeptical Theism." Here the connections with Plantinga's philosophical work are drawn even more explicitly. Richard Otte objects to a pair of methodological assumptions which Otte alleges are quite often assumed in the epistemology of religion literature. Moreover, echoing some of Plantinga's own arguments, Otte argues that not only are the two assumptions false, but the fact that they are assumed in the religious context reflects a double-standard, since no one would reasonably assume them in the scientific context. The first assumption, which he calls the "Core Assumption," is that when assessing "the bearing of evidence upon religious belief, we should look at the bearing of evidence upon a certain core of religious belief, instead of the religious beliefs as a whole" (86). For example, when assessing the evidential bearing of evil on Jewish (or Christian or Muslim) belief, we ought to look at the evidential bearing of evil on so-called Austere Theism. The second assumption, which he calls the "Probabilistic Assumption," is that "the probabilities we should use in philosophy of religion are not personal probabilities, but some sort of objective probabilities, conditional upon some agreed upon public evidence. Furthermore, rational belief is closely connected to these probabilities, and these probabilities are accessible by reason alone" (90).

Otte, together with his commentator, Bas van Fraassen, subjects the Probabilistic Assumption to penetrating and multifarious criticism. And it is no surprise that one can attack the Probabilistic Assumption from different vantage points, since it is something of a hodgepodge of controversial ontological, epistemological, and normative theses about probability. In worse shape still is the Core Assumption, which seems to encapsulate obviously unsound methodology. Why when trying to assess the bearing of evidence on a certain hypothesis should one always look at the bearing of the evidence on some specific implication of that hypothesis rather than the hypothesis itself? Indeed, as Otte notes, it is simply false that if some evidence disconfirms (lowers the probability of) a hypothesis H^* , then it disconfirms any hypothesis H that implies H^* : it might well confirm (raise the probability of) H . So, even if evil disconfirms Austere Theism, that doesn't in any way imply that it disconfirms Judaism (or Christianity or Islam); it might well confirm it.

That seems right. But I am not sure how often the Core Assumption, in its full generality, is in fact assumed in philosophy of religion. (I am also unsure how often the Probabilistic Assumption is in fact assumed

in philosophy of religion, but I set that aside.) When critics of particular religions shift their target to Austere Theism, they seem to be making the following very straightforward assumption: if a theory T has as a core, and so obviously implies, theory T^* , then T can be no more probable on one's total evidence than T^* . So when those critics attempt to mount an evidential argument from evil which shows merely that Austere Theism is improbable on a given religious believer's total evidence, and then they go on to infer something about the probability of some specific variety of theism, there is nothing illegitimate going on. If their argument is in fact successful, it will also show that each of the more specific varieties of theism is improbable on that religious believer's total evidence. Otte's singular focus on *confirmation and disconfirmation* of Austere Theism and its more specific varieties has obscured the question of how probable Austere Theism and its more specific varieties *are* given a certain body of evidence. Granted, in order to know how probable Austere Theism is given a certain body of evidence, we almost surely need to know the prior probability of Austere Theism, and Otte seems skeptical about our ability to know that. But Otte can't reasonably fault a philosopher who, taking herself to have a good idea of what that prior probability is—or even, in line with Otte's preference for personal or subjective probabilities, simply to *have* a prior probability assigned to Austere Theism—and hence what the conditional probability of Austere Theism on her total evidence is, *then assumes that the conditional probability of Austere Theism on her total evidence is an upper bound for the conditional probability of each of its more specific varieties on her total evidence*. There is nothing methodologically unsound about that further assumption. Otte simply goes too far when he concludes, "The core of a theory is basically irrelevant to the rationality of believing the theory" (90).

Ernest Sosa makes the case that Descartes's epistemology is a close forerunner of Sosa's own well-known variety of virtue epistemology. He argues that "Cartesian certainty" is not a matter of how confidently a belief is held, or even that confidence in conjunction with how well-evidenced the belief is. It is, rather, "*superlative aptness: it is a belief's getting it right through perfect competence that leaves no room for error*" (115). Much of the essay will be familiar territory for those who have read Sosa's epistemological work before, but Sosa's commentator, Raymond VanArragon, adds an original and fitting discussion of the relationship between Plantinga's notion of warrant and Sosa's notion of reflective knowledge. In particular, he queries whether Christian belief, on Plantinga's view, might also constitute reflective knowledge.

Michael Bergmann's essay is a masterful defense of the view that has come to be known as skeptical theism: roughly, that we have no good reason for thinking that the possible goods we know of, the possible evils we know of, and the entailment relations we know of between possible goods and possible evils are representative, respectively, of the possible goods, possible evils, and entailment relations that there *are*. This skepticism is

the backbone of a now-popular reply to a certain sort of evidential argument from evil, viz. an argument that infers the improbability of God's having a good reason to permit the evils there are from the fact that we can't see any such reason.

In particular, Bergmann's essay is a defense of the claim that skeptical theism does not lead to *too much* skepticism, a charge that, in one form or another, its opponents have persistently raised. Bergmann sets out to refute this charge by showing that the skeptical component of skeptical theism is consistent with a robust commitment to the deliverances of common sense, captured by what Bergmann calls "commonsensism": the view that "(a) it is clear that we know many of the most obvious things we take ourselves to know (this includes the truth of simple perceptual, memory, introspective, mathematical, logical, and moral beliefs) and that (b) we also know (if we consider the question) that we are not in some skeptical scenario in which we are radically deceived in those beliefs" (10). I have no quarrel with Bergmann's defense of skeptical theism. Indeed, anyone who now wishes to object to skeptical theism on the grounds that it leads to too much skepticism must first contend, it seems to me, with Bergmann's formidable defense.

But while the bulk of Bergmann's essay is defensive in nature, the essay contains a section in which Bergmann goes on the offensive. Here Bergmann is less convincing and seems to commit an error he spotted in his opponent. In this section, he is targeting someone who holds on to skeptical theism together with an extended version of commonsensism, which we might call "commonsensism⁺." Commonsensism⁺ is just like commonsensism except that it adds to the inventory of commonsense data the belief, with respect to some actual evil E, that God wouldn't permit E (or, more modestly, that it is unlikely that God would permit E). The idea is that she who accepts commonsensism⁺ "can just see directly, as a matter of common sense, that a perfectly loving God wouldn't permit the evil in question" (17). I don't suppose she claims that we all can just see this: she claims only that she and others like her can do so. (Thus, there really is no such view as commonsensism⁺, period; it, unlike commonsensism, must be relativized to a subject or subjects.) Now, it would seem that one could consistently hold the conjunction of commonsensism⁺ and skeptical theism; and so even a wildly successful defense of skeptical theism, one that convinced all rational human beings of the truth of skeptical theism, would leave open the possibility that some human beings could, without contradicting themselves, still believe of some actual evil E that there is no all-things-considered reason for a perfectly loving God to permit E (or that it is unlikely that there is), and *believe that they know this*. Such atheists would be taking a play from Bergmann's own playbook in his defense of skeptical theism: their skepticism, they might note, merely rules out the possibility of their coming to know that there is no all-things-considered reason for permitting E (or that it is unlikely that there is) *just by reflecting on the possible goods and possible evils we know of and on the known entailment*

relations between them. But there is another way they can come to know this: they *infer* it from their commonsense⁺ knowledge that God wouldn't (or is unlikely to) permit E.

Bergmann claims that such a combination of views is nevertheless unreasonable. Or, more precisely, he claims that the conjunction of those views and two other, quite plausible claims cannot reasonably be maintained. The other two claims are the following:

- (1) For every instance of horrific suffering that we know to have occurred, there are possible states of affairs that are significantly worse than it or possible states of affairs that are outweighing greater goods. (18)
- (2) For every instance of horrific suffering that we know to have occurred, although it is an intrinsically bad state of affairs, it is not intrinsically wrong to permit it, regardless of the consequences. (18)

Let us assume, with Bergmann, that these are quite plausible. So plausible, in fact, that one cannot reasonably fail to accept them upon consideration. What follows from this? Take Reasonable Ronny, who considers (1) and (2) and the skeptical component of skeptical theism, and accepts them all. Bergmann argues that in virtue of his accepting (2), he can reasonably believe, with respect to some actual evil E, that God wouldn't (or is unlikely to) permit E only if he can reasonably believe this:

- (3) It's false or unlikely that there is some possible worse evil that could be avoided by God (or some possible outweighing good that could be obtained by God) only if E or something as bad were permitted. (19)

After all, Reasonable Ronny has accepted (2), and so he can't consistently think that God wouldn't permit E because it's intrinsically wrong to permit E. Bergmann then poses a challenge: how, he asks, does Reasonable Ronny arrive at (3)? Since he accepts (1), he can't consistently think that there just *is* no possible state of affairs that is significantly worse than it. And in virtue of his acceptance of the skeptical component of skeptical theism, he can't arrive at (3) by reflecting on the possible goods and possible evils we know of, and on the known entailment relations between them. Finally, it doesn't seem like the sort of thing that one can just *see directly*: it's a fairly complex claim, after all. Bergmann's challenge cannot be met. So Reasonable Ronny can't reasonably believe (3) after all, and hence he can't reasonably believe, and *a fortiori* can't know as a matter of commonsense, with respect to some actual evil E, that God wouldn't permit E (or that it is unlikely that He would). That is, commonsensism⁺ (with respect to Ronny) is false. But if Reasonable Ronny is really reasonable, he'll see this line of argument, and so won't accept commonsensism⁺.

If I am not mistaken, this argument simply misses the mark. The answer to the question of how Reasonable Ronny arrives at (3) is just this: Reasonable Ronny *starts* from commonsensism⁺, and infers (3) from the commonsense⁺ fact that God wouldn't (or is unlikely to) permit E and the fact that it is not intrinsically wrong to permit E regardless of its

consequences. That inference is valid if Bergmann's challenge has any force in the first place. To point out that you can know (or reasonably believe) a putative piece of common sense only if you can know (or reasonably believe) something *else*, which else you cannot see to be true directly or by reflecting on the possible goods and possible evils we know of and on the known entailment relations between them, does nothing to impugn the status of the putative piece of common sense as a genuine piece of common sense: you can come to know that something else by inferring it from common sense. Indeed, this is the essence of one of Bergmann's replies to the critics of skeptical theism.

Perhaps I have misconstrued Bergmann's remarks, and his point is simply that it is unreasonable to hold commonsensism⁺ in the first place, that you can't reasonably believe that you (or some other human being) immediately and non-inferentially know(s), with respect to some evil E, that God wouldn't (or is unlikely to) permit E. But is it unreasonable? I take it that is unreasonable only if it is unreasonable to believe that it is possible for a human being to have a properly basic belief, with respect to some evil E, that God wouldn't (or is unlikely to) permit E. And is *that* unreasonable?

Well, before we ask if it's reasonable, let us first ask, is it true? Bergmann (n16) cites Plantinga's discussion, at the end of his *Warranted Christian Belief*, of a view very much like the relevant component of commonsensism⁺, the view that "one who is properly sensitive and properly aware of the sheer horror of the evil displayed in our somber and unhappy world will simply see that no being of the sort God is alleged to be could possibly permit it" (484). And Bergmann summarizes Plantinga's conclusion as saying "it is false that the proper response to an awareness of the sheer horror of evil is to believe that God could not (or would not) permit it" (17). While this correctly captures Plantinga's conclusion, it is nonetheless a bit misleading. Plantinga first argues for the following conditional claim: if Christian theism is true, then a fully rational person—one all of whose cognitive faculties are functioning properly—would not, indeed could not, have a basic belief, with respect to some evil E, that God wouldn't permit E. Since Plantinga accepts the antecedent, he naturally accepts the consequent. But Plantinga implicitly acknowledges (492) that if, say, classical theism is false, then it might well be the case that it is possible for a human being to have a properly basic belief, with respect to some evil E, that God wouldn't permit E. If there is in fact no God, and hence we are not designed to come to know God, is it not plausible that the proper immediate response to the sheer horror of evil is the belief that God would not permit it (or, at the very least, that it's unlikely that He would)? Here we have yet another instance of Plantinga's central and ingenious move in *WCB*: the epistemology of religion cannot be neatly separated from the metaphysics of religion. And that seems right (to render a snap judgment on Plantinga's philosophy). But then if we return to the question whether it is *unreasonable* for, say, Reasonable Ronny to believe that it is

possible for a human being—perhaps himself—to have a properly basic belief, with respect to some evil *E*, that God wouldn't (or is unlikely to) permit *E*, it seems that the question turns on what else Reasonable Ronny believes. (Here I assume that reasonableness is some species of internal rationality.) If Reasonable Ronny is a theist, like Bergmann, then it would perhaps be unreasonable for him to believe such a thing. But if he's an atheist, then it seems he could well be reasonable in thinking it possible to have a properly basic belief, and non-inferential knowledge, with respect to some evil *E*, that God wouldn't (or is unlikely to) permit *E*. Indeed, it seems he could reasonably believe that *he* has such non-inferential knowledge. Of course, it would be dialectically inappropriate or at any rate useless to take as an undefended premise the claim, with respect to some evil *E*, that God wouldn't (or is unlikely to) permit *E*, in an argument intended to convince a theist of the truth of atheism, but wasn't that obvious to begin with?

The aim of Trenton Merricks's essay, "Singular Propositions," is to show that the received view about the metaphysics of propositions, that if a proposition is directly about some object, then it has that object as a constituent, is false. David Vander Laan, in his comments, captures the essay well when he says that Merricks "has launched a barrage of arguments—each of them transparently valid" (81). But each of the arguments rests on controversial metaphysical premises, and often more than one: an evaluation of all the arguments would require a discussion of, among other things, the merits of eternalism, serious actualism, Williamson's necessitism, and certain mereological principles. At this late hour, I cannot indulge myself. I will only say that the logical relations between the received view and these other claims are well-trodden territory (in part due to the work of Plantinga), so I do not know how many philosophers who don't already endorse Merricks's conclusion will accept his premises.

Eleonore Stump's essay, "The Nature of the Atonement," begins with Plantinga's claim that the atonement in which Christians believe is of such great value that it can single-handedly explain the presence of evil in our world. Stump agrees with Plantinga that there is such a thing as the atonement and that it is of paramount value, but she raises difficulties for the standard accounts of what the atonement *is*. After arguing that the atonement is meant to be a solution to three problems—the disposition to sin, guilt from past sins, and shame from past sins—Stump surveys three accounts of just how the atonement is supposed to solve these problems, the two main contenders being the Anselmian and Thomistic theories. However, she raises unresolved questions about each of the main contenders, and she, together with her commentator, E. J. Coffman, gesture at new directions to pursue. The essay is both an excellent overview of the philosophical issues surrounding this core element of Christian theism and a model of intellectual honesty and humility in philosophical theology: she forthrightly acknowledges that she has more questions than answers.

Peter van Inwagen's essay, "Causation and the Mental," offers a striking solution to Jaegwon Kim's puzzle for non-reductive materialists about mental events/states and mental causation: the solution, reminiscent of van Inwagen's solution in *Material Beings* to certain puzzles surrounding constitution/composition, is that there are no such things as events or causation, and a fortiori no such things as mental events or mental causation, and hence nothing that can raise any puzzle. (More precisely, the claim is that causation, and a fortiori, mental causation, is never *instantiated*.) This is no ad hoc reply, but rather a consequence of van Inwagen's very general ontological claim that everything is either a substance or a relation; thus, there are no events and no causation, since the latter is a relation that holds between events if it holds at all. (Van Inwagen does not deny that there are true causal *explanations*, but the truth of these, he argues, does not require that there are any events.) Van Inwagen has demonstrated one advantage of denying the existence of events, namely that doing so allows one to avoid a certain puzzle one might otherwise have to confront. I suppose that could be taken as a reason to deny the existence of events. Even if it is such a reason, it has to be weighed against all the difficulties involved in such a denial. In any case, van Inwagen's ambitions are more modest: he is merely noting that Kim's puzzle presupposes an ontology that one need not endorse, and that van Inwagen rejects on independent grounds.

The volume is rounded out by two other pieces: an excellent editorial introduction and a moving and informative appreciation of Plantinga's philosophical contributions, delivered by his long-time friend and colleague, Nicholas Wolterstorff. The former provides an overarching framework for the volume, and the latter drives home the significance of Plantinga's achievements, especially for those of us who weren't around in the "balmy days of positivism." All in all, this high-caliber volume is a fitting tribute to one of our greatest philosophers.

Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God, by William Hasker. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 269 pages. \$99.00 (cloth)

DANIEL HOWARD-SNYDER, Western Washington University

William Hasker writes: "The 'three-in-oneness' problem of the Trinity is *really hard*" (162). I couldn't agree more. Appropriately for a treatise on that problem, Hasker divides his attempt at a solution into three parts: Trinitarian Foundations, Trinitarian Options, and Trinitarian Construction. Throughout, Hasker pushes something he calls "Social Trinitarianism."