Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 37 | Issue 2 Article 8

4-1-2020

Blake Hereth and Kevin Timpe, eds., THE LOST SHEEP IN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON DISABILITY, GENDER, RACE, AND ANIMALS

Andrew W. Arlig

Follow this and additional works at: https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy

Recommended Citation

Arlig, Andrew W. (2020) "Blake Hereth and Kevin Timpe, eds., THE LOST SHEEP IN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON DISABILITY, GENDER, RACE, AND ANIMALS," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 37 : Iss. 2 , Article 8.
DOI: 10.37977/faithphil.2020.37.2.8
Available at: https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol37/iss2/8

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

pessimism and optimism on this matter. The doctrines of original sin and total depravity don't encourage a rosy outlook among those hoping that their proposed guidance for inquiry will result in actual improvements on a large scale. But the doctrines of divine grace and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are more encouraging on this score. In any case, despite this concern (and with or without Christian teaching), it seems wise and valuable for epistemologists and others to try to do what we can to improve human inquiry (including our own) even if the prospects of widespread success often seem dim. In my view, Ballantyne has not only tried hard to do this, he has (in *Knowing Our Limits*) succeeded at providing us with usable advice that will improve our inquiry if only we can discipline (or otherwise arrange for) ourselves to follow it.

The Lost Sheep in Philosophy of Religion: New Perspectives on Disability, Gender, Race, and Animals, edited by Blake Hereth and Kevin Timpe. Routledge, 2020. Pp. xiii + 400. $155.00 (hardcover), $28.98 (e-book).

ANDREW W. ARLIG, Brooklyn College, CUNY

The Lost Sheep in Philosophy of Religion is a timely and significant contribution to contemporary philosophy of religion. It is the product of a concerted effort to include more voices and perspectives and to expand the range of topics addressed by philosophers of religion, especially by those who practice it in Anglophone and thus primarily "analytic" departments of philosophy. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this volume includes a significant number of contributions by up-and-coming, early career philosophers, and hence, it also provides us with an exciting glimpse of the future of the philosophy of religion.

The volume consists of an introduction by the editors, followed by essays broken into five Sections. In the introduction, the editors helpfully survey analytic philosophy of religion as it is currently practiced as well as the main criticisms that have been launched against it both from within and from the outside. Section I is entitled "Methodology" and it consists of two pieces. The first is a fascinating summary and analysis of two focus group discussions organized and directed by Helen De Cruz (chapter 1), where she attempts to get a clearer picture of what it is like to be a member of an underrepresented group who is currently working in philosophy of religion. In the second contribution (chapter 2), Michelle Panchuk argues that philosophy of religion should dispense with the pretense that the

pp. 248–252 FAITH AND PHILOSOPHY Vol. 37 No. 2 April 2020
doi: 10.37977/faithphil.2020.37.2.8
All rights reserved

philosopher of religion ought to adopt an impersonal, objective standpoint with respect to her chosen subject of inquiry. First, as Panchuk argues, it is unclear whether there is such a standpoint. But more importantly, she forcefully (and, in this reviewer's opinion, *convincingly*) argues that even if there were such a thing as a "God's-eye perspective," in many cases doing philosophy from such a position would be morally harmful. These essays make for riveting reading and together with the introduction they develop a compelling case for transforming philosophy of religion as it traditionally has been practiced. This part of *Lost Sheep* will also be a time capsule of sorts, providing for future historians an enduring snapshot of academic philosophy of religion at this crucial juncture in its evolution.

Section II consists of three essays dealing with broadly epistemological themes. Kirk Lougheed (chapter 3) considers the possibility that persons reporting religious experiences might on occasion be subject to various forms of epistemic injustice. Joshua Cockayne (chapter 4) provides an intriguing reflection on the way in which the sense of smell might provide a way to experience the presence of God, and thus to gain indirect yet "non-metaphorical" understanding of the divine. And Joshua Blanchard (chapter 5) shows how certain cases of apparent "divine reversals" in Scripture should call into question our confidence that "God is on our side." Specifically, he leaves us with the important thought that there seems to be "a hierarchy of divine ethical concern" (132), such that acting with justice and compassion towards others is more central than enforcing certain behavioral norms or "cultic practices" (132). Therefore, "even if, in some ultimate sense, God wills a particular, narrow model of human gender or sexual life, it may be that, *for the time being* and even for quite a while, God not only permits but sanctifies alternative models that serve the underlying values at issue" (133). This lesson, he hastens to add, applies both to "conservatives" and to "liberals," and thus his argument has potentially wide-ranging ramifications for theologically based ethics, both as it is debated by stakeholders and as it is applied by various religious communities.

Section III addresses several issues that directly pertain to non-human animals. In chapter 6, Dustin Crummett argues for a form of "animal universalism," such that all animals with "interests" will eventually receive eternal, infinitely good afterlives. Faith Glavey Pawl (chapter 7) speculates about whether animals might have conscious awareness of divine presence, and she provides some reasons to think that if an animal has even a "limited Theory of Mind" (a concept she draws from psychology, and which has been applied in primate studies, for instance) and "an ability to detect other agents as individuals," then it "might have some encounter with God where it senses God's presence or action" (177). Finally, Blake Hereth (chapter 8) starts with the classical assumption that God is a maximally perfect being and argues for "zootheism," that is, that "some divine person is an animal."

Section IV concerns disability. The first two essays by David Efird (chapter 9) and Kevin Timpe (chapter 10) offer reasons to think that at least some disabilities will persist in the afterlife. Efird argues that God has no reason either to eliminate or to retain physical disabilities, and hence, it would seem fitting that individuals will have the option to be resurrected with disabilities. Moreover, he argues, some individuals might have *rational* reasons to make that choice. Timpe argues that we have good reasons to think that among the heavenly goods are "beatified disabilities," that is, physical and cognitive disabilities that have been separated from the harms and badness that accompany them in the present life. In the final chapter in the section (chapter 11), Scott Williams examines a common contemporary notion of personhood, one which sees rationality as an essential constituent of personhood, and he argues that such a conception may lead to a form of ableism. Fortunately, he proceeds to argue, this contemporary notion of personhood is far from self-evident, and indeed, as he shows in a brief history of the concept, the conception of a person as an essentially rational substance is a "theoretical posit" developed for other purposes than to serve as the locus of personal identity or moral worth.

Section V consists of five essays, each dealing with some aspect of sex, gender, or race. Eric Yang and Stephen Davis (chapter 12) start things off by considering two related questions. First, would it be morally impermissible for an incarnate God to take a spouse, have sexual relations, or procreate? Second, even if it were morally permissible, would it be "fitting" for an incarnate God to do so? Yang and Davis argue that while it would be morally permissible, there are compelling reasons to think that, all things considered (including and especially the actual historical realities of first-century Palestine), it would not be fitting for an incarnate God to be married or procreate. Kelli Potter then provides a "transfeminist" critique of several contemporary Mormon theologies of gender (chapter 13). Specifically, Potter argues that many interpretations of the famous Proclamation of 1995 as well as the current official policies of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints lack solid theological footing but are instead grounded in patriarchal and heteronormative prejudices (320). Hilary Yancey (chapter 14) turns to the matter of whether bodies will be gendered in the afterlife. She argues that resurrection requires not only a new age of complete justice, but also "a final (and full) rectification of the injustice suffered in this life" (331). The only way to bring about this full, final rectification is for individuals to be resurrected with bodies that have gender. Therefore, in the life to come individuals will have gendered bodies. In chapter 15, David Worsley takes as his starting point a conception of limbo developed by Kevin Timpe in an earlier paper ("An Argument for Limbo," *Journal of Ethics* 19 (2015): 277–292) and in a subtle display of analytical philosophical theology, he works out several surprising implications of this picture. Finally, Sameer Yadav (chapter 16) develops an ambitious

agenda for future research at the intersection of race theory and the philosophy of religion. He argues that while we have learned much in recent years about the complicated interplay between race and the history of Christianity and its effects on racial identity in the broader culture, many aspects of this story will remain underdetermined until we apply the methods and concepts of contemporary social ontology to the picture that is being developed. By applying the insights of current work by Brian Epstein and others on the metaphysics of social entities, philosophers reflecting on the intersection between race and religion will be in a position to diagnose and ameliorate certain features of Christian group identity that "anchor" contemporary racial identities and thereby perpetuate certain structural injustices.

Lost Sheep is a refreshing addition to the field. It succeeds at bringing in a variety of new voices and perspectives—all the while, honestly acknowledging that it fails by other measures at achieving diversity (e.g. the essays all assume some form of theism and for the most part they work within a Christian framework)—and the contributors outline several interesting and promising trajectories of future research. This, however, does not mean that more traditional concerns are discounted. Both the editors and many of the contributors assert that there is nothing wrong with discussions of, say, inquiries into the nature and attributes of God or questions about the rationality of believing in divinity and its nature. In fact, as many of these essays show, one can make exciting contributions to longstanding debates and concerns precisely by expanding the scope of philosophy of religion. For instance, as Crummett observes, the suffering of non-human animals highlights specific shortcomings with many of the standard answers given to the problem of evil (141). And both Cockayne's reflection on the sense of smell and Pawl's speculations about animal spirituality tie into larger concerns about how a transcendent being can be perceived or experienced in any respect by finite beings. While he does not note this, Cockayne's essay also connects to current research on the contemplative, or "mystical," literature, and specifically, to research that has pointed out what is arguably an *over*emphasis on the intellect and the consequent dismissal by many philosophers of embodied religious experiences (see, e.g., Christina Van Dyke, "What has History to do with Philosophy? Insights from the Medieval Contemplative Tradition," in *Philosophy and the Historical Perspective*, edited by M. Van Ackeren (Oxford University Press, 2018), 155–170).

A number of the essays in this volume draw upon novel insights, concepts, and methods developed and employed in other domains of analytic philosophy. As was already noted, Yadav refers to current work in the metaphysics of social entities. Yancey's essay also addresses some of this literature, in particular, suggesting that certain irrealist metaphysical accounts of gender are incompatible with what she has argued is the most probable picture of the afterlife that a committed Christian can have (337f). Many others make profitable use of the notion of *epistemic*

injustice, especially as it is formulated by Miranda Fricker in her seminal book (*Epistemic Injustice* (Oxford University Press, 2007)). Several of the essays, in fact, devote considerable space to canvassing these notions and summarizing the state of the art. Perhaps for some these surveys will seem to be unnecessarily didactic. But this reviewer sees their inclusion, as well as the substantial bibliographical references, as a virtue of the volume. First, many of the book's intended audience, that is, current analytic philosophers of religion, might not be conversant with these concepts or the corresponding literature. But second, and more importantly, these summaries of the state of the art make many of these pieces ideal for undergraduate teaching. As De Cruz reports, several of her focus group participants, despite wanting to do the right thing, found it difficult to be more inclusive in their pedagogy (40–41). Some of this was due to perceived expectations from students, but a large part of it had to do with the narrowness of most of the current anthologies and surveys. The appearance of this volume could begin to remedy this problem, as many of these articles would be excellent additions to an undergraduate philosophy of religion syllabus. (This reviewer, for instance, will be trying out the papers by Cockayne, Crummett, Pawl, Efird, and Yancey in a current iteration of his undergraduate-level philosophy of religion course. Although, this by no means is meant to suggest that these are the only papers in the present volume that would be suitable for inclusion in undergraduate courses.) For that matter, many of these articles could conceivably be included in other specialist courses (for instance, Yancey's article in a metaphysics or philosophy of gender course as a litmus test for various accounts of the metaphysical status of gender) or even in a carefully crafted introduction to philosophy. The accessibility of the articles, however, does vary. Some are quite technical or assume a thorough familiarity with the relevant literature, enough so in fact that this reviewer would only countenance including them in more advanced undergraduate or graduate-level curricula. This, to be sure, is not a criticism of *Lost Sheep* as such, as the volume was clearly not intended primarily to be a textbook. Rather, as the editors insist, this volume aims to be only one modest contribution in a growing attempt to make the discipline of philosophy, and philosophy of religion, in particular, more diverse and inclusive, and thus more in step with the needs of present-day students and future generations of philosophers. Measured in terms of that aim, the book is a resounding success.