

EDITORS' NOTE

Billy Dunaway and Jon McGinnis

This issue of *Res Philosophica* is a collection of articles on the medieval Islamic tradition in philosophy, and its relationship to live issues in the contemporary philosophy of religion.

Recent work in the philosophy of religion is rarely concerned with issues that are entirely new. Arguments for the existence of God, questions about the nature of God, and the relationship between God and creation have been raised and debated for millennia. Recent work in the contemporary Analytic tradition often, though not always, acknowledges its historical precedents. However, the relationship between contemporary philosophers of religion and their predecessors is not entirely satisfactory, for two reasons.

First, the level of engagement is often superficial at best. This impacts the scholarly value and amount of knowledge that recent literature engaged with its historical predecessors has generated. Often, we find in the history of philosophy sophisticated discussions of issues in the philosophy of religion, and while attempts to engage with them in recent works has proven more easily readable, those attempts just as often fail to contribute to what already was known centuries earlier. Alvin Plantinga in his monograph *Does God Have a Nature*, for instance, delivers a lengthy discussion of Aquinas's commitment to divine simplicity, focusing on the predication of intrinsic perfections to God. Except for two cryptic paragraphs at the very end of his discussion of simplicity, however, Plantinga nowhere acknowledges Aquinas's doctrine of analogy. Since the doctrine of analogy is central to Aquinas's account of what statements about God's nature *mean*, readers of Plantinga would come to learn something about questions involving God's nature only if they know why Plantinga believes that the doctrine of analogy cannot do the work that Aquinas claims for it. They will be disappointed, and we think that this neglect of a key philosophical element is an instance of a general pattern where more serious scholarly engagement with historical sources would benefit ongoing research in the philosophy of religion.

Second, even when their engagement with historical precedents is rigorous, Anglophone philosophers of religion are almost exclusively concerned with ideas in the Christian tradition, and mainly these ideas are from the Scholastic and Early Modern periods. This work deserves the attention it receives, and more; however, those working mainly outside the history of philosophy are not wholly blameworthy for their exclusive focus on the Western Christian tradition. For obvious reasons, the translations that are up-to-date, most philosophically sophisticated, and widely available for

English-speaking philosophers are works of the main figures in the Christian tradition. However, the Western Christian tradition does not contain the only rigorous discussions of issues that are valuable to current work in philosophy of religion. The Islamic and Jewish traditions contain their own rich discussions of many of the same topics in the philosophy of religion, and include towering figures such as Avicenna, al-Ghazālī, and Maimonides, to name only a few. Indeed, much of their work made it to the West in Latin translation and influenced subsequent work in the Scholastic tradition. For example, while Plantinga focuses almost exclusively on Aquinas's doctrine of divine simplicity in *Does God Have a Nature?*, Aquinas's doctrine is, by Aquinas's own acknowledgement, a version of the doctrine as found in Avicenna, who argues that simplicity directly follows from the existence of God understood as the necessary existent in itself (*wājib al-wujūd*). From this perspective, focus on divine simplicity as Aquinas's doctrine is somewhat misplaced or at least not focused on its place within its broader context. Also, even works that did not make it to the West in Latin translation are relevant to contemporary discussions in the philosophy of religion, and they can inform and provide additional resources for exploring those issues. For example, as noted earlier, a central element of Aquinas's defense of divine simplicity is his doctrine of analogy. In the medieval East, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī developed an analogous yet notably different doctrine of systematic ambiguity (*tashkīk*) to address challenges leveled against Avicenna's doctrine of divine simplicity, challenges which in many salient ways anticipate Plantinga's critique.

Contemporary work in the philosophy of religion would benefit from more rigorous engagement with the Islamicate philosophical tradition. To further these aims, we started the *Theology, Science, and Knowledge* project in 2019, with generous support from the John Templeton Foundation and the University of Missouri–St. Louis. We have gestured at some ways in which recent work would benefit from attention to its Islamicate predecessors, but we also think that those who work on translating and explicating figures within this tradition would benefit from increased awareness of how their work relates to issues in contemporary Anglophone philosophy of religion. The *Theology, Science, and Knowledge* project aims to produce original research and scholarly translations that further these goals, and to host conferences, workshops, and other activities to encourage scholars to produce works with similar aims. More papers and scholarly resources from the project can be found at <https://www.theologyscienceandknowledge.org>.

The articles in this issue are, with the exception of the final article co-authored by the guest editors, the products of summer research awards funded and distributed by the *Theology, Science, and Knowledge* project. Authors submitted proposals in the spring of 2020, and a group of awardees were granted stipends to complete their work over the summer of 2020. In this issue we have collected some of the finished products, and we anticipate that others will appear in published form elsewhere. All proposals were

reviewed by two outside referees, and we wish to thank those referees for their help, in addition to financial support for the awardees from the John Templeton Foundation.

The awardees come from a variety of academic backgrounds. Some work primarily on figures in the Islamicate tradition. Others come mainly from a background working on Western figures or issues in contemporary philosophy, and who have found work in the Islamicate tradition that they wish to bring to bear on their research. The result is an issue with articles on a wide range of topics, with diverse methodological approaches and aims. We hope that the results will be of interest to scholars of philosophy in medieval Islamic lands, contemporary philosophers of religion, and those with a general interest in philosophy who simply wish to acquire a broader picture of the discipline and how its questions continue to be of interest and worthwhile scholarly pursuit, even to the present day.

The final article in this volume is one of the original works co-authored by the co-leaders of the *Theology, Science, and Knowledge* project, Billy Dunaway and Jon McGinnis. We also wish to acknowledge the John Templeton Foundation for support of the research that went into this article.

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