

Analytic Philosophy and the Islamic Tradition: Introduction

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Guest Editors

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The *Theology, Science, and Knowledge* project aims to bring research in the Islamic philosophical tradition into contact with philosophical research on live issues pertaining to knowledge, science, and religion. We have already outlined our perception of the need for research connecting these fields in our introduction to a special issue on the topic in *Res Philosophica* 98(2). Instead of repeating the reasons for pursuing research at the intersection of Islamic philosophy and issues of contemporary interest, we will comment briefly on what we take to be the contributions in the essays contained in this issue.

Joshua Kelleher raises a question that has been at the center of debates in Islamicate philosophical theology since Islam's first encounter with Greek thought, namely the simplicity of God. In his paper "God under All: Divine Simplicity, Omni-parthood, and the Problem of Principality in Islamic Philosophy," Kelleher proposes a novel way of understanding simplicity. Using the tools of mereology from contemporary analytic metaphysics, he proposes to understand simplicity as the view that God has no parts, but is a part of everything else. He dubs this an "omni-part." If God is the omni-part, Kelleher argues, we can understand another doctrine central to Islamicate philosophical theology in addition to simplicity, namely that God is the first, or primary, and before all other existents.

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Asha Lancaster-Thomas's paper "Loose Canons: The Epistemic Problems of Scriptural Testimony" addresses the important epistemological question of whether (and how) we can learn from scripture as a source of testimony. This problem is especially compounded in light of the fact that within the Abrahamic traditions there are multiple, competing and at times incompatible texts that claim to be a source of divine revelation. Lancaster-Thomas addresses this issue as not simply an abstract problem that arises regardless of the specific form of a purported divine revelation. Instead, she considers the consequences for knowledge of divine revelation that follow from the specific character of the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic scriptures. She approaches this issue by introducing the notion of a religious dialogue among ideal adherents of each faith, i.e., equally rational and informed about all three religions. She suggests that for the dialogue to move forward, these ideal adherents would agree to accepting 'epistemic bar proppers,' which go beyond the explicit content of a specific faith.

In "Objective Representation and Non-Physical Entities," Alireza Mazarian outlines a framework for understanding the possibility of, as his title suggests, representation of non-physical entities. The topic is a general one but, as Mazarian points out, is a crucial precondition for a phenomenon many philosophers of religion take seriously: religious experience. This is because if an experience of the divine is possible and can support belief in the existence of God, it must be possible to entertain representations of non-physical entities, including God. Mazarian draws on Avicenna, Suhrawardī and Mullā Ṣadrā, as representatives in the Islamic (or, as he dubs it, "Persian-Arabic") philosophical tradition, who have entertained the question and proposed similar frameworks.

As its title suggests, the topic of Billy Dunaway's "Knowledge and Theological Predication" is theological predication, examples of which include 'wise' in 'God is wise' and 'powerful' in 'God is powerful.' Philosophers in both Christian and Islamic lands in the Middle Ages proposed theories of the meaning of theological predications, because of perceived difficulties with the view that theological predications are univocal with—that is, mean the same thing as—predications of 'wise' and 'powerful' to ordinary creatures. Dunaway argues that medieval discussions not only took into account considerations of what it would take for theological predications to be *true*, but also they frequently considered whether a theory makes theological predications *knowable*. Dunaway argues that not only were medieval philosophers correct in treating epistemological constraints as relevant to a theory of theological predication,

but also, contemporary accounts of theological predication often ignore, and run afoul of, the same epistemological constraints.

The first three papers in this issue are all recipients of a 2021 summer research award from the *Theology, Science, and Knowledge* project. These awards were highly competitive, with over 50 applications, and were judged by an external panel of referees. Awardees participated in a summer seminar to discuss their research. We are pleased to see these papers appear in this issue of *Essays in Philosophy* and are especially enthusiastic to make them available in an open-access format. We wish to acknowledge the generous support of the John Templeton Foundation for all of the papers that appear in this volume.