

*Einführung in die Religionsphilosophie.* By Winfried Löffler. Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006. 192 pages. SFr. 27.50.

Those of us who are burdened for the spiritual condition of Europe have longed to see there the sort of renaissance in Christian philosophy that has taken place in the United States over the last forty years. Now and again there appear glimmerings of hope. One such is the new book by Winfried Löffler, professor at the Institut für Christian Philosophy at the University of Innsbruck in Austria. Löffler, a Roman Catholic philosopher, shows himself to be remarkably conversant with the literature of recent decades in Anglo-American philosophy of religion, a fact evident, not only from his impressive bibliography of nearly three hundred sources, but also from his handling of issues from Anglophone as well as Continental perspectives.

Explaining positions in Anglophone philosophy to a German-speaking audience occasions challenging and sometimes amusing problems for Löffler. For example, how do you translate the word "belief"—as *Glaube*, *Meinung*, or *Überzeugung*? Löffler employs all three, not always consistently. For example, chapter 3 concerns "*Argumente für die Vernünftigkeit des religiösen Glaubens*," which carries the connotation of "religious faith," whereas the parallel chapter 4 concerns "*Argumente gegen die Vernünftigkeit religiöser Überzeugungen*," which has the meaning of "religious convictions." When discussing belief in the sense of a properly basic belief, *Überzeugung* would seem preferable to *Meinung* (opinion), sometimes used by Löffler. I had to smile at Löffler's dilemma with "foundationalism." The literal translation *Fundamentalismus* means "fundamentalism," almost a term of abuse in German theology. So to avoid misunderstanding, Löffler has to concoct the awful *Fundationalismus* as his translation! But he does a generally wonderful job of providing clear German equivalents for English terms.

Löffler's book, part of the series *Einführungen (Philosophie)*—itself groundbreaking in its deliberate focus, not on "names and periods" in the history of philosophy, "but arguments"—will be an eye-opener for European philosophy students. Here they will find arguments for God's existence taken seriously and even defended, along with substantive treatment of the divine attributes, the problem of evil, religious epistemology, religious experience, and so forth. The book will doubtless be controversial and upsetting to those used to easy dismissals of classical theism. If the book is studied seriously, students will be forced to wrestle with actual arguments for and against theistic beliefs.

The book comprises five parts. In the first part Löffler asks what it is that philosophers of religion do. The book thus gets off to a rather slow and uninteresting start by a pedestrian tour of what religion is, what theology is, and what is the philosophy of religion. Löffler takes philosophy of religion to

be at its core the defense of the (ir)rationality of a religious worldview, with an interest also in the analysis of religious language and the clarification of the relation between religious and other sorts of explanations. The central problem concerns the arguments for and against the rationality of religious beliefs. In line with traditional Catholic thinking, Löffler distinguishes theology from philosophy of religion in that the latter must prescind from reliance upon authoritative sacred texts and traditions. He acknowledges that since the 1980s Reformed epistemologists have championed a quite different conception of "Christian philosophy." But he says of Plantinga's account of warranted Christian belief, "It has strong theological presuppositions and can therefore no longer be classified as a philosophical theory" (115).

The second part of the book surveys arguments in support of the rationality of religious belief. Here Löffler treats the ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments, arguments from miracles, cumulative case arguments, Reformed epistemology and religious experience, arguments from transcendental experience, arguments based on moral experience, pragmatic arguments, and Pascal's Wager. Löffler finds cosmological arguments to be the most promising candidates for a cogent argument for God's existence. I was disappointed by his superficial rejection of ontological arguments. Though he discusses contemporary versions of the argument, he is skeptical of the principle that "If God exists, He exists necessarily" because we lack sufficient insight into God's essence (a traditional Thomistic objection). But the argument in no wise depends upon such a premise, since it may be formulated in terms of maximal greatness alone, which is just defined to mean maximal excellence in every possible world. Löffler's treatment of the teleological argument includes up-to-date versions of the fine-tuning argument and the anthropic principle, which will be new to many German-speaking students. In handling miracles, Löffler nicely avoids the typical characterization of miracles as violations of the laws of nature in favor of God's causal intervention in the sequence of secondary causes. His handling of cumulative case arguments includes a discussion of Swinburne's Bayesian argument, about which Löffler expresses skepticism because of our inability to assign values to the prior probability of theism. Löffler's discussion of Reformed epistemology includes an up-to-date exposition of the development of Plantinga's account of proper basicity and his Aquinas/Calvin model of warranted Christian belief. But Löffler's complaint that Plantinga's model will have little success in grounding the rationality of religious belief for outsiders fails to appreciate that Plantinga's public project is merely to show that there is no *de jure* objection to Christian belief independent of *de facto* objections. All this material and more will be new to the average German philosophy (or theology) student.

In the third part of the book Löffler airs objections to the rationality of religious beliefs. Here he reviews arguments in five descending categories:

against the meaningfulness of religious beliefs, for the falsity of religious beliefs, for the unwarrantedness of religious beliefs, against the rationality of religious beliefs, and for the harmfulness of religious beliefs. The first includes a nice survey of the views of Carnap, Flew, and Wittgenstein. The second category treats Findlay's ontological disproof of God, and here I was surprised to find Löffler resorting to God's mere "factual necessity," which may help to explain his skepticism about the ontological argument. In treating the problem of evil, he distinguishes between logical and evidential versions, which will be news to most European students. Löffler, however, ascribes far more credibility to atheistic arguments from evil than they deserve. His objections to the free-will defense against the logical version (130) are already dealt with in Plantinga's original formulation of that defense. His claim that the "noseum" defense against the evidential version is "very weak" greatly overestimates our capacity to make reliable probability judgments to the effect that God lacks morally sufficient reasons for permitting some given instance of evil. In the end he pronounces the problem of evil "philosophically unsolvable" (131), a conclusion that, while admirable in its candor, will only serve to reinforce the unbelief of most European students. It remained unclear to me whether Löffler in the end thinks that the force of the problem of evil can be overcome by the weight he gives to natural theology. This part of the book also includes discussion of current issues such as whether belief in God is hardwired into our brains.

The final section of the book deals with the question of worldviews (*Weltanschauungen*) and the role of religious beliefs in one's worldview. Löffler provides several criteria for adjudicating worldviews and applies these to theistic worldviews. Here the problem of evil resurfaces with respect to the consistency of a theistic worldview. Löffler claims that consistent talk about God is possible only if the attributes ascribed to God are not too similar to the attributes we ascribe to worldly agents. In particular, "Were we to assess God's actions with our human moral standards and benefit calculus, then certainly no solution to the problem of evil stands out; rather a God so conceived would appear cynical, powerless, unknowing, or irrational" (160). So, as a Christian theist, is Löffler advocating that the goodness of God be conceived to mean something different than what we normally conceive a good person to be like? In that case a good and loving God does not exist, as those words are normally understood.

With respect to theistic arguments, Löffler opines that such arguments "have little practical significance and little 'success': scarcely anyone will be greatly influenced in his worldview on the basis of such arguments" (165-6). Rather such arguments "serve to reaffirm for a person who already tends to belief in God's existence that this belief is rationally supportable" (168). What Löffler fails to appreciate is that one's tendency to believe in God or not may itself be the result of intuitions concerning the world's contingency

or design or the suffering in the world, so that such arguments are already effectually shaping a person's worldview, even if they are not clearly articulated. Moreover, moving someone who tends to, say, theism to actually embrace theism strikes me as so hugely significant, which would give to theistic arguments, *pace* Löffler, even the role of "Missionsinstrument."

Löffler closes the book with some nice reflections on the relationship between philosophical conclusions and religious belief. He concludes, "In general philosophy of religion and philosophical theology are no substitute for concrete, lived religious engagement; they can, however, serve to confirm the rational acceptability of some religious worldviews" (175). What remains unclear to me is how this conclusion is compatible with the *philosophische Unlösbarkeit* of the problem of evil.

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*The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*. Edited by Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 468 pages. \$29.99.

*The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. Edited by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 508 pages. \$27.99.

Scholars and students who have worked their way through Seyyed Hossein Nasr's and Oliver Leaman's masterfully edited work, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (Routledge, 2001) will, if they had read the two introductions by Nasr and Leaman, come away with an appreciation of how difficult it was to define the parameters of "Islamic philosophy." If that was difficult, now we must tackle the issue of what constitutes "Arabic" and "Jewish" philosophy. Two works, Adamson and Taylor's *Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, and Frank and Leaman's *Cambridge Companion to Jewish Philosophy*, attempt to do just that.

Adamson and Taylor's volume focuses on the "formative, classical period of philosophy in Arabic," between the ninth and eleventh centuries (1). The earliest period in which Islamic scholars took interest in Greek philosophy was one of transmission and translation, these sources being translated into Arabic from Greek and Syriac. These formative periods saw a great increase in interaction with Neoplatonic and Aristotelian texts by scholars in the caliphate of Damascus' court. The authors caution us, however, of thinking about this period as one of simple transmission of Greek texts into Arabic, since "most important for the later Islamic tradition was the towering

achievement of Avicenna," who "was one of the many thinkers with the ideas put forward by the tradition of theology in Islam (*'ilm al-kalam*)" (1-2). The central focus of this volume, then, is the interaction between philosophy and Islamic theology, and the central player would inevitably become Avicenna (Ibn Sina). The reason for this centrality of the Avicennian tradition is because all later philosophical work in Arabic is primarily a response to him (6). But there are chapters that clearly spend a good amount of time covering the earlier period of the encyclopedic tradition, whereby Islamic scholars compiled and commented on Greek philosophical texts. This is Christina D'Ancona's main contribution in chapter 2 ("Greek into Arabic: Neoplatonism in Translation"). Central to this period of reception and translation are the figures of Plotinus and Porphyry. Plotinus "represented a turning point in the history of philosophical ideas which was to play a decisive role in the creation of *falsafa* and to influence indirectly philosophy in the Middle Ages, in both Latin and Arabic" (10). Readers of this journal will read with interest the role of the Christian scholar Hunayn Ibn Ishaq, and his son Ishaq Ibn Hunayn, in the work of translation of the Platonic and Aristotelian corpus during the Abbasid Caliphate. In chapter 3 ("Al-Kindi and the Reception of Greek Philosophy"), Peter Adamson recounts the central figure of al-Kindi, who is credited with setting "the agenda for *falsafa* in the generations to come" through "his treatment of intellect and theory and theory of creation" which "resonates throughout Arabic philosophy" (48). In the realm of intellect, he is somewhat indebted to the Alexandrian Christian philosopher John Philoponus, though he would not agree with him on every point (40).

All these points provide a good background to Robert Wisnovsky's chapter on Avicenna ("Avicenna and the Avicennian Tradition"). This by far is the longest chapter, since, in Professor Wisnovsky's own words, he "was the central figure in the history of Arab-Islamic philosophy" (92). Wisnovsky goes on to highlight Avicenna's significance: "Before Avicenna, *falsafa* (Arabic Aristotelian and Neoplatonic philosophy) and *Kalam* (Islamic doctrinal theology) were distinct strands of thought, even though a good deal of cross-fertilization took place between them. After Avicenna, by contrast, the two strands fused together and post-Avicennian *kalam* emerged as a truly Islamic philosophy, a synthesis of Avicenna's metaphysics and Muslim doctrine" (92). In many ways, then, Avicenna laid the groundwork for what would emerge as a truly Islamic philosophy, influencing the metaphysics of Averroes, and defining the terms by which such an Islamic philosophy could take shape (131-3). The next chapter on al-Ghazali by Michael Marmura (chapter 7) poses al-Ghazali in opposition to some of the metaphysics of Avicenna (especially in his classic *On the Incoherence of the Philosophers*), but nonetheless also "adopting Avicennian philosophical ideas" (137). Though Richard Taylor's chapter on Averroes does not quite bring this out, Averroes develops much of his metaphysics in conversation (and at times in opposition