Editorial preface

R. L. Hall

Published online: 3 July 2014
© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2014

As I think of it, philosophers of religion, indeed philosophers in general, often make progress on philosophical issues in a way analogous to the way in which laws are refined as they are adjudicated in appellate courts. So I think of our journal in these terms. The great body of literature in philosophy, like the body of law we live by, is always subject to dispute, to correction, to critique. Our journal is a forum designed to contribute to this critical process and hence to the advancement of our understanding of religion.

We bring our submissions before our Editorial Board and other external reviewers, and the ones that pass this review are published and set before our readers for their judgment and criticism. As philosophers of religion, we know full well that to publish our ideas in books and journals is to place them before a critical audience of our peers. But this is how we deepen our understanding and correct our misunderstandings. Even though the path of critique can sometimes be harsh and hurtful, it is also the case that when it is undertaken in a spirit of collegiality, this critical process can lead to the happy outcome of advancing our philosophical projects.

The five articles in this issue are exercises in this procedure of critical philosophical discussion. The first three are critical of specific philosophers of religion, the fourth is critical of a particular approach to the philosophy of religion, namely, the phenomenological approach, and the last is a criticism of a particular philosopher for not taking such a phenomenological approach to the philosophy of religion.

Our lead essay, “Does Anselm beg the question?,” can stand, in my judgment, as a model of what I would call genuine collegial criticism. Keith Burgess-Jackson shows us how criticism is itself subject to criticism and reproof. He discusses the claim of a long-time friend of this journal and former member of our Editorial Board, William

R. L. Hall (✉)
Stetson University, Deland, FL, USA
e-mail: ronhall@stetson.edu

Rowe, namely, his celebrated claim that the ontological argument begs the question. In the article, Rowe's argument is clearly set out and Burgess–Jackson's critique is clear and easy to follow. Indeed, you may find that it raises serious objections to Rowe's objection to the ontological argument. But what I also call your attention to is the fact that Burgess–Jackson dedicates this article to Rowe.

In the second article, "Search, rest, and grace in Pascal," Jenifer L. Sorensen demonstrates how what we gain from the work of our fellow scholars often calls for and can fruitfully bear critical refinement. Her essay is in large measure a corrective to Graeme Hunter's characterization of Pascal's notion of rest (*repos*). She thinks Hunter was correct to see that for Pascal rest and active searching, along with searching and finding, are connected. Her objection to his account is that it seems to miss the dialectical nature of the connection. This failure occurs because he depicts searching and finding, activity and rest, as connected by human effort alone. This misses the decisive role that grace plays in this dialectical combination of searching and finding, rest and activity.

In "Divine thoughts and Fregean propositional realism," Colin P. Ruloff addresses an argument for God's existence that is not among the usual suspects. Anderson and Welty (in their 2011 article, "The Lord of Non-contradiction") provide a conceptualist argument from natural theology to the existence of God. They argue that the propositions (laws) of logic are ontologically dependent on God's existence. The point that Ruloff wants to make, however, is that such an argument is viable only if a key assumption Anderson and Welty make is true. That assumption is that it is not possible for a proposition to be intentional but fail to be mental. However, on a Fregean inspired account of propositions, this assumption is false. Ruloff, after presenting a very clear view of such an account of propositions, does not argue that it is correct, but that Anderson and Welty should not have neglected to address such an account of propositions without due consideration and argument.

In the next article, this critical process turns from specific philosophers to an approach to the philosophy of religion, what Guus H. Labooy calls the approach of religious phenomenology. This approach is represented by such figures as Heidegger and Marion and runs counter to a more traditional idea that we can sometimes speak univocally of God. A subtle version of this traditional (medieval) semantic theory is exemplified by Duns Scotus. The debate between the traditional approach and phenomenology is whether or not we can attribute any properties to God in a univocal sense without committing what phenomenologists say is idolatry. Labooy thinks that Scotus was correct to say that if we cannot do this, we will end up being agnostics. But he also argues that Scotus's argument for univocity needs to be clearly understood. Once we understand Scotus's view properly, we can find a viable way to attribute univocal meaning to some properties of God and this will enable us to circumvent the negative theology of phenomenology and its correlative invitation to agnosticism.

The last article combines a critique of a particular philosopher, in this case, Daniel Dennett, and the philosophical approach he exemplifies. Dennett and others in a group that has come to be known as "The New Atheists" (including Dawkins, Hitchens and Harris) champion scientific rationality, or as I would say, scientific naturalism. But as Donovan O. Schaefer argues, there is an ironic failure in this new atheism to embrace a central tenet of one of the signature doctrines of scientific naturalism, that is, the key role that accident plays in evolutionary theory. As a result, the New Atheists

have a flawed view of religion and with it a limited and rigid version of atheism. By contrast, deconstructionist phenomenologists, like Derrida, Caputo, and others see that brokenness, the broken body, the accidents intrinsic to a radically contingent universe, call for an approach to both theism and atheism alike that is a far cry from theistic and atheistic positivism in which it seems that reason alone is all that counts for or against God.