

*The Question of God: An Introduction and Sourcebook.* By Michael Palmer. New York: Routledge, 2001. xvi + 357 pages. ISBN 0-415-22387-3 (paper).

Michael Palmer's *The Question of God* is an introductory textbook of the philosophy of religion. Textbooks on this subject typically cover a wide range of issues such as divine attributes, religious experiences, the problem of evil, life after death, and so on. Palmer's book, however, solely focuses on a single problem: the existence of God. The book discusses six classic arguments for the existence of God: the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, the argument from design, the argument from miracles, the moral argument and the pragmatic argument. Each chapter contains both a historical and a philosophical discussion of an argument and excerpts from a relevant philosophical literature. Palmer's discussion is clear and sophisticated, and the sources drawn from philosophical texts are carefully selected. The book also offers revision questions, biographical sketches of key thinkers, figures and bibliographies, all of which teachers and students should find helpful.

Given that the book essentially covers only a single specific issue in the philosophy of religion, my initial concern was that students could derive limited value from it. It might not, in fact, be suitable for introductory students, who need to be familiar with broad philosophical issues. Fortunately, this worry was unfounded.

First, by examining the arguments for the existence of God, students can study the history of philosophy in general. Many important philosophers have devoted themselves to these arguments for over two thousand years. Throughout this textbook students will read Plato, Anselm, Aquinas, Descartes, Hume, Pascal, Kant, James, Moore, Flew,

Swinburne and others; as these names suggest, it covers both important classic debates and on-going contemporary discussions.

Second, through a study of these arguments, students can learn general philosophical concepts and ideas, since the problem of the divine existence has involved a number of fundamental philosophical issues. For example, in order to contrast the ontological argument with other arguments, Palmer introduces the concepts of *a priori* and *posteriori* (2-3). By understanding its aprioricity, students will discover why the ontological argument appears unique when compared with others. As another example, Palmer discusses the metaphysics of causation and induction through Hume's criticisms of the cosmological argument and the argument from miracles (58-72; 172-203). Hume's empiricism involved in those issues could be challenging for students who have no philosophical background but again, they are nicely explained.

Third, a study of the arguments for the existence of God is helpful in training students' logical and critical reasoning skills. Palmer introduces not only the arguments themselves but also objections to the arguments and then further rebuttals from proponents of the arguments. One of the most remarkable debates introduced is the one on 'Findley's paradox' (19-22). It is well known that Kant provided a strong argument against Anselm's ontological argument. But J. N. Findlay went further and proposed, by examining Kant's argument, the 'ontological argument in reverse'; a formal *disproof* of the existence of God. Palmer discusses how Findley derived this paradox and how Charles Hartshorne and Norman Malcolm tried to refute it. As they follow the flow of this sort of debate, students will acquaint themselves with the manner of philosophical

argumentation and reasoning. Teachers using this text can organize in-class discussions with revision questions provided in each chapter.

A final, minor point: the pragmatic argument is included in this book. Should it have been? As the name suggests the argument purports to show that, in practical terms, it is more advantageous to believe in God than not. Palmer devotes his last chapter to Pascal's (286-301) and James's (302-324) versions of the pragmatic argument, but it is not strictly speaking an argument for the existence of God, since the argument is based on the very assumption that there is no sound proof for the existence of God.

Overall, Palmer's book is highly recommendable as an introduction to one of the most interesting and profound issues in the philosophy of religion. The book tells readers why so many philosophers throughout history have been puzzled and fascinated by the 'question of God'.

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