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Chad Meister (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity*
(New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Pp. xii+456. £95.00/\$150.00
(Hbk). ISBN 978 0 19 534013 6.

This volume summarizes the current state of a number of academic approaches to the study of religious diversity. With few exceptions, the thirty-two original contributions are written by senior British and North American academics. The contributions span philosophy, public policy, religious studies, sociology, and theology and are preceded by a short three-page introduction by the editor. As Meister explains, the aim of the volume is to bring together surveys and analyses of disparate approaches to the phenomenon of religious diversity in an enduring reference work.

Part 1, in four chapters, begins by identifying how religious diversity can be of interest to historians before surveying the contribution of religious studies, philosophy, and then sociology to answering questions about religious diversity. Part 2, a much longer part of eighteen chapters, is devoted to exploring philosophical and theological issues of religious diversity (in the first half) and then sociological and public policy issues of religious diversity (in the second half). Part 3 includes chapters on religious diversity from the perspectives of the Hindu, Buddhist, African, Chinese, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic religious traditions. There are also chapters on feminist, naturalistic, and continental philosophy perspectives. The volume is supplemented with an index – a feature which multi-author works often lack.

Turning to some of the philosophical chapters of *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity* we can begin by noting Peter Byrne's survey in part 1, chapter 3, 'A philosophical approach to questions about religious diversity'. Byrne distinguishes four areas in philosophy of religion which have arisen from reflection on the fact of religious diversity. The first of these areas is the epistemology of religious belief, which arises from a consideration of disagreement among epistemic peers adhering to different religious traditions. Byrne outlines evidentialist, agnostic, and anti-evidentialist responses to this issue and alludes to the tension that underlies them, specifically, the opposing accounts of 'warrant' held by epistemic internalists and epistemic externalists. Second, we have theories of religion that both inform, and are informed by, one's view on epistemic matters (such as the matter just mentioned). These theories are naturalism, confessionalism, and pluralism. Third, rival conceptions of the Ultimate lead to reflections on whether any of these conceptions can be true. Fourth, we have the issue of salvation/liberation and the idea that there may be

some moral teachings which are common to the religious traditions. In sum, Byrne's contribution helps untangle some tightly intertwined threads in the philosophical literature on religious diversity.

The chapters of part 2 begin with Joseph Runzo tracing the history of relativism and pluralism in a discussion that is informed by both western and eastern thought and religion. Runzo then, briefly, makes his discussion relevant to interreligious dialogue before closing with a word on moral matters.

In chapter 7, 'The diversity of religious experience', Keith E. Yandell discusses the diversity that can be found between religious experiences across different religious traditions. The first thing to notice, Yandell explains, is the difference in the way experiences are structured. In the western religious traditions we see accounts, both scriptural and non-scriptural, of something distinct and independent of the subject. The eastern traditions, on the other hand, give testimony to both experiences of the subject's relation with the metaphysical order and experiences of an introspective nature. Yandell considers, and duly defends, this categorization from the complication of the Buddhist no-self doctrine. The remainder of Yandell's contribution is aimed at stating the conditions in which religious experience can be evidentially significant.

Chapter 9 sees Paul J. Griffiths identifying ethical approaches to dealing with religious 'aliens'. In chapters 12 and 13 we see Michael L. Peterson and Keith Ward respectively explore Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Hindu responses to evil and the concept of 'revelation'. These two contributions further exemplify (in addition to chapter 5 by Runzo already noted above) the breadth offered by the many comparative perspectives in the volume. But there are also more tightly focused contributions of a theological nature, as well as contributions that span academic boundaries. Paul Moser's discussion of religious exclusivism in chapter 6, spanning theology and philosophy, is a case in hand. Moser focuses on trying to find a suitably pious response to the soteriological problem of evil – that problem which arises when it is believed that (a) there is a uniquely correct path to redemption and (b) there are many people who are ignorant of this path through no fault of their own and who are therefore excluded from redemption. Moser explains how this problem can arise out of Protestant predestinarian views and also out of the trinitarian Athanasian Creed before offering a more inclusivist reading of Christian teachings.

D'Costa also writes from a Christian perspective in chapter 11 ('Theology amid religious diversity') to explain how Christianity grew out of a religiously diverse setting. The questions about truth and salvation that early Christians were confronted with were still being answered in the medieval period, a period which witnessed the rise of missionary proselytization. In examining the modern period D'Costa tells of Immanuel Kant's influence on pluralist thought; he also avails himself of the opportunity to engage with the debate between Karl Rahner and

Hans Urs von Balthasar over the former's concept of the 'anonymous Christian'. D'Costa argues that the two great Catholic theologians of the twentieth century have similar positions but that their differences in method and emphasis should not be masked. In closing, recent comparative theology is noted, as well as D'Costa's own views on the possibility of a theology of religions and a theology for specific religions.

Continuing with the Christian themed contributions of Moser and D'Costa that span both philosophy and theology we can also add the contribution of Charles Taliaferro in part 3, chapter 28, 'A Christian perspective'. Taliaferro takes as his focus, first, the salvation of non-Christians and, second, their rationality - matters which are also covered in chapters 3, 6, and 11. However, there is little sense of repetition, for although similar questions are being answered the discussion takes its own route and is enriched by Taliaferro's own reading and reflection. In specific terms this means a response to J. L. Schellenberg's counting religious diversity as evidence against God (as understood by Christianity). It also means a response to further objections from Schellenberg and Richard Feldman on the counter-evidence to the truth of Christianity posed by the existence of rival traditions. Taliaferro suggests that a Platonic version of faith can help a Christian to learn from other religions while not losing confidence in their own religion.

The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity should not be confused for a type of encyclopaedia where article-length entries refrain from arguing for a certain point of view, or indeed for a certain programme. In this vein we can note the contribution of Leonard J. Swidler who observes in chapter 10, 'Religious diversity and a global ethic', that although we have long known about religious diversity we are now actually interested in this phenomenon. Indeed, with social change now occurring so rapidly that changes are being noticed in our own lives, we can no longer ignore religious diversity. Swidler traces the rise of this awareness from the birth of civilization through to the globalization of western civilization. Of central importance is the observation that humankind is leaving the Age of Divergence and entering the Age of Convergence. This leads Swidler to speculate on the form religion will take in the future and to advocate his formulation of the Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic.

With each contribution accompanied by recommendations for further reading, *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity* will be well suited to researchers and advanced students looking to find a pathway into the topic of religious diversity. Philosophers of religion concerned with religious diversity will find not only philosophical reflection on the topic but also contributions situated in other academic disciplines - convenient data over which one can philosophize! These range from studies of new religions, religious environmentalism, education, and tolerance. Although Meister has not made a written

contribution to this volume apart from the introduction, he is nonetheless deserving of praise for editing a fabulous and welcome collection that encourages cross-disciplinary fertilization.

AMIR DASTMALCHIAN

The Islamic College

e-mail: a.dastmalchian@islamic-college.ac.uk