



Reviews

A DICTIONARY OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION edited by Charles Taliaferro and Elsa Marty, *Continuum*, London and New York, 2010, pp. xxx + 286, £19.99

KEY TERMS IN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION by Raymond J. VanArragon, *Continuum*, London and New York, 2010, pp. vii + 158, £12.99 pbk

The titles of these books may give the impression that they attempt the same task. They do not. The dictionary pages are set in two columns and most definitions, whether of terms (e.g. aseity, *dharma*, doubt, hell, language games, natural law, everlasting...), personal names (e.g. Al-Ghazali, Bergson, Bultman, Epictetus, Kant, Mencius, Wittgenstein...), philosophical systems or positions and religions (e.g. Christianity, Existentialism, Gnosticism, Islam, Jainism, Occasionalism, Neo-Platonism, Process Philosophy, Rationalism, Realism...) occupy a column or less. The entries, by different hands, are identified only in the acknowledgements and by the name of the writer rather than by topic so that it is more difficult than it need have been to discover who wrote what.

As properly becomes a dictionary, the entries do not presume to be controversial but give the generally accepted meaning or basic information. The entries for Martin Buber and for existence give a flavour of what to expect: 'Martin Buber (1878–1965). Buber stressed the primacy of personal over against impersonal relations, which he formulated in terms of "I-You" or "I-Thou" relations, rather than "I-It". The relation to God is a high form of the "I-Thou" relations. In 1925 he translated the Hebrew Bible into German, in collaboration with Franz Rosenzweig in Frankfurt.' There follows a list of some of his publications. That seems to me to be a good brief definition for someone who knows him only by name – and, whatever about the reviewer, the user of a dictionary usually consults it to discover the meaning of an unfamiliar word. The entry for Existence reads: Some philosophers treat 'existence' as a property and distinguish between the properties of existing contingently and existing necessarily. Other philosophers resist thinking of 'existence' as a property and claim that it is dispensable in our descriptions and explanations of the world; e.g. rather than affirm 'lions exist', we should say 'there are lions'. In each case, there is evidently more to say but what is said is appropriate to a dictionary.

Most of the entries that I was competent to check seemed to me to be good although, inevitably, there are some oversights. The entry for Robert Boyle omits the fact that his most important and enduring discovery was the relation between pressure and volume in an inert gas, and the list of Avicenna's work ought to have included *The Book of Scientific Knowledge*. 'These definitions, as the editors write, are only the beginning of philosophical exploration' (p. x). There is a good introduction, a useful chronology and a very valuable thematic bibliography (pp. 253–85).

Unlike *A Dictionary*, *Key Terms* is a set of essays by a single author. In the former the entry for 'naturalism' takes up less than half a column but in

Key Terms an entire page; ‘agnosticism’ in the first is half a column; in the second a page. Some essays, for instance, the ‘*Kalam* cosmological’ argument runs through four pages. A *Dictionary* tells how the term ‘ontological argument’ is used; in *Key Terms* there is a seven page discussion of the idea. The books, then, serve very different purposes as do dictionaries and encyclopaedias. Several essays in *Key Terms* are in themselves interesting and illuminating contributions to contemporary debate, some are closer to being simply definitions (the entry on ‘Omnipotence’ is close to being a definition of the term with an addendum about God’s foreknowledge and freewill) but the entire collection is an excellent introduction to, and discussion of, contemporary questions in the philosophy of religion.

GARRETT BARDEN

NATURA PURA : ON THE RECOVERY OF NATURE IN THE DOCTRINE OF GRACE by Steven A. Long, *Fordham University Press*, 2010, pp. 282, \$65.00

Henri de Lubac’s hugely influential *Surnaturel* served to turn up the volume in the twentieth-century on what has been a perennial discussion in Christian theology, namely the relation of grace to nature and its amalgamate theological excursus. Prof. Steven Long argues that, contrary to the thesis of de Lubac, there is for St. Thomas, in addition to the supernatural end of beatitude, a natural end that defines the species of human nature. *Natura Pura* is a loaded and immediately controversial title; Long grabs the bull by the horns in arguing the thesis that pure nature discloses ‘the proximate, proportionate, natural end from which the species of man is derived’ (8), and also that the human person could without injustice have been created for this natural end alone, in a state of pure nature. For Long, the necessity of this thesis arises from the intelligibility and integrity of the natural order in its own right. The Thomist tradition has always, maintains Long, insisted that the gift of creation has its own theonomic character considered in precision from grace.

The book proceeds in two movements: the first chapter calls attention to the teaching of St. Thomas regarding the theonomic character of nature and the natural law. The following three chapters head off significant challenges to the author’s thesis regarding the intelligibility and integrity of *natura pura*. The created order, maintains Long, discloses real knowledge of God as cause and first principle of being. The denial of *natura pura* – that the gift of nature has an integral intelligibility and proximate end definitive of the species – reduces nature to an empty limit concept, an autonomist jurisdiction, unintelligible apart from grace; this denial results in a veritable ‘ontological evacuation of nature’ on the part of theology and philosophy (43). Long writes, ‘Once this theonomic character of natural order and natural law are lost, then sustaining the distinction of nature and grace simply formalizes the boundaries consequent upon the loss of God’ (43).

First, Long argues against an understanding of nature as a ‘vacuole for grace’. Interacting with Balthasar’s *The Theology of Karl Barth*, Long maintains that the account of nature rendered by Balthasar lacks ontological density; it is ‘the equivalent of a theological vacuole or empty Newtonian space, a placeholder for grace’ (55). Balthasar found the doctrine of *natura pura* both unhelpful and insufficient; for him an account of nature outside of the precincts of grace was purely hypothetical and unintelligible because *natura pura* is not the ‘concrete nature’ we experience. *Sed contra*, maintains Long, pure nature is a necessary and valid theological abstraction similar to other theological abstractions that Balthasar was quite comfortable employing (such as the real distinction between