a philosophical point of view, it does not offer much, especially in terms of the problems relevant for philosophy of religion. But again, this might be too much to expect from a popular book such as BB. Fortunately, there is an emerging literature on philosophers engaging with psychological and biological explanations of religion (e.g., *The Believing Primate*, OUP 2009). Further, Barrett himself has addressed the topic in several articles and his other 2012 book *Cognitive Science, Religion and Theology: From Human Minds to Divine Minds* (JTF Press), which I would suggest as a companion piece to BB.

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Charles Taliaferro. *Dialogues about God*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009.

In his excellent book *Dialogues about God*, Charles Taliaferro gives a comprehensive introduction into the main questions concerning the subject of God. The theist Taliaferro presents his introduction in the form of a dialogue, because he appreciates the abilities of self-questioning and of placing oneself into the opposing position (p. xii). He chose the form of a friendly dialogue in order to enable a constructive discussion and reduce the hostility which sometimes occurs in philosophical discussions (pp. xiii-xiv). The four characters of this dialogue are the secular naturalist Pat, the theist Chris, the agnostic Tony and the negative theologian Liz who holds that God is beyond human concepts (pp. xiv-xvi).

Is Theism coherent and valid as an Explanation?: Pat begins the dialogue by arguing that theism is incoherent. Theism assumes the existence of God, a conscious immaterial person. But we are only familiar with bodily beings. Without a face there can be no grin. Without a body there can be no thinking, feeling and acting. The idea of an immaterial person is incoherent (pp. 2-4). Chris objects to that and argues that human beings are conscious immaterial persons. Hence conscious immaterial persons are possible. Chris argues that materialism with respect to human beings is false. Beliefs, purposes and desires cannot be reduced to physical processes in the brain. We can imagine that human beings are zombies, i.e. that they behave as if they had mental life with conscious experiences while in fact lacking mental life altogether. This conceivability is

evidence for the assumption that zombies are possible. If zombies are possible, then my body has the property of possibly existing without my consciousness, whereas my consciousness does not have this property. Thus, by Leibniz's Law of the Indiscernability of Identical Entities my body and my consciousness are different entities, because they differ in at least one property. We know that there are many correlations between our bodily states and our mental states. However, correlations are not the same as identity relations (pp. 4-5). Pat responds to this by arguing that the constant correlations between our bodily states and our mental states are evidence of the identity of bodily and mental states (p. 5). Chris admits that in the case of water and H_2O the constant correlation of the two is evidence of the identity of the two, because we can grasp the identity by thinking that water is composed of H_2O. By contrast, we will never observe subjective conscious experience. We can only discover it introspectively. Therefore we know that our conscious experiences are radically distinct from our brain states (p. 7). Chris further argues that even if 'human consciousness is necessarily physical, it does not follow that every form of consciousness is necessarily physical' (p. 8). Even if materialism with respect to human beings were true, it would not follow that conscious immaterial persons are impossible.

Then Pat and Chris discuss whether theism is a valid explanation of the cosmos. Chris argues that the natural sciences explain the existence and the properties of many contingent objects in the cosmos. But we also need an explanation for why there is a cosmos at all and why there is this cosmos rather than another cosmos. For if every part of the cosmos is contingent then the cosmos itself is contingent (p. 13). Theism is an explanation of our cosmos. The existence of the cosmos is explained as created according to God's contingent will. God himself does not have to be explained, because he exists necessarily (p. 14). Pat's stance is that the necessary truths (including mathematical truths) are features of language and that we could simply define the cosmos as existing necessarily (p. 15).

Eventually Liz presents her view that God is not a thing among other things. He is beyond all human concepts and categories. Unlike Pat, Liz does not deny God's existence. Liz only denies that God can be described (p. 19). Chris responds that the negations Liz proposes only make sense if there is some positive concept of God (p. 21).

The Concept of God: The divine attributes are discussed in the second conversation. God is omniscient and has immediate awareness of all

states of affairs (p. 27). Pat argues that God's omniscience is incompatible with human libertarian freedom by presenting the following dilemma. Either God is omniscient or not. If he is, then he knows your future actions. That you will go sailing tomorrow is fixed now, because God foreknows it. Hence you do not have the ability to do otherwise than going sailing tomorrow. You lack freedom in the libertarian sense. If God is omniscient, then human beings do not have libertarian freedom. Hence, either human beings do not have libertarian freedom or God is not omniscient (p. 29). Chris's response is that being omniscient means to know all truths that are possible to know. Today there is not yet a matter of fact about what you will do tomorrow. Hence it cannot be known and is not required to be known in order to be omniscient (p. 30). This stance seems problematic for the theist, however. For there are many prophecies in the Bible foretelling future events. For example, Jesus foretold Peter's denial and the prophets of the Old Testament foretold Jesus' life, suffering and death. There seems to be better solution for the theist, namely Molinism. Luis de Molina assumed that before the creation of the world God knew about every possible creature what she/he/it would do if put in certain circumstances. God chose to create this cosmos on the basis of this Middle Knowledge. God's foreknowledge of what the creatures in this cosmos will do does not determine their actions, because it has no causal influence on the creatures. Rather, God's foreknowledge is dependent on what human beings will freely choose to do. (See Thomas Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 36-46.)

Pat takes the discussion to the divine attributes of omnipotence and essential goodness. She argues that these attributes are incompatible. For if God is essentially good then because of his nature God cannot do any evil. But Pat can do evil and thus is more powerful than God (at least in this respect). Hence God is not omnipotent (p. 36). Chris responds that the ability to do evil is not a power, but a deficiency (p. 37).

Arguments for the Existence of God: In the third conversation Chris advances four arguments in favour of theism. First, Chris presents the ontological argument. If God exists, then he exists necessarily. Essential or necessary existence is one of the qualities of a perfect being. God cannot exist contingently. Therefore either he exists necessarily or his existence is impossible. The existence of God is possible. We have reason to think so, because there is no contradiction in the concept of God. This is so for two reasons. First, this is so, because we can positively

conceive that God exists. Second, this is so, because the complexity of the universe, the existence of human consciousness and the existence of religious experience are evidence in favour of God's existence and thus also in favour of the assumption that it is possible that God exists. Hence the existence of God is not impossible. Thus God exists necessarily (pp. 52-53). Pat objects that Chris simply defines God into existence. Existence and necessary existence are not proper qualities of a concept. For they do nothing to enlarge the concept (p. 54). In Chris's view, however, necessary existence is a proper quality of a concept, because it is an excellence which contingent beings lack (p. 54).

Second, Chris presents the cosmological argument. Pick any physical object in our cosmos you like. Let us assume we seek an account for the existence of this physical object. It exists but it could also not have existed. It exists contingently. It does not explain its own existence. It has been caused by another physical object which again exists contingently. This physical object again exists contingently as well as its cause, etc. We can go back as far as we wish in this kind of causal chains of contingently existing objects. But we never get an ultimate explanation of the existence of any of these contingently existing objects. There are only contingent objects in the cosmos and the cosmos as a whole exists contingently. Only God as necessary being provides an ultimate explanation of the existence of the cosmos and every object in it (pp. 56-57). In response to this Pat keeps her view to regard the cosmos as the ultimate frame of explanation. She is not willing to go beyond physical explanations to explain the cosmos (p. 62).

Third, Chris presents the teleological argument. The cosmos has a high degree of structure and order. This enables the existence of irreducibly complex organisms with consciousness. The existence of an intelligent good God provides an intentional explanation for this. It is likely that God wants there to be intelligent conscious creatures in the cosmos and thus designs to cosmos accordingly. By contrast, the naturalist has a hard time of explaining the structure, order and complexity of the cosmos, because only causal explanations are available for him (pp. 63-65). Pat objects that this argument is only plausible if we posit a finite amount of time. If there is an infinite period of time, then all possible configurations of the cosmos are expected to occur sometimes (p. 65).

Fourth, Chris presents the argument from religious experience. There is widespread testimony of the existence of a transcendent reality. This is evidence in favour of the existence of a transcendent reality. Pat raises

four objections and Chris responds to each of them. First, Pat argues that because of their diversity religious experiences cannot be evidence in favour of one and the same entity. Chris responds that the religious experiences of adherents of different religions share many elements. They have in common that God reveals himself as good, compassionate and powerful (p. 68). Second, Pat argues that the existence of religious experiences can be explained naturally without appeal to the existence of a transcendent reality. Religious experiences can be explained by the human desire for mercy, forgiveness, etc., and by the religious training the persons with religious experiences have received. Chris responds even if God uses natural means to perpetuate religious experiences it does not follow that religious experiences do not point to the existence of God (p. 70). Third, Pat argues that even if religious experiences are evidence in favour of a transcendent reality they are not evidence in favour of the theistic God as a necessary, omniscient, omnipotent, and essentially good being over other transcendental realities. Chris agrees with this objection by Pat and admits that it is not by experience alone but only by reasoning and revelation by God that we come to know the divine attributes (p. 71). Fourth, Pat argues that religious experiences are not valid evidence, because we can produce them by pharmaceuticals. Chris responds that even if this is so it does not undermine religious experiences as evidence for the existence of God. God is omnipresent and religious experiences can be evidence of him even if we have the power to produce them (p. 72).

The Problem of Evil: Pat starts the fourth conversation by presenting the problem of evil. If God is all-good he wants to prevent evil. If God is all-powerful and all-knowing he can prevent evil. So why is there evil? (p. 77) Chris answers this question with the free-will defence. It is good that God creates creatures with free will. Free will entails that the creatures have the ability to do evil. God allows that in order to keep the value of free will for his creatures: ' ... deep moral freedom involves acting in favour of goodness when one could do otherwise.' (p. 81)

The second challenge Pat raises is about the amount of evil. Why did God not create a world with less evil? Chris argues that there is no best possible world. This is analogous to there being no greatest possible number. One can always ask why there is not less evil and why there are not more values in the world (p. 80).

Miscellaneous Topics: In the fifth conversation miscellaneous topics about God are discussed. Miracles are events brought about by special

acts by God that violate at least one law of nature. Miracles like the resurrection of Jesus are radical breaks of the regularities of the world (p. 106). Pat distrusts testimonies of miracles in general, for she thinks it is more probable that the witnesses had hallucinations than that there was a radical break of a law of nature (pp. 107-108). Chris regards the special divine acts involved in miracles as similar to acts of human free will. Both types of actions are free and cannot be predicted by knowledge of the current state of the universe and the laws of nature. The type of miracle that occurs most often is religious experience in which God causes an experiential awareness of the divine in human beings (p. 108). Chris's view that miracles are possible can be backed up by Alvin Plantinga's argumentation. First, miracles are not incompatible with classical Newtonian science, because the laws of classical mechanics hold only for closed systems. (See Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion and Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 76-84.) Second, miracles are compatible with quantum mechanics for the same reason. Furthermore, some physicists think that miracles are not even breaks of the laws of quantum mechanics, because the wave function of quantum mechanics only gives us probabilities where each particle is located. On this view miracles are extremely improbable events caused by God. (See Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion and Naturalism*, pp. 94-97.)

Eventually, the incarnation as an issue within Christian theism is discussed. Jesus Christ is both God and a man. The divine attributes are necessary existence, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, essential goodness and eternal or everlasting existence. By contrast, the human attributes are contingent existence, finite knowledge, power and presence, not essential goodness and temporally finite existence. These properties are direct contraries. Pat argues that it is impossible for one person to exemplify both the divine and the human properties (p. 111). Chris responds by stating that the Christian doctrine is that Jesus Christ is both wholly God and a whole human being. But he is not the whole God and he is not a mere human being. Chris advocates Eastern Christology. There is one single divine nature. But God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit has three centres of consciousness. In the incarnation the Son kept all the divine attributes. But he undertook a radical self-limitation and limited himself to a human mind within his divine mind (p. 112). The Son of Good took on an individual human nature. In a proximate sense it was Christ's human nature which did miracles and rose from the dead while

ultimately it was the Son of God who did miracles and rose from the dead. (See Thomas Flint, '"A Death He Freely Accepted": Molinist Reflections on the Incarnation', *Faith and Philosophy*, 18: 1 (2001), 5-6.) Here is how this account can be applied to the attribute of essential goodness. Jesus Christ as the Son of God was essentially good and not able to sin. But Jesus as a human being was not essentially good. He was able to sin and faced real temptation. By his Middle Knowledge of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom God foreknew that Jesus Christ as a human being would resist all temptations if he was put it the circumstances he was put in. In this way God foreknew with certainty that Jesus would resist all temptations and freely choose to accept the death on the cross for the sake of the redemption of us sinners. (See Thomas Flint, '"A Death He Freely Accepted": Molinist Reflections on the Incarnation', pp. 7-10.)

Conclusion: Charles Taliaferro's book *Dialogues about God* is an excellent, comprehensive and easy-to-read introduction into the important topics about God. Taliaferro presents the different views with clarity and covers the most important aspects of the topic. It is a great introduction for undergraduate students and non-philosophers, and gives a wonderful overview of the fascinating topic of God. It is not intended go into great depth and detail and it is not intended to advance the current discussions in philosophical theology.

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Fraser Watts (ed.). *Creation: Law and Probability*. Ashgate, 2008.

Creation: Law and Probability is a collection of papers drawn from, or prompted by, the second meeting of the International Society for Science and Religion held in Boston in 2004, and published within the Ashgate Science and Religion Series.

With a keen interest in the relation between science and religion and particular interests in the nature of physical law (probabilistic or otherwise) and the nature of chance (physical or otherwise), I found this book interesting. It gave me valuable insight into how various religious perspectives understand the concepts of law and probability, and the role those concepts play within those perspectives. (Although it should be