



## Resensies/Reviews

# Philosophy and religion: a historical dialogue

**Sawyer, Frank. 2010. Philosophical perspectives in dialogue with theology. Vol. 1: Greek, Roman & Medieval philosophy.** Sárospatak: Sárospatak Reformed Theological Academy. 313 p. Price: €25,00. ISBN: 978-963-88090-7-0.

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Sawyer is an established author on philosophy and ethics in the reformed theological tradition. In this two-part series Dr. Sawyer aims to produce an introduction to western philosophy in dialogue with theology. The volume under review takes the reader from the Pre-Socratics to Aquinas, while volume two will move from the Renaissance through the Enlightenment to postmodern times. The history of philosophy is painted with a broad brush, the brush being the relationship between philosophy and the Christian faith. The publication finds its roots in the author's notes to students challenging them "to think about the history of philosophy and to see some of the actuality of philosophical themes" (p. 5).

This volume is divided into thirteen chapters. Chapter one deals with a number of introductory questions aimed specifically at theological students studying philosophy: Why study the history of philosophy? Why study philosophy as students of theology? What is philosophy? What are the roots of western civilisation and philosophy? The author also touches on issues such as faith and knowledge, epistemological approaches and limits logic and criteria for finding truth. This first chapter provides a readily understandable introduction to philosophy even to the uninitiated. Chapter 2 introduces Pre-Socratic philosophy as the beginnings of western philosophy. Influential

philosophers of this period are discussed in short, yet informative sections. Chapter 3 discusses the philosophy of Socrates and his great influence. For the first time the author places philosophy under the microscope of theology based on divine revelation through Scripture and systematised in systematic theology. At this junction the real dialogue between philosophy and theology starts. Following the same pattern, chapters 4 and 5 discuss the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle.

Chapter 6 continues the history of western philosophy through the Hellenistic period, covering the philosophy of the Cynics, Sceptics, Epicureans, Stoics and Neo-Platonists. The dialogue with theology also continues by way of the author's comments on each of these philosophical schools. Chapter 7 serves as a summary of the development of western thought into Greek and Roman times, identifying themes typical of early western philosophy. The chapter concludes with a section on the relevance of Theology to Philosophy as well as other fields of study such as the Natural Sciences, Sociology, and Economics. The dialogue between philosophy and theology intensifies in chapter 8 dealing with Hellenistic philosophy and the theology of the apostle Paul. The chapter ends with a review of the impact of Paul's theology on Christian philosophy and the latter's contribution to philosophy in general.

Chapter 9 deals with the influence of philosophy in the patristic age, referring specifically to the problem of God and early Christian apologetics. This is further elucidated by the discussion of Augustine's philosophy and theology in chapter ten, ending with themes that have continued to spark debate in philosophical and theological circles. Chapter eleven introduces philosophy in the centuries between Augustine and Aquinas, with chapter twelve focusing on Thomas Aquinas. The concluding chapter describes philosophy from scholasticism to nominalism at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance.

The question is whether the author achieves the stated purpose of the publication. The overview of the history of philosophy from Pre-Socratic times to the end of the Middle Ages is certainly not unique, and might very well be covered in more detail in other publications. Yet Sawyer's focus on the relationship between philosophy and theology is refreshing in a postmodern context where theology is often regarded as irrelevant and beyond the scope of proper scientific enquiry. He succeeds in establishing theology's credentials as a unique way of looking for answers to questions typically posed by philosophy, and beyond. Yet he also reminds theologians of the

questioning role of philosophy to be applied to all scientific endeavours, theology included. Sawyer manages to provoke further thought and discussion among students with the “Questions for further thought” at the end of each chapter. I consider this work to be compulsory reading for all theological students of all traditions, and especially students in the reformed tradition. It succeeds in bringing about true dialogue between two disciplines often at odds with one another!