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The Reality Of Time And The Existence Of God

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What is important in the present context, however, is that *simple foreknowledge*, foreknowledge *without* middle knowledge, is *not sufficient* to enable God to be perfectly provident. Indeed, I claim to have shown that simple foreknowledge is *of no use whatever* for the doctrine of providence.⁸ Simple foreknowledge provides God with knowledge of what will *actually* occur, but this knowledge, which is *subsequent* to God's own decision about what he will himself do, cannot then be used to *guide* that decision. And thus we obtain an important result: *Those who wish to combine a libertarian conception of free will with a strong doctrine of providence must embrace middle knowledge.* Those who affirm simple foreknowledge but deny middle knowledge are very likely to find themselves with a doctrine of foreknowledge which is theologically useless.

Freddoso's work on Molina is indispensable. It is an outstanding contribution to the literature on divine foreknowledge, and by far the best thing produced to date on middle knowledge. Those who work on either of these topics will overlook it to their own great loss.

NOTES

1. See, "Foreknowledge and Necessity," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985), pp. 121-57; "A Refutation of Middle Knowledge," *Nous* 20 (1986), pp. 545-57; and *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), Chapters 2 and 4-7.

2. Alfred J. Freddoso, "Accidental Necessity and Logical Determinism," *Journal of Philosophy* 80 (1983), pp. 257-78.

3. See Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), p. 123.

4. Strictly speaking, what is new here is that accidental necessity is not closed under entailment *for contingent propositions*; on Freddoso's explication, necessary propositions cannot in any case be accidentally necessary.

5. See, "Foreknowledge and Necessity," pp. 142-44, and *God, Time, and Knowledge*, pp. 104-15.

6. This point is argued in *God, Time, and Knowledge*, pp. 32-35.

7. Personal communication.

8. See, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, Chapter 3.

The Reality of Time and The Existence of God, by David Braine. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988. Pp. XVI, 383. Cloth.

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In a challenging and penetrating inquiry, this philosopher from Aberdeen develops a sustained argument whereby the world in which we live assumes its rightfully primary place, and it is this world's continuing into the future

which provides the impetus for his proof that God exists. Josef Pieper once remarked that the “hidden element in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas” is the fact of creation. Braine may be seen to be elucidating that remark by making explicit the connections between key assertions of Aquinas’ synthesis: the eternity of God and the reality of time, the centrality of a real distinction between essence and *esse*, such that the resulting composition of creatures demands a simple (or incomposite) cause of their existence, leading to a relation of creator to creation of such immediacy that all temptation to deism is removed “when, in one move, we at once mark the unlikeness in God’s way of existing from the way creatures exist and mark this immediacy” (20).

My reference to Aquinas is intended as an orientation; one should not be misled into labelling Braine’s effort as “Thomist,” for the arguments he gives are his own, exhibiting a sophisticated grasp of key elements in philosophy of science, as well as logic and semantics. Yet he manages to catch thereby the heart of Aquinas’ affirmation of a temporal world freely created by an eternal God, showing just how wrongheaded it is to caricature Aquinas’ articulation as “classical theism”—i.e., an irreligious substitution of philosophical categories for the fresh perspectives of revelation, and therefore a position which must be overcome, on theological if not philosophical grounds. Quite the contrary, Braine argues: unless some such articulation of creation in relation to its creator is allowed to inform one’s theological inquiry, the delicate harmony between free creatures and a sovereign God is bound to be jeopardized—as the history of theology amply demonstrates. In fact, one of the strongest recommendations of Braine’s study is his knowledgeable sensitivity to theological issues throughout, particularly in his recurrent application of logical and semantic results to Trinitarian doctrine. One might also see his resolute upholding of the primacy of “first order” philosophical results and the world of existing substances as reflecting a similar theological sensitivity: the only world we know is the one in which we and other things subsist; other “worlds” are conceptually parasitic on this one, the one which God creates and sustains.

The focus implies the “reality of time”: while substances exist in a causal matrix wherein their activity is causally displayed, the *now* of existence and activity (which he dubs the “dramatic now” [47]) itself provides no reason for their continuing in existence. Such a claim does not entail “occasionalism,” though it indicates why theists bereft of the conceptual tools needed to distinguish *existing* from *essence* might feel constrained to evacuate natural causal efficacy in the face of a sovereign creator. For Braine, as for Aquinas, natures reliably continue yet their actual continuance requires a non-temporal cause of their existing (340). Such is the nub of his proof that a first cause of the universe must exist, so the early chapters are spent securing a viable

notion of temporal existence, and the latter chapters enhancing the notion of first cause of existence so that it can be recognizable to Jews, Christians, and Muslims as their God. And throughout, his astute methodological comments keep reminding the reader how doing philosophy of religion requires a clear perspective on and accurate use of many subdisciplines of philosophy.

God's eternity and the "dramatic now" of temporal existence will be seen to complement one another once one assumes a resolutely (Aristotelian) "first order" philosophical stance, wherein existing things exhibit their activity *via* causal efficacy. And the activity stems from their actual existing, which must itself flow from an eternal cause, where 'eternal' means more than 'non-temporal' since what makes God eternal is the very identity of God's essence with existence, such that God alone is in full possession of life and so can properly be said to be the cause of everything's existing (351). The result, then, is a creator, free because eminently personal (Ch. IX), yet "purged...of the implications of 'individuality' to which Hindu and Buddhist rightly object" (370) by a "metaphysical perspective which...considers the conditions of temporal existence itself, and not the conditions of rational thinking, as internal to any proper theology" (338).

That same perspective "secures the rejection of deistic, 'strong predestinationist,' and Platonic models of eternity and personhood" (333) by adopting the "*via negativa* [which insists] that God should be differently related to his effects than any other possible cause to its effects and that He should possess His nature in a different way from any other possible being" (353)—i.e., simply and identically. Joined to a non-dualist account of action, this means that "the eternal God...is at one and the same time the one whose breath (*spirit*, *pneuma*, or *ruah*) enlivens, energizes, and gives vigor and existence to all things, immediate within them" (357)—since "the agent does what happens [in such a way] that the time of the doing is the time of the happening so that God's acting will not be in eternity but in time" (135), since "what is done by God is the existing and the continued existing of things that exist" (20). Moreover, this immediacy of God's presence to creation, tied as it is to the reality of time, nicely finesses "foreknowledge" questions, since whatever does not exist cannot be present to a knower either. The need to attribute such a knowledge to God at once betrays a category mistake (re. time/eternity) as well as places both creator and creature in a theological bind, as we shall see.

Braine's arguments are designed explicitly to culminate in a creator: not a demiurge, which he implies is the furthest one can reach with a "platonist" or rationalist perspective, which elevates conceptual possibilities above the actuality of existing things; nor a sovereign being conceived "alongside" the world in which we live, "imagined as if He made plans and acted in the manner of a finite person" (327). With such a one, "we seem to be forced

into a choice between 'strong predestinationism' and a coeval interdependent demiurge." So the metaphysical efforts to think an incomposite (or simple) being, whose uniqueness is rooted in that negative first-level assertion (168-73), and to do so from an analysis of existing things which leads one to recognize their existential composition, promises a rich theological payoff. Yet here one must attend to Braine's explicit "contrast between a rationalist metaphysics attempting to build...on certain univocal general principles bestraddling all subject-matters uniformly and an Aristotelian metaphysics utilizing structurally interrelated sets of analogous concepts" (210). What is at stake here is a crucial difference in the way one approaches human knowledge of generality: is it "*exhibited primarily in judgements about particular cases*" (257), and so "*realized in a spread of analogous applications of principle*" or is it expressed "*in some single univocal principle*" (262)? Braine, with Aquinas (213-19) and Wittgenstein, comes down decisively for the first, while "platonists," who play the lasting foil for his sustained argument, line up with Scotus and Leibniz (263) on the other side, carrying with them (I would suggest) all too many graduate students who are introduced into professional philosophy by way of *-isms* rather than by way of examples and careful consideration of the context and point of diverse philosophical arguments. In that respect, Braine's manner of proceeding, rigorous as it is, asks more than following its tight reasoning; or rather, the upshot of allowing oneself to follow the arguments will be a challenge to settled perspectives about philosophical argument itself. That is, I take it, the import of his insistence on the primacy of first-order over second-order considerations (225n.), and of an "*a posteriori* approach which considers the conditions of temporal existence" (378) over various *a priori* approaches associated with "platonism" and identified with Scotus. Braine shows better than anyone I know just how crucial such a difference is for philosophical theology, and since that difference cuts so deep, just how relevant other parts of philosophy are to executing a philosophy of religion which will be adequate to the demands of a theology faithful to the newness of Christian revelation—to say nothing of the newness of Jewish or Muslim faith as well.

Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age, by Sallie McFague. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987. Pp. xv and 224.

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This is an important book. Addressing some of the most trenchant, current issues in philosophical theology, it offers an articulate and interesting exposition of "metaphorical theology" which not only challenges traditional theo-