

7-1-1991

Book Review: Divine And Human Action: Essays In The Metaphysics Of Theism

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Recommended Citation

Wainwright, William (1991) "Book Review: Divine And Human Action: Essays In The Metaphysics Of Theism," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 8 : Iss. 3 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol8/iss3/8>

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BOOK REVIEWS

Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism, ed. by **Thomas V. Morris**. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988. Pp. 366, \$42.50 (cloth), \$13.95 (paper).

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The authors in Morris's new collection were commissioned to "treat in some manner the theistic conception of God's relation to, and interaction with, the created realm." It was hoped that they would explore neglected issues and thereby deepen our understanding of theism's metaphysical implications. They have succeeded admirably.

The book is divided into three sections. The first ("Divine Causality and the Natural World") contains essays by Linda Zagzebski, Philip Quinn, Alfred Freddoso, and Jonathan Kvanvig and Hugh McCann.

Zagzebski's paper is called "Individual Essence and the Creation." It contains two arguments for the existence of individual essences. The first shows that objects can't differ only in accidental properties; they must also differ in at least one essential property. There are, then, individual essences. Zagzebski's second argument is designed to prove that objects must differ not only in qualitative properties (properties "expressible without direct reference to an individual or a possible world") but also in *essential* qualitative properties. If they do, objects have different individual *qualitative* essences. Both arguments employ a "Principle of Plenitude" which expresses the "simple intuition" that it is logically possible for an object to have any property that isn't excluded by its essential properties, and both appeal to the Identity of Indiscernibles. I found Zagzebski's arguments persuasive although her second employs the more controversial version of the second principle (that distinct objects must have different *qualitative* properties). She also makes a good case for the claim that, by identifying the divine exemplars with individual qualitative essences, exemplarism can be defended from several important objections.

Philip Quinn ("Divine Conservation, Secondary Causes, and Occasionalism") shows that whether natural causation is construed as Humean regularity, counterfactual dependence, or causal necessity, secondary causes are consistent with a strong doctrine of divine creation and conservation. Quinn avoids occasionalism by stipulating that God is the total and exclusive cause of a thing's existing at a time but not of its possessing its properties at that

time. It is thus possible for (e.g.) a fire being lit at a certain time to be the total and exclusive cause of water being heated slightly later although God is the total and exclusive cause of the water existing at that later time. Quinn's argument is successful on its own terms. Nevertheless, I am bothered by the implication that the fire being lit is the "sole cause" of the water being heated, and that God's activity isn't "required by way of causal contribution in order for the effect to obtain." Doesn't this unduly diminish the range of God's sovereignty? I think it does, although (as Quinn points out) it is difficult to see how one can avoid this consequence unless one rejects the attractive notion that real causes necessitate their effects and aren't redundant, or adopts occasionalism.

Is occasionalism really so absurd? Freddoso's "Medieval Aristotelianism and the Case against Secondary Causation in Nature" displays the theological motives behind it, argues that (in its most coherent form) occasionalism denies that created material substances have causal powers, and shows that most standard objections to it can easily be met. Freddoso's own objections are more formidable. Occasionalism implies that anti-realists are correct. Science only describes regularities among phenomena; it doesn't discover causes. Freddoso also believes that occasionalism leads to Berkeleyan idealism since it is difficult to see what a body's metaphysical independence can consist in if it lacks causal power. Finally, occasionalism "implicates God too deeply in the causation of physical evil." It may also be inconsistent with a catholic view of the sacraments.

I am not completely convinced by these objections. The most unattractive feature of anti-realism is its repudiation of a real and independent truth of the matter. Occasionalism doesn't do this. Nor is it clear that causal powers are a necessary condition of metaphysical independence. Platonisms which ascribe independence to numbers, propositions, and values aren't obviously incoherent. I also doubt that the "buffer between God and evil" provided by created natures matters much. The real issue is responsibility and (as Freddoso admits) responsibility isn't diminished by buffers of this sort.

In "Divine Conservation and the Persistence of the World," Kvanvig and McCann offer two arguments for the doctrine of divine conservation. The first is "based on considerations having to do with the eternity and immutability of God, and with the nature of the creative act itself." The second attempts to show that created things can't have an inherent capacity to sustain themselves in existence. Although both are interesting, I found the first less persuasive. Kvanvig and McCann argue that since (1) God is immutable, (2) "there is simply no room for the claim that He could cease to create, or cease to create any of the things He does create." Hence (3) "the world cannot persist after God has ceased creating it, for He cannot cease creating it."

How convincing is this? As the authors point out, one might attempt to

avoid the conclusion by arguing “that the primary object of God’s creative action is not the *existence* of the world but rather *the world’s existing at t*” (the first moment of its existence), for this doesn’t entail that God changes. While I am not attracted to this view, Kvanvig’s and McCann’s objections to it didn’t fully persuade me. Although it is true that the position as stated is “saddled” with a controversial presupposition—“namely, that the world had a beginning in time,” it could be reformulated to avoid it. One could stipulate, for example, that the object of God’s creative act isn’t the existence of the world at its first moment of existence but, rather, the existence of each substance at its first moment of existence. Nor is it clear that, on this view, the objects of God’s creative action aren’t “substances but complex relational states consisting in something’s having being at a particular moment.” The position is surely that God brings about the relational state in *creating the substance* that comes into being at *t*. Kvanvig and McCann also think that the view we are discussing implies that times can “be individuated independent of the changes that occur at them” and that this leads to difficulties. God would have no reason to bring the world into existence at *t* rather than at some other moment and hence is not “a completely rational being.” Since there “is a respect in which His activity as Creator is non rational,” He isn’t “perfect in every respect.” His immutability also precludes Him from acting in this way. An immutable being can’t “time the results” of His action by “controlling the time” at which He acts since He doesn’t act at a time. Nor can He do so by “making sure some pre-existent material changes at *t*,” or by “doing something to *t*.” Neither objection seems compelling. Suppose there is a good reason for doing something (e.g., creating) but not for doing it in one way rather than another, and an agent does it in one of these ways. How is the agent imperfect? Surely not for being less rational than he or she, or some other agent, might have been in those circumstances since it is impossible for an agent to act *more* rationally in those circumstances. Nor do I see why God must time the results of His actions by doing something else. Why isn’t the fact that God eternally wills that the world come into being at *t* sufficient? Given that His will is necessarily efficacious, what else is needed?

The second section is devoted to “Providence and Creaturely Action.” Peter van Inwagen’s paper is called “The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God.” He argues that chance may play a major role in a world that God both creates and sustains. If it does, many events aren’t part of His plan and He has no reason for permitting their occurrence (although they may have causes and although God may have reasons for permitting events of that type). Van Inwagen’s thesis is provocative and raises important new issues. In my opinion, van Inwagen has successfully shown that even if God creates and sustains the world’s basic constituents (elementary particles, Cartesian egos, or what-

ever) and their causal powers, and even if He foresees everything that transpires, there won't be reasons for some events, or for God's permitting them, provided that there is no best possible initial state of the created world, the universe is indeterministic, or some creatures enjoy free will.

John Martin Fischer ("Freedom and Actuality") thinks that theological compatibilism has unwelcome consequences. Compatibilists believe that even though God foreknows what we will do, we have the power to act otherwise. Suppose, for example that God truly believes at t_1 that A will do x at t_3 . If A has the power to refrain from doing x at t_3 , then (1) A at t_3 can bring it about that God believed at t_1 that A would refrain from doing x at t_3 , and (2) can also bring it about that God believed at t_2 that A would refrain from doing x at t_3 . The first is incompatible with the "Fixed Past Constraint" (that agents don't have the power to perform an action which would make it true that individuals who in fact possessed a property prior to their action did not possess it). The second is incompatible with one sort of divine immutability, *viz.*, that if God has a property at a time, no agent can bring it about that God doesn't have that property at some later time. Compatibilists are willing to accept the first consequence but Fischer believes that some may be uneasy about the second. I fail to see why. As he admits, bringing it about that God doesn't believe at t_2 that A will do x at t_3 *also* brings it about that God doesn't believe this at t_1 or any other time. The compatibilist isn't committed to the possibility that God's beliefs *change*. Why, then, should compatibilists be any more bothered by the fact that agents can bring it about that God didn't have a belief at t_n which He in fact had at an earlier time t_{n-1} (as well as at t_n and every other time) than they are by the fact that agents can bring it about that God *never* had the belief He in fact had at t_{n-1} (and every other time)?

The most interesting part of Fischer's paper shows how an indexical possibilist like Lewis could avoid both consequences. His argument is, roughly, this. Since God's beliefs about what A will do are world indexed, God has the same set of beliefs about what A will do in every world in which He exists. He believes at every moment, for example, that A does x at t_3 in world w_1 , that A refrains from doing x at t_3 in w_2 , etc. Hence, A's refraining from doing x at t_3 wouldn't bring it about that God had different beliefs about what A will do at t_3 than those He in fact has. Nor (since God doesn't have non-relativised beliefs about which world is actual) would A's refraining from doing x at t_3 bring it about that God believed that (e.g.) w_2 rather than w_1 is actual. As Fischer points out, though, this solution has costs. Apart from indexical possibilism's intrinsic implausibility, it is "in contrast with the standard theological assumption that God...made this world *the* actual world, and that He had a good reason for doing so." It also deprives practical reasoning of its point. Why should I care whether I do or refrain from doing

x if, no matter what I do, worlds in which I do x and worlds in which I don't are equally real?

Thomas Flint's "Two Accounts of Providence" provides a very useful analysis of the Thomists' and Molinists' debate over middle knowledge. It also contends that the ultimate source of their disagreement is philosophical, not theological. Molinists had a libertarian conception of human freedom while Thomists did not. I wasn't entirely convinced by this. Flint is surely right in thinking that there is no "credal divergence," and that the issue can't be settled by scripture or tradition. It is also true that libertarian conceptions of human freedom and orthodox views about God's omniscience make the theory of middle knowledge attractive. It is equally true that compatibilist conceptions of human freedom and orthodox views about God's independence and sovereignty make it attractive to suppose that God's knowledge of contingent truths depends on His creative will. Is it clear, though, that the philosophical divergence is more "fundamental" than the theological? Is it clear, for example, that strong views about divine sovereignty haven't led at least some to reject a libertarian analysis of freedom which would otherwise have seemed attractive? Indeed, why isn't it at least as plausible to think that the basic issue isn't between philosophical opinions or between theological beliefs but between a theological and a philosophical doctrine, i.e., between a high doctrine of divine sovereignty which insists on God's complete determination of contingent facts and an intuitively attractive analysis of human freedom?

William Mann ("God's Freedom, Human Freedom, and God's Responsibility for Sin") proves that standard views of omnipotence and omniscience and the doctrine of simplicity entail that, for any situation that obtains, God effectually wills that it obtain and, for any situation that doesn't obtain, God effectually wills that it not obtain. Mann envisages three objections to this conclusion. It seems to limit God's freedom. (God can't do something we can do, viz., "forbear from being decisive about a situation.") It also appears inconsistent with human freedom and makes God causally responsible for sin.

Mann's reply to the first objection seems adequate. The "alleged...lack of an ability on God's part is more accurately described as a lack of a limitation." God's inability to forbear from determining whether some state of affairs does or doesn't obtain is simply a consequence of His unlimited sovereignty. Mann's responses to the other objections are less convincing. He correctly points out that his conclusion doesn't entail "Necessarily, I bring it about that s" or "Necessarily, I do not exercise the power I have to refrain from bringing it about that s," for it isn't necessary that God wills that I bring it about that s. This won't provide much comfort to libertarians, however, for the latter believe that the power to do otherwise required by human freedom entails

the absence of *any* kind of external determination. Mann's response to the third objection is somewhat more persuasive. I agree that God's moral responsibility in permitting someone to sin is as great as His moral responsibility in effectually willing that that person do so. Mann's position fares no worse in this respect than other views. I am not as convinced that the goodness of God's purposes and intentions, and His "special status" as "loving creator," implies that God doesn't *do* evil (that good may come) in bringing it about that someone sins. (Mann's example of parents knowingly permitting their child to do something wrong isn't analogous. In the analogous case, the parents would effectually determine the child's sinful intention, desires and circumstances.) Contrary to Mann's intentions, his well-reasoned article provides those of us who hold standard conceptions of omniscience and omnipotence, yet find the second and third objections powerful, with one more reason for doubting the doctrine of God's simplicity.

The final section ("The Nature of the Divine Agent") examines a variety of topics. In "Divine and Human Action," William Alston amplifies and refines a position he has argued for elsewhere: that a functionalist analysis of pro-attitudes and beliefs enables us to speak of divine and human action in a partially univocal manner. He admits that the resulting concepts of the divine psyche and activity are too "thin" for practical or devotional purposes but suggests that a solution to this difficulty lies "somewhere in the general territory of metaphor and symbol." Alston's thesis is important and should interest anyone concerned with the nature of divine action or theological predication.

George Mavrodes ("How Does God Know the Things He Knows?") defends a thesis usually rejected out of hand—that God's knowledge is inferential. Since Mavrodes shows that standard objections to this claim are weaker than people have thought, future discussions of the topic must take this paper into account.

Eleonore Stump's and Norman Kretzmann's "Being and Goodness" is a rich and interesting discussion of Aquinas's moral theory and of its implications for theodicy. I will focus on two of their central contentions. (1) If a thing's goodness is a function of its being, then the (moral) goodness of a human act is a function of what the act is. What it is is determined by its "object" ("the state of affairs the agent intends to bring about as a direct effect of the action") and its end. An act's goodness, then, is determined solely by the value of its end and object; its extrinsic consequences have no bearing on its moral quality. (2) One treats an innocent unjustly if he or she is made to suffer without fair compensation. Taking an innocent's life, for example, is unjust because "a necessary...condition of its being rational ["to take another's worldly goods"] is its involving an even trade," and the innocent whose life is taken receives nothing in return. One is never justified in per-

mitting innocents to suffer in order to obtain a greater good. While the act's end is good, its object is not and hence the act itself is morally defective. God cannot, then, justly permit uncompensated suffering to secure the good of others. Nor is it enough that He provide compensation which is accepted as adequate by the victim or that there be "an essential rather than a merely accidental connection between the suffering and the compensation." The suffering must be such that without it "greater harm would come to the victim." Greater good theodicies typically ignore this requirement and are therefore inadequate.

Neither contention is fully persuasive. Consequentialist intuitions are stronger than the authors seem willing to allow. Common sense morality doesn't believe that an actions (intended and foreseen) consequences are always (or perhaps even usually) decisive. But it does appear to think that, in cases in which the foreseen consequences of refraining from an act that would otherwise be wrong (one with a bad object, for example) are *overwhelmingly* bad, it is permissible to perform it and may even be morally wrong *not* to do so. I think Charles Larmore is right. We have deontological *and* consequentialist intuitions. Both should be respected, and they sometimes conflict.¹ (Whether the conflict is a reflection of our fallen situation is an interesting question.) If Larmore *is* right, theories which entail that (foreseen) "extrinsic" consequences can't have a bearing on the moral quality of a person's act are mistaken. But theories like Aquinas's are attractive for a number of reasons not the least of which is the way they embed ethics in a rich theistic metaphysics. Could a theory of this sort accommodate consequentialist intuitions without being altered beyond recognition? A metaphysics of being and goodness may entail that an act's moral value is determined by its intrinsic nature, i.e., by what the act *is*. It is less obvious that an act's intrinsic nature is solely determined by its object and end and not also by its foreseen consequences and the foreseen consequences of refraining from it (including those that depend on how other agents will probably behave). It isn't obvious, in other words, that these consequences *are* "extrinsic accidents" of the act. A particular act is partly defined by its motivational structure and foreseen consequences are *part* of this structure. If intrinsic accidents are what "clarify and redefine our understanding of what" an agent does, it is difficult to see why foreseen consequences aren't intrinsic.

I am also unpersuaded by the authors' second contention. It is true that God's justice requires that He compensate those whose innocent suffering He permits. It is also true that it isn't enough for a victim to find compensation adequate since it may not be. But the example from *A Tale of Two Cities* which the authors use to make this point is misleading. While a few gold coins may satisfy the parents whose child has been run over, they are clearly

disproportionate to the loss of a child's life. Suppose, however, that the compensation is an everlasting participation in God's own life. Marilyn Adams has argued that this good is incommensurable with any finite evil. Be this as it may, it surely isn't disproportionate to it. But if innocent victims *can* be compensated with a good which isn't disproportionate to their suffering (and may even be incommensurable with it), and if (as I argued in the preceding paragraph) "extrinsic" consequences *are* sometimes relevant to the moral quality of a person's act, I fail to see why God couldn't be justified in permitting someone's suffering when doing so is necessary to secure the greater good of others.

Keith Yandell's paper on "Divine Necessity and Divine Goodness" is very interesting and highly controversial. His argument is roughly this. (1) Jesus could be tempted only if He was able to act wrongly. (2) If it was logically impossible for Jesus to sin, He wasn't able to act wrongly. (3) If God is essentially divine and exists necessarily, it is logically impossible for God to act wrongly. (4) God is essentially divine. (5) Jesus is God. (6) If God exists necessarily, it was logically impossible for Jesus to sin. (From 3, 4, and 5.) (7) Jesus was tempted. Therefore, (8) God doesn't exist necessarily. (From 1, 2, 6, and 7.) Yandell concludes that "plain theism" which believes that God's existence is contingent should be preferred to Anselmian theism which does not.

Several comments are in order. (1) While being tempted to do *x* may entail thinking one can do it, does it entail being able to do it? Although Yandell thinks 1 is necessary, he doesn't provide an argument for it. 1 isn't really needed, however, for not only is 7 true, it is also true that Jesus was a responsible moral agent. If Yandell is right, being a responsible moral agent entails an ability to act wrongly. (2) *Is he right?* Yandell argues that a person whose nature or circumstances are so constructed that he or she can't act wrongly isn't a responsible moral agent. The person's goodness isn't "earned," and his or her "freedom would range over too little territory." This seems correct. But what appears to be crucial in these cases is a lack of *autonomy* (the fact that the person's actions are ultimately produced by the extrinsic causes responsible for his or her nature or circumstances) and a lack of *significant* freedom (the comparative triviality of the agent's choices). Neither is true of God (and hence of the incarnate Logos). God's actions aren't produced by extrinsic causes and the range of God's freedom (the creation of any world it wouldn't be wrong to produce) is hardly insignificant. (3) Yandell's "plain theism" leads to the same problems he discovers in Anselmian theism.

Even though goodness is included in God's essence, God *can* sin although, if He "should sin, He would...commit deicide—cease to be altogether." Does this imply that God isn't essentially eternal (and that a belief firmly rooted

in classical Christianity is therefore false)? To show that it doesn't, Yandell constructs the following argument. (1) If God exists, God now knows whether He will choose to sin or not. (2) If He knows that He won't sin, He won't and "so deicide does not occur." (3) If He knows that He will sin, then He also knows that He sins in the future and does nothing now to prevent it. (4) If He knows that He sins in the future and does nothing now to prevent it, He "is not morally perfect even now, and so has committed deicide already" (which is impossible). Hence, (5) If God exists, He never commits deicide. Given that (6) no other being can "surprise" or "overcome" Him, and so destroy Him, it follows that (7) God is indestructible. Therefore, (8) "if God ever exists, He always exists." But this won't do; for if the argument is valid, its premises also entail that God can't sin. Since Yandell thinks 8 is necessarily true, he must also think his premises are necessarily true. Since his premises are necessarily true, 5 is necessarily true. There is no possible world in which God exists and commits deicide. God, therefore, *can't* commit deicide. But sinning and deicide are logically coextensive. If God sins He commits deicide and (since "deicide would be wrong") if God commits deicide, he sins. Hence God, and thus the incarnate Logos, *can't* sin. If He can't, then (on Yandell's view), Jesus isn't a responsible moral agent. "Plain theism" turns out to have no advantage over Anselmian theism.

I am enthusiastic about this collection. All of the essays are good and some are outstanding. Anyone with an interest in philosophical theology should read it.

NOTES

1. Charles Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Eternal God, by Paul Helm. NY: Oxford University Press, 1988. Pp. xv + 228, \$34.95.

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The Western monotheisms agree that God is eternal. But their philosophers disagree about what eternity is. While most now think that God's eternity is His existing through all time, virtually all thinkers up to Aquinas' day held that God's eternity is His existing timelessly—i.e., existing, but existing neither before, after, nor at the same time as any temporal event. As Paul Helm understands this doctrine of timeless eternity (DTE), a timeless God is to time as an author is to the time-frame of that author's novel (30-31): in