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A Most Unlikely God, by Barry Miller. Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996. Viii + 168; *From Existence to God*, by Barry Miller. London and New York: Routledge, 1992. Pp. viii + 206.

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These two books by Barry Miller will soon form a triptych by the addition of a third: *"Exists" and Existence: Redundancy vs. Non-redundancy*. (I shall indicate from the manuscript how this final volume may flesh out issues raised in the earlier two.) Unyielding in argument yet ever modest in his formulations, Barry Miller might be dubbed the "master strategist" of philosophical theology. For he is crystal clear about his goal and the means to that goal, yet always aware that the territory is mined with conceptual conflicts which are difficult to resolve, so he assumes a minimal approach to clarifying them, never asking more prior commitment from his interlocutors than is needed, yet demanding our attention throughout. His mode is analytic, his range broad, and his sights high: the earlier volume (FETG) offers a proof (from the principle of non-contradiction) that a cause of existence must exist, and how it must be constituted to cause something to exist; the latter (AMUD) spells out the character of such a cause, taking on a formidable array of objections to such a One subsisting in itself or being ontologically simple. The "revolution" in ontological attitude which he must work is the explicit theme of the final part of his endeavor (EAE): that far from being the "thinnest" of attributes, *existence* is the richest of all attributes, and that by virtue of which an individual has any other. Of course, he must first show how "^oexists" is a first-level predicate as well as a unique predication, which has been amply and effectively argued (against a formidable set of objectors) in the initial volume (FETG). That extended argument makes but one presumption: that *essence* and *existence* are distinct, and that any existing thing is thereby "composed" of the two.

That composition is likened to the predication relation, so that essence/existence are constituents rather than components of an existing entity, much as Aristotle modeled his matter/form relation on predication. Yet Miller relies explicitly on Frege rather than Aristotle to make his point. Indeed, the prevailing strategy of his argumentation is consistently to employ contemporary conceptual tools to display a classical ontology. He is coy about this goal, however, anxious as he is to bring readers along who may know little about these venerable traditions. At the heart of his initial book lies a strategy for proving God's existence which assiduously avoids any use of the "principle of sufficient reason" or the related "principle of intelligibility." We readily associate the first with Leibniz, while those who know his work could easily associate the second with the Canadian philosopher and theologian, Bernard Lonergan. In search of the fewest possible contested premises, however, Miller's strategy is to rely solely on the principle of non-contradiction, together with the aforementioned distinction between an existing thing's essence and its existence. Here is where he must do the most work, of course, as he labors first to show how "^oexists" can be a first level predicate (assigning a real property to Socrates), and then how it must be unique among such predicates, since it

cannot denominate an accident, for if Socrates is prior to his existing by way of individuation, he can only be posterior to it by way of actuality. (Here he must also eliminate residual traces of "platonism" by arguing "the inconceivability of future individuals" [FETG 40-63].) Only then is he free to show how the dual priorities of Socrates with regard to Socrates' existence generate a contradiction unless a cause of Socrates' existing be introduced; a cause which must exist, where the "necessary existence" involved is more than logical, and best articulated by that being's essence being to exist.

For it turns out that Socrates is [logically] prior to Socrates' existence with respect to individuality, yet posterior with respect to actuality. So what makes Socrates' existence unique as a first-level property is precisely that it must be prior to Socrates, whereas any other property depends on Socrates. Whence then can such an existence come, if not from Socrates? Only from "something external to him," which compels the conclusion: "He exists inasmuch as he is caused to do so by something external to him, and *ultimately by a cause that is itself not caused to exist*" (112). Yet even the term "external" takes on new meaning here, since the very uncaused existence of this "cause of being" is, by virtue of this analysis, *internal* to the existence of Socrates. Nor can such a one be an individual in an ordinary sense, since individuals paradigmatically have their essence distinct from their existence; so while the uniqueness of this cause can be demonstrated, "it cannot be a concrete *individual*, or at least it cannot be an individual except in an analogous sense of that term" (126-27). This extended argument concludes, then, by reminding us how "the notion of Subsistent Existence—a being which is not distinct from its essence—has turned out to be indispensable" (151).

It is this very notion which is explored in exquisite detail in the sequel, AMUG. The initial work is content to have established that one cannot overlook the centrality or the import of something's existing: either by treating existence as the actuality which "comes to" a possible being which could adequately be referred to prior to its existing (so allowing existence to be written off either as a "brute fact" or as a second-level predicate), or by failing to recognize how the logical priority of existence to Socrates makes of Socrates' existence an utterly unique first-level predicate, and one which can be seen to require a cause other than Socrates for Socrates to exist.

It is the second work (AMUG) which spells out the uniquely identifying characteristics of this cause, this time more polemically by developing an account which pinpoints the "falsity of the claims [of] perfect-being theologians and negative theologians alike ° about the nature of God" (10). He does this by distinguishing the limit of a series *simpliciter* from its "limit case," where the limit case functions like the circle to which a series of polygons with an increasing number of sides approaches, yet the circle is not a polygon. So the limit case is not the final member of the series but that to which the series as a whole points, where the capacity so to point distances his treatment from a simple "negative theology," while the very distinction of the limit case from the members of the pointing series assures "the distinction" of creator from creatures which is the touchstone of classi-

cal philosophical theology.¹ So by the deceptively simple device of a "limit case," Miller manages to open a space within which contested notions like *subsistent existence* might receive their due philosophical hearing. And with them, classical notions like *divine simplicity*, with the disarming corollary that "a simple God ° is unlike creatures in never exercising [his power] on anything, and thus his power is never anything but creative" (13). This invites another strategy: "in talk about his causation, the causal operator should always be used externally: ° not 'God makes the Universe exist' but 'God makes it be that (the Universe exist)', not 'God acts on individual X to bring about F' but 'God brings it about that (X do F)' " (13). Nor are these mere devices, but subtle strategies developed to distinguish our discourse about the limit case (creator) from any other thing in the universe (creatures).

If these contentions be familiar to philosophical theologians working in classical (and especially medieval) traditions, they are not only unfamiliar to contemporary laborers in this arcane field, but bowdlerized versions of them have regularly been mocked or trashed. So Miller's strategic skills are constantly stretched to lead his interlocutors into a fresh considerations of formulations which are at best unfamiliar and at worst have been subject to crass misrepresentation. In that respect, the concluding chapter of the third part (EAE), while characteristically modest, becomes quite ironic in the light of the entire triptych: "Somewhat of a Revolution." For following his careful argumentation will indeed lead one to a revolutionary way of thinking about the most basic of issues, and may even prompt a kind of conversion in those who thought these same issues had long been resolved so as to preclude respectful consideration of classical positions and ways of arguing. In that sense, Miller's work may also be seen as an effort at retrieval directed against implicitly Hegelian presuppositions regarding the ways in which "we" have superseded earlier thinkers. Since that settled way of thinking has been endemic to modernity, however, a closer look at classical modes of thought—presented here in an utterly contemporary idiom—may offer his readers one more way of stepping beyond modernity. It also offers a salient reminder of the ease with which philosophical theology can be co-opted by modern ways of thinking which have themselves been developed—quite deliberately if not always that explicitly—to frame a universe absent the "hypothesis" of a creator. Indeed, nothing displays this better than the contrast between an impoverished or an abundant notion of existence.

While this difference forms the explicit theme of his third manuscript, it already figures centrally in his attempt to retrieve a classical notion of the creator in AMUG. The strategy turns on the notion of a bound, and the initially paradoxical proposal that "an object's existence [be] recognized as *bounded* by the object" (70). More explicitly: "so long as an object's existence was conceived of as a being inhering in the object, any ontological richness possessed by the existing object could only have been attributed to the object rather than to its existence." But if *existence* is the first-level property which ordinary discourse presumes it to be, and for which Miller has strenuously argued, it would be incoherent to think of it as attributed to something which does not exist. So he proposes that "that assumption be

jettisoned and an object's existence [be] recognized as *bounded* by the object." For then "its existence has to be accepted as more or less rich, depending on the extent to which it is contracted by the individual that both bounds it and individuates it: the less restrictive the bound, the richer the instance of existence that is individuated by it." The limit case would then be subsistent existence: "quite literally 'rich beyond all bounds'." His earlier discussion of the ways in which Socrates and Socrates' existence are respectively prior one to another, whether one be focusing on individuality or on actuality, prepared us for this startling suggestion, as did the manner in which the first-level predicate "° exists" must differ from any non-existential predication.

Yet Miller saves further discussion of his strategy of *bound* for the final volume, moving on here (in AMUG) to consider in detail the ontological simpleness for which "subsistent existence" provides the necessary condition (80). Here he must contend with a formidable array of objections, negotiating them with a single-minded consistency which allows him to portray creation as the limit case of power: "the limit towards which these series of powers is pointing is a power that is utterly impervious to the absence of anything on which to operate" (88), so that "what might have been thought of as an intervention in the Universe would not be an operation on something that, once having been created, existed in its own right at every moment thereafter. Rather it would be simply the continuing creation of the Universe that was now in some modified state relative to its immediately preceding one" (88-89). In fact, nothing but ontological simpleness can assure the distinction of creator from creatures: "only a being that is identical with its existence (and hence with its other real properties) can be the creator of the Universe" (94, n.11). Finally, divine simplicity requires a stringent alteration of ordinary modal strategies, since such a One has no powers in the sense of abilities: "God does know, understand, will, and create, but he does so without engaging any correlative ability. Likewise, though his is free, he exercises that freedom without engaging in any ability to choose. So, when we accept that he differs absolutely from creatures, we need to be aware of exactly what that precludes us from saying. In particular, it precludes most of the claims made so freely by perfect-being theologians, who seem to have no qualms about depicting God as making choices, as having the ability to create a universe different from our own, as one whose creative activity, knowledge, and understanding are the exercise of his abilities to create, know, and understand respectively, and who acts *on* his creatures as they themselves act on each other °. Anselmians are so far under the spell of anthropomorphism as to fail to realize that this way of depicting the creator of the Universe is not merely false, it is positively bizarre" (167-68).

The striking way in which this concluding salvo contrasts with the careful argumentation throughout all of these volumes should help us to appreciate Barry Miller's sustained motivation, as well as remind us that the presumptions he is exploding have formed the stock-in-trade of much of the recently touted resurgence of "philosophy of religion." In the face of a set of presumptions prevailing like dogmas in that arena, he concludes: "the doctrine of divine simplicity has therefore proved not only to be

entirely intelligible and defensible, but to be crucial in making available to us an understanding of God as being transcendent in a way that, for different reasons, has so eluded Anselmians and negative theologians alike. What they, and process theologians too, have thought to be a most unlikely God is in fact the God who created us" (168). Challenges like that deserve the closest possible attention, even if that should lead us to question many a cherished presumption. Moreover, those whom Barry Miller's work may have encouraged to give classical formulations a second look, even to acknowledge the sophistication they can bring to current debate, would profit by Harm J. M. J. Goris' *Free Creatures of an Eternal God* (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), which also engages contemporary analytic discussions; and in a more theological vein, Thomas Weinandy's recent *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame IN; University of Notre Dame Press, 2000).

NOTES

1. For a lucid account of the implications for faith and for philosophy of "the distinction" of creator from creatures, see Robert Sokolowski, *God of Faith and Reason* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982 / Washington DC: Catholic University of American Press, 1993)

Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas, by John I. Jenkins, C.S.C. Cambridge, 1997, Pp. xv, 267.

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Aquinas's doctrines on knowledge and faith, Jenkins argues, have been misunderstood. He has been read as if answering modern questions, and so his own "conceptual framework" has been largely ignored. Specifically, many have misunderstood Aquinas's view of *scientia* and how that affects his views of theology (*sacra doctrina*), the purpose and structure of the *Summa Theologiae*, and the light of faith. His book is an attempt to remedy these defects.

The book covers a lot of ground, and does so interestingly and competently. The reader will find treated here not only the subjects just mentioned, but also Aquinas's basic theories of epistemology, free choice, nature, will, appetite, and principles of natural law.

The main task of the book is to explain how according to Aquinas theology is a *scientia*, or an Aristotelian *epistémē*. This has more than antiquarian interest. Aquinas's view of theology at first seems rather dry: to say it is a science, even in the Aristotelian sense, seems a straight-jacket. But when one understands how according to Aquinas theology is a sharing in the *scientia* of God himself, Aquinas's position emerges as both an exalted view of theology's dignity and a frank acknowledgment of its limitations.

According to Aquinas, following Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, *scientia* is an understanding of why things have the necessary properties they have—an understanding "not just of the fact, but of the reasoned fact." For example, to know that metals readily conduct heat and electricity is not *scientia*,