Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 18 | Issue 1

Article 14

1-1-2001

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Recommended Citation

Taliaferro, Charles C. (2001) "Mark Wynn, GOD AND GOODNESS," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 18 : Iss. 1 , Article 14.

DOI: 10.5840/faithphil200118122

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol18/iss1/14>

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God and Goodness, by **Mark Wynn**. London: Routledge, 1999. Pp. x and 225. \$29.95 (Cloth).

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God and Goodness contains an argument from design and interrelated essays that fill out the thesis that the goodness of the world finds its root and consummation in the goodness of God. Mark Wynn has effectively re-kindled F.R. Tennant's natural theology (Chapter One), made good use of contemporary work in aesthetics (Chapters One and Seven), ecology (Chapters One, Three, and Four), and anthropology (Chapter Six). The book constitutes a balanced, broadly conceived defense of theism; it is a welcome, promising first volume in the Routledge Studies in the Philosophy of Religion under the editorship of Peter Byrne (editor of the journal *Religious Studies*). Wynn is to be commended for his impressive use of a variety of sources in this unified work in natural theology.

Wynn's argument from design differs from *some* but not all extant arguments in natural theology by emphasizing the value-laden character of the world. Most design arguments do this (e.g. Swinburne's), but there has been a tendency since the Enlightenment to employ mechanistic models of nature; Wynn rejects this philosophically and religiously inadequate orientation. "Some forms of the design argument may have proved self-subverting: to the extent that it has concentrated on quasi-mathematical, evaluatively neutral features of the world (for example, its apparently mechanical regularity over space and time), the design argument may paradoxically have contributed to the demise of religious belief, by undermining our appreciation of the world, and thereby encouraging a secular, merely utilitarian interpretation of its significance" (p. 13). Wynn's proposed new look at the design argument privileges recent ecology as found in work by Holmes Rolston. Contemporary ecology discloses a world shot through with values; there are few worries that such disclosures violate what used to be called the naturalistic fallacy. Wynn focuses first on the experience and the evident good of beauty in nature and the experience of nature. "The world's beauty speaks to us of the ultimate meaning of our existence" (p. 36). He contends that naturalistic, evolutionary accounts of our aesthetic experience provide less satisfactory accounts of natural beauty vis-à-vis a theistic, design hypothesis. Design also has greater explanatory power when it comes to other goods. "The predictive power of the design hypothesis is greater than that of naturalism in relation to the phenomena of life, sentience and concept use, because naturalism would be unembarrassed by the non-existence of all these phenomena, whereas the design hypothesis seems to make their existence at least unsurprising" (p. 68). In so arguing Wynn does not presume to develop an irresistible case for theism; he offers rather reasons, which together with other arguments, makes theism reasonable.

I believe Wynn is quite right to commend contemporary ecology in natural theology. "Ecology represents the obvious conversation partner for contemporary natural theology, just as mathematical physics was the preferred conversation partner during the Enlightenment" (p. 154). Readers

of this journal will recognize a section of *God and Goodness* as the book contains a version of Wynn's paper "Natural Theology in an Ecological Mode" (*Faith and Philosophy*, 1999, vol. 16, pp. 27-42). I find the design argument plausible, though I am less convinced that an argument from beauty can stand on its own. Wynn considers a sociobiological account of aesthetics and finds it wanting. But there are many naturalistic accounts that are less crude than sociobiology; see Anthony O'Hear's work for example. The appeal to beauty can still bolster a design or teleological argument. Alternatively, aesthetic experience and beauty may also be seen as folded into an overriding theistic argument from religious experience.

In the chapter "Providence and Evil" Wynn proposes we think of individual lives as comprising, interrelated organic wholes or forms of life. Because the goods of life are bound up with our vulnerability and ills, an overall good life may contain profound hardship. "I am suggesting that our vulnerability to hurt, sickness and to death (in short, our vulnerability to evil) so deeply conditions our relations to one another and to our surroundings that a world without these things would be a world in which human life, considered concretely, would not be possible" (p. 86). Wynn balances his insistence on the goodness of the world and God with an allowance that God is in some respects inscrutable. Near the end of the book he locates his position as somewhere in between Cleanthes and Demea in Hume's famous *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. "Like Cleanthes, I have defended the argument from design... But at the same time, I have tried to show how the design argument can be married to a conception of God which draws its inspiration from the doctrine of divine simplicity, a doctrine which has Demea's support, and which gives due recognition to the radical difference between God's reality... and the reality of creatures" (p. 194). In terms of contemporary figures, Wynn sails somewhere in between Richard Swinburne and Brian Davies (p. x).

Wynn offers a version of William James' pragmatic case for religious belief. Religious convictions often have meaning and take shape in interpersonal relationships; religious trust bears some analogy to the trust between persons. Just as the goods and the allegiance that are proper to interpersonal relations may justify one in believing something despite some counter-evidence (you believe your beloved despite some epistemic disquiet) the goods and allegiance proper to religious life may justify a similarly challenged belief. Here is a pivotal thought experiment which Wynn then uses in the context of natural theology:

Suppose I receive a letter which purports to be from my wife. And suppose that this letter makes some claim whose truth matters for the persistence of our relationship as a trust relationship. In this case, we might say, I should give some weight to the fact that if the author is who she professes to be, then I have particular reason to believe what she says. Of course, my trust-relationship reason for believing the contents of the letter will be strongest when I know that the letter has been written by my wife. However, this reason will still have some force, I suggest, even if there is some uncertainty about the identity of the author of the letter.

I think Wynn is right to assimilate some religious beliefs to such cases. "The natural theologian who attaches some weight to the design argument supposes that there is some reason to consider the world as a kind of communication, one which reveals the providential purpose of its source" (p. 132). The result is a form of personalism in epistemology; trusting in what seems like a divine communication in the absence of proof can generate some religious, ethical, and personal goods.

A chapter on worship contains interesting but unresolved speculation on whether God is best thought of as an individual or as Being. The final chapter defends the thesis that individuals in relationship offers a reflection of God and that life in relationship with God may constitute a vital part of the fulfillment of our lives.

The writing is solid but at times Wynn seems too caught up in qualifiers. There are three "however"s on p. 25, four "but"s and a "however" on p. 43, four "however"s on p. 97, *etceteras*. While the chapters flow together, the book does show signs that it was constructed out of articles. This is hardly a sin, but there are passages that interrupt reading from start to finish, e.g. on p. 104 we learn "David Hume is the most celebrated philosophical critic of the design argument," despite the fact that Hume has entered the book some ninety pages earlier. The same passage from Iris Murdoch's work is cited twice (p. 113 and p. 215); a passage from Aquinas is also given two appearances (p. 149 and p. 172). The tentative nature of some of Wynn's points is at times distracting. The author's points are frequently introduced as what 'seems' to be the case; we are invited to consider positions; the author offers us suggestions and a plea. "Taken as a whole, the book constitutes a plea to value the world" (p. 196). Some points in the text are downplayed, e.g. "The discussion of this chapter is intended as a small contribution to this last school of thought" (p. 67). The title of one of the sections (and a repeated phrase) is cumbersome: "The goodness of the world as its reason for existence."

The book is not intended for the newcomer. There are even assumptions of familiarity that may escape some readers of this journal, e.g. "This approach offers a parallel with Charles Hartschorne's well-known distinction between the abstract and the concrete poles of the divine nature" (p. 158). "The general outline of Teilhard's approach to the nature of God and God's relation to the world is well known" (p. 175).

Despite these few caveats, *God and Goodness* is a splendid, significant text which sports two warm, well-earned endorsements on the book jacket from Swinburne and Hasker. The book is self-consciously in the Christian Platonist tradition; the *Timaeus* is cited at the outset, and God is inextricably bound up with Beauty and Goodness. In the wake of books like R.M. Adams' *Finite and Infinite Good*, an observer might just conclude that Christian Platonism is on the re-bound; Wynn's work for example, would not be out of place among the Cambridge Platonists. A revival of this school is over-due.