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Book Review: Searching For An Adequate God: A Dialogue Between Process And Free Will Theists

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NOTES

1. Pereboom assumes throughout the work that there are various types of freedom, and specifies what type of freedom he is discussing in various contexts.

2. See John Martin Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will: An Essay on Control* (Cambridge Mass Blackwell Publishers, 1994), pp. 140-141, "Recent Work on Moral Responsibility," *Ethics*, vol. 110 (1999), pp. 93-139, and in Fischer and Mark Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 100ff.

3. The arguments he considers are largely from Jaegwon Kim, *Supervenience and Mind* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue between Process and Free Will Theists by John B. Cobb Jr. and Clark H. Pinnock, eds. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000. \$26.00.

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Process theists follow Whitehead in requiring that their theology be adequate in the sense that every item of experience, including the findings of science, can be interpreted in terms of their philosophy. Free-will theists have a rather different notion of adequacy in mind: it must be adequate to Scripture as broadly interpreted within the evangelical tradition.

Although starting from such diverse perspectives, they have much in common. In particular both endorse what is known as "open theism," that God does not know future contingents, not because there is some peculiar limit on divine omniscience, but because future contingents are simply unknowable per se. God knows the actual as actual, the possible as possible, but not the possible future as if it were already in some sense determinately actual.

Traditional treatments of omniscience attempt to preserve immutability. God's knowledge could only be immutable if it were already completely determinate. Such traditional accounts assume that God must be complete and fully self-sufficient to be perfect. That is the proper meaning for a perfect being. Process theism sees God as becoming, and therefore adopts a different standard of perfection: that which, no matter how great, can always be further enriched. Open theists recognize the extent to which God is portrayed as temporally engaged, facing an indeterminate future.

David Griffin and William Hasker, whose contributions frame the volume, explore the differences. One concerns creation *ex nihilo*. This is not in the first instance the cosmological question about the beginning of the world, although process theists need to take more seriously than they have the claim by astrophysicists that time and the world began with the Big Bang. It is more the question whether God can be complete and self-sufficient alone, or whether God requires some sort of world as a source of novelty and enrichment. It also concerns divine power, as pure persuasion does not appear able to explain creation *ex nihilo*.

For process thinking God requires a world to love, whereas open theists find love already within a social trinity, and insist that the existence of the world is contingent upon a divine decision. For them this expresses the transcendence of a necessary God over a contingent world. If, however, perfection needs enrichment, there must be an other to provide that enrichment. A social trinity may provide a home for love, but after some aeons wouldn't the personae become bored with one another? Adventure, the quest for new perfections, is a metaphysical excellence for process theism appropriate for God, not just an accidental appendage.

Hartshorne and Griffin hold that metaphysical principles, e.g. that some world or other exists, are beyond divine determination. Whitehead, however, held that God "at once exemplifies and establishes the categorical conditions." If so, God could choose a purely deterministic world, although it would make little sense, there being no way it could provide God with any novelty. It would be no better than a world God could fully imagine, or no world at all. In determining the metaphysical principles for our world, God could agree to live by those principles in dealing with our world. This is the truth in the kenotic view proposed by Rice (p. 188ff). In some such fashion it seems possible to mediate between process and open theists on this issue.

Rice, who pioneered open theism in 1980, situates it between classical theism and process theism persuasion. Classical theists typically understand omnipotence in terms of unilateral power. Open theists argue that God acts sometimes coercively (as in creation or miracles) God usually acts persuasively, respecting creaturely freedom. Process theists insist that God acts only persuasively.

David Basinger alleges an inconsistency in *Divine Power in Process Theism* (reviewed in *Faith and Philosophy* 8/1 (January 1991), 124-27). On the one hand, process theology claims persuasive power is superior to coercive power, yet on the other hand it holds that "God is morally culpable if he has coercive power but fails to use it... if there are times when God should employ coercive power, how can its exercise be inherently immoral?" (p. 193).

We should not restrict ourselves to persuasion versus coercion. There is a prior issue involved. Is God's activity part of the regular course of things, so that it is exercised in all events? Or can there be supernatural interruptions? Process theism has sought to conceive of God's activity as purely regular. In such a context divine power must be persuasive, if there is to be any freedom.

Open theism is proud of the fact that it allows for both persuasive and coercive divine power. ("Coercive power" is misleading. We should talk in terms of *determinative power*, as Hasker suggests. God's power in creating the world is hardly coercive, since there did not as yet exist anything, which could be coerced.) But any special determinative act introduces an element of supernatural intervention, for otherwise events can be considered to be influenced by past events, divine persuasion, and self-determination.

If divine activity is natural and continuous, then it must be persuasive. If divine activity is occasionally determinative, then determinative acts should happen more often than they do to prevent egregious evil. Even if

this were to curtail some freedom and soul making, it would be worth it. While process and open theism largely agree on temporalistic omniscience, they part company, as we have seen, with respect to divine power. Although appreciating divine persuasion, open theists insist upon omnipotence as the norm, even if it is self-limited in most cases. Besides Hasker and Griffin, who debate the major differences, Rice, Howell, and Wheeler take up more mediating positions.

Wheeler in particular explores what elements an evangelical can learn from process theism. His finely nuanced essay suggests further ways in which the discussion may be taken. He presents the evangelical position in terms of National Association of Evangelicals 1942 statement of faith (p. 111), and explores its ramifications in terms of process theism, including the question of Biblical authority. He indicates other areas such as the Body of Christ, the earth community, and eschatology where dialogue could be especially fruitful.

Finite and Infinite Goods, by Robert Adams. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Pp. 424. \$45.00 (hardcover).

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This remarkable book is a milestone in ethics and in philosophy of religion. Directly, it is the fruit of thought and reflection on ethics over at least ten years— from Robert Adams' Wilde Lectures in Oxford in 1989, to its publication in 1999. Equally but less directly, it represents, co-ordinates and systematises Adams' writings on ethics over the whole of the last quarter-century. Those who know Adams' distinguished work at the cutting edge of analytical philosophy of religion will come to this book with high expectations. I believe they will not be disappointed. Anyone who thinks that there is nothing new in philosophy of religion, or that secular-minded ethicists need know no more about theistic ethics than the Euthyphro Dilemma, had better think again.

If I were requested to sum up *Finite and Infinite Goods* in a single sound-bite, I think the sound-bite would have to be "generosity of intellect and imagination". One of Adams' chief gifts is his Bach-like ability to take a simple theme and show how much can be done with it: how widely and how differently different variations on that theme can be applied and reapplied. It is this intellectual generosity and imagination that holds together what would otherwise be an unwieldy and inchoate variety collection. The book is vast in its ambition and its scope, covering everything from the semantics and metaphysics of value to eros, idolatry and martyrdom. It is only Adams' exceptional ability to keep a grip on his "big picture" that enables him to tell a coherent story about so many different regions of our life and thought.

The book is divided into four sections. Part I, "The Nature of the Good,"