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## Paul Copan and Paul K. Moser, eds., THE RATIONALITY OF THEISM

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tion" need not after all imply ethnocentrism or the arbitrary privileging of one tradition over others (contrary to what Nielsen himself maintains) (p.67). On these issues, in spite of himself, Nielsen provides some helpful pointers to the shape of a more acute philosophical theology.

*The Rationality of Theism*, edited by Paul Copan and Paul K. Moser. London and New York: Routledge, 2003. Pp. 292. \$32.95 (paper).

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With thirteen previously unpublished essays by prominent philosophers, Copan and Moser argue in this volume that theism "better resolves major philosophical questions than do its alternatives, including its most influential intellectual rival, naturalism" (3). The argument comes in three stages. Part I of the book consists of preliminary considerations designed to ready both the mind and the spirit to consider a sustained argument for theism. Part II is the positive piece of this argument and the core of the book. Like Swinburne's *The Existence of God*, the work of Part II is meant to comprise a cumulative case—the arguments presented are "to be considered not in isolation from, but in combination with, one another" (9). Part III presents responses to two objections to theism: the argument from incoherence and the problem of evil.

Let me begin by examining Davis' discussion of the ontological argument, and some related content from Taliaferro's discussion of the coherence of theism. Davis sets himself the manageable and useful task of replying to Michael Martin's criticisms of Anselm's and Plantinga's versions of the argument. I will focus here just on his treatment of Martin's critiques of Anselm.

One of Martin's complaints is that, even if existence is a predicate, it does not add to the greatness of things for, e.g., undesirable things. Davis' reply is ingenious. He suggests that we read the term "greatness" in the argument as "power, ability, or freedom of action," even if this is not all that Anselm might have meant by it, because this notion "at least has a chance of making the ontological argument work" (98). This reading guarantees, contra Martin, that "exists" is a great-making property, since an existing thing will necessarily, for better or worse, have more power than the mere concept of this thing (100).

Davis' "power" reading of "great" also helps him respond to Martin's second criticism, from Gaunilo, that he can construct "parallel ontological arguments" to prove the existence of the greatest conceivable lost island, etc. Davis develops a dilemma to argue that there can be no such things. First, if we try to conceive the greatest conceivable lost island "in terms that islands can possibly have, properties like temperature, the beauty of the scenery," and so on, "these properties have no intrinsic maximums...so there logically can be no 'greatest conceivable lost island'." But if instead we try to conceive the island in a wider sense of "conceive," and allow it to take on predicates that islands cannot possibly have, then "the greater we

make [it] in conception, the less it will resemble an island. Now we have seen that more powerful things are greater than less powerful things; moreover...necessary things are greater than contingent things. It follows then that the greatest conceivable lost island will be a necessary and omnipotent thing." And that, Davis says, is logically impossible, since "islands are essentially contingent and non-omnipotent things" (102-3). So, no matter how we try to conceive it, there can be no greatest conceivable lost island. This is not so with the greatest conceivable *being* on Davis' reading, since the property of having the most power conceivable does have an intrinsic maximum—even if what this maximum is is controversial (more later).

Davis' construction of a dilemma here is innovative: this line of reasoning usually consists of only the first horn. And it is reassuring: if we worried at the end of the first horn that we could not conceive the greatest conceivable lost island due to a lack of imagination, the second horn invites us to imagine more broadly, and see that this attempt fails, too. But the second horn fails for a reason other than the one Davis gives. Its main problem is that it embraces the wider sense of "conceive," since this sense permits category mistakes that break the law of non-contradiction, a condition of reasoning. But if we join Davis in permitting this sense of "conceive" for the sake of argument, it is unfair then to complain, as he does, that the island we reach at the end of the argument has properties which contradict its essential ones. This is to permit logical impossibility and then complain that it is there. I submit that a more promising route is to note that, on the wider sense of "conceive," conceiving of the greatest conceivable island means maximizing the island's properties in all the categories of being-it must be not only pleasing, but our highest joy, not only powerful, but omnipotent, etc. Whether such a being is an island or not, it is Anselm's greatest conceivable being. Thus, on the wide sense of "conceive," Gaunilo's "parallel" argument for the greatest conceivable island collapses into Anselm's argument for the greatest conceivable being. This consideration closes the horn without denying its initial assumption. It is also interesting. It suggests that any attempt to use the ontological argument to argue for the existence of something else just amounts to Anselm's attempt to argue for the existence of his God.

Thus, Davis' reading of "great" as "powerful" helps address Martins' objections. But it has an obvious downside: if Davis' ontological argument works, it proves the existence only of the most powerful conceivable being—just an O "God," not a OOO God, to use the usual parlance. As Hume suggests, such a being is not necessarily God, since it could be evil, for instance. Davis seems happy to accept this at one point (e.g., he says the moral character of the greatest conceivable being will be decided not by his argument but "wholly on other grounds," 103). Still, even he seems to expect more from the argument in the end ("If the OA succeeds, then God exists, and that is the end of the matter," 110).

Davis' reading of "great" as "powerful" also runs him directly into the problems of the coherence of omnipotence. The concept is not coherent as he defines it, viz., as being "able to bring about any state of affairs that it is logically possible for [the being] to bring about" (102). Stated thus, it is

plagued, at least in its necessary form, with, e.g., the paradox of free will. The paradox identifies two powers which are such that exercising one of them means losing the other: use the power to make a free creature, and lose the power to control all wills, or vice versa. Since if one genuinely has a power, it has to be possible to exercise it, no one can be necessarily omnipotent: having either of these powers entails using it in some world, and that entails losing the other power in this world, so no one can have both powers in every world.

To remedy the problem, Davis could borrow Taliaferro's understanding of the most powerful conceivable being: "the being whose power is such that it is metaphysically impossible for there to be any [other] being that has a more excellent scope of power" (250). This definition wisely removes talk of logically possible powers and states of affairs altogether, while still getting at the heart of what is theologically important about God's power. The greatest conceivable being just has to be able to do more than anybody else can do, in every possible world. So, even if one indeed cannot have both powers in every world, this is no strike against necessary omnipotence, because nobody else can do this either.

This is a clever analysis of omnipotence on Taliaferro's part. But the paradox shows that it permits ties for the title of omnipotent being. Suppose there are two beings with more power than anyone else except each other in every world; suppose they never thwart each other's acts; and suppose they both have the powers at issue in the paradox in as many worlds as possible. But suppose the first has the power to create free creatures in all these worlds in virtue of exercising this power in world A (where they both thus lack the power to control all wills), and has the power to control all wills in these worlds in virtue of exercising this power in world B (where they both thus lack the power to create free creatures). The second has these powers in virtue of exercising them in worlds C and D instead. By Leibniz' law, these two beings are distinct. But they each lay equal claim to being omnipotent, since there is no world in which anyone has greater power than they do—not even each other. This is no problem for coherence: not only can *someone* be necessarily omnipotent, *multiple* beings can be. But it is a problem for Davis' ontological argument: whose existence does it prove?

Many other articles in the anthology deserve a close analysis, but space will permit me to mention just two more highlights here. Koon's piece in Part I stands out as a scholarly, innovative argument for the view that a commitment to science does not preclude a commitment to theism. He suggests that (1) religion was, as a matter of historical fact, required to develop modern science, and (2) scientists have more warrant to believe their conclusions if they are theists than materialists. His argument for (1) is plausible. He identifies seven elements of Western theism that were "necessary conditions" for the growth of modern science, and one can actually picture them being such. His argument for (2) is less strong. He thinks materialists cannot explain how it is that we can learn either the laws of nature or truth more generally, which leaves him without "any explanation for his reliability, other than appeal to dumb luck" (86). I need more convincing that the materialist cannot appeal to evolutionary fitness instead.

Collins' piece on the teleological argument is thought-provoking. After arguing that the fine-tuning of the constants, laws and forces of nature is more probable on theism than on a naturalistic single-universe hypothesis, he considers the stiffer competition of a hypothesis that there are an infinite number of universes, some of which seem bound to have life-permitting conditions like ours. His assessment: "usually these universes are thought to be produced by some sort of physical mechanism, which I will call a many-universe generator....[but the] generator itself would need to be well-designed" (143-5). This response assumes that there is no guarantee that the universes in question will play out all the nomological possibilities, even if there are an infinity of them; one still needs a designer to generate life. I am still puzzling over whether this interesting suggestion is plausible.

Though some of the essays in it are better than others, taken as a whole, this anthology offers a strong cumulative case for theism—one that comes from many voices, offering better versions of the usual arguments than their classical forms. It could serve as a good text for a philosophy of religion course, if it were coupled with an extended argument for atheism to ensure even-handedness. Prospective users should be aware, however, that some parts of the text seem to speak to a Christian audience (e.g., Moser develops an account of knowledge based on I Corinthians, see also 150-151, 199, 231), so it would function better in a Christian setting than, say, at a public university. This is unfortunate, since the aim of the book is to persuade people that theism is rational, and many who could be persuaded are in non-Christian settings.

*Ontology, Identity, and Modality: Essays in Metaphysics*, Peter van Inwagen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Pp. ix + 261. \$65 (cloth); \$23 (paperback).

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The experience of reading this book is precisely that experience that drew many of us to philosophy in the first place—it is full of insight and precision, two properties not always conjoined in philosophical discourse (said with a British accent to indicate the humor of understatement). The philosophically smug will find much to criticize—that my left leg is not a material object, for instance. And van Inwagen often makes pronouncements that will strike one as a bit too arrogant—most often under the rubric of "not understanding" what a philosopher might mean when making any of various claims which van Inwagen refuses to endorse (such as that identity through time might fail of transitivity). His criticisms and complaints are not superficial, however; they are instead the product of decades of trying to work through completely and carefully the implications of various positions and arguments.

This book is a collection of thirteen of van Inwagen's essays in metaphysics published over the past twenty-five years or so, organized by the concepts in the title. It also contains an informative introduction by van