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Daniel J. Hill, DIVINITY AND MAXIMAL GREATNESS

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Divinity and Maximal Greatness, Daniel J. Hill. Routledge, 2005. Pp. 255. £65.00

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This book analyzes the main divine essential attributes. Inevitably, some get more attention than others: following a chapter's introduction to perfect being theology, we get ninety-eight pages on God's knowledge and sixty-seven on omnipotence, then goodness, eternity, immutability, omnipresence and necessity whiz by in a total of fifty-four. The book repays careful study. As reviewers typically do, I will now carp, but my criticisms should not suggest that this is less than a book well worth reading. Regrettably, I can take up only two topics in the space allotted.

Perfect Being Theology

Hill defines a perfect being as one maximal with respect to greatness *simpliciter* (p. 8), a concept whose content he believes we understand, or at any rate a concept we possess:

> Some philosophers claim that they cannot make sense of the idea of greatness *simpliciter*. This claim seems to me . . . undercut by the fact that almost everybody would save a human rather than an inanimate object from a burning house. This fact seems to me to reflect the value that we . . . place on human life. (p. 23)

Perhaps. There are other explanations, e.g., that others might criticize failure to save the human, that we feel sympathy for humans, not dishes, that we have obligations to humans but not to dishes, that greater good will likely flow from saving the human, that the virtuous are kind and one cannot be kind to a dish, or that the virtuous care about suffering, and of the two only humans suffer. The moral claims' explanations do not obviously rest on claims about the relative greatness-*simpliciter* of humans and dishes, either. Hill tells us that

> The fear that many people have of dying or losing consciousness is . . . evidence that people think it is greater to be living and conscious than to be non-living or non-conscious. (p. 16)

It is certainly evidence that they prefer it. But their preference might have more to do with thinking that for most of us most of the time, life and consciousness are more fun, or perhaps considering the consequences their loss of life and consciousness would have to people and causes they love. It does not clearly have anything to do with greatness *simpliciter*, a concept which (*pace* Hill) most people seem to operate without, and find a bit puzzling when they meet. Questionable too is Hill's suggestion that

> It is greater to be a particular than a universal. (But if) particulars and universals are incomparable as regards greatness . . . One could

> (restrict) the domain of quantification and say that every divine being is a maximally great particular. (p. 16)

If they are incomparable, it is not clear why we should be sure that a divine being must come out particular. It is not germane that "most of those we intuitively think of as theists . . . accept that every divine being is . . . a person" (p. 17). For this is not a perfect-being consideration, and Hill claims to be doing pure perfect being theology. If they are comparable, though, we must ask why we should think being particular great-making. On Hill's account an attribute F is great-making

> if and only if an object, a, that has F is greater than every object, b, like a in all particulars save that b lacks F and any properties whose possession is implied by the possession of F, (p. 9)

and also, presumably, properties which imply being F. We might wonder whether greatness is so tightly ordered: perhaps some properties make whatever has them either greater than or incommensurable with things lacking them. And it isn't clear whether only actual or also merely possible objects count for the comparison. But I now argue that this doesn't matter, because the definition is unsatisfiable. To begin, if disjunctive properties count, the definition is unsatisfiable: necessarily, for every b and F, being F implies being F or being b, and so it is not possible for any a that there be a b which lacks not only some F but every property possessing F implies possessing.[1] If identity- and non-identity properties count, the definition is unsatisfiable again. Consider a, which has F, and b, which does not. B has the property of non-identity with a. A does not. Non-identity with a does not imply being F, and if being F implied non-identity with a, a would not have F. B, then, is not like a in all particulars save for lacking F and any properties implying or implied by having F; clearly something similar will work for the property of identity with a. Having F implies having some property; nothing could lack this property. In fact, many properties are "transcendental," i.e. having them is implied by having any property at all: not just having some property but also being a being, self-identical, colored if green, etc. So we must alter the definition to:

> if and only if . . . b lacks F and any non-disjunctive non-identity-involving non-transcendental properties (henceforth "appropriate properties") whose possession is implied by or implies being F.

But even this is unsatisfiable. Consider a property F only particulars can have. In accord with the definition, we need to compare an F object with objects which *inter alia* lack all appropriate properties that follow from being F. Among these are being a particular. If we subtract being particular from a particular, to have a possible item left over we must also subtract every property which entails being particular. This includes all properties only particulars can have, including for each particular a the property of being identical with a. This leaves no possible particular object at all to compare with F-particulars for greatness. Only universals are left. But no universal is like any particular in all respects save for lacking particularity

and any appropriate properties entailing or entailed by particularity. I have the property of not being a universal. Being a universal neither entails nor follows from being particular. But any universal is a universal. Every possible item is either particular or universal, and the same sort of problem will arise when we assess universals for greatness. Hill's definition, then, is simply unsatisfiable.

Thus we must ask whether being F is great-making if no objects meet the condition on b. If there are no such objects, there are none at least as great as an F. So it might seem that F should come out great-making. But then if only actual objects count for greatness comparisons, then if there were one object, all its attributes would be great-making. If merely possible objects also count, then if there were just one of those, all its attributes would be great-making—which sounds like it should be false if (as Hill believes) not all counterpossibles are true. Further, if being F is great-making if no objects meet the condition on b, then having the property of having a property for which no (actual? possible?) objects meet the condition on b entails having a great-making property. But any property that entails a great-making property is *ipso facto* at least derivatively great-making. So the property of having a property for which nothing meets the condition on b comes out great-making. That's not intuitive. Surely it doesn't make a thing greater that there aren't other objects of a particular description. Finally, if I'm right that on Hill's definition no object can meet the condition on b for any F, then if being F is great-making if no objects meet the condition on b, on Hill's definition every property comes out great-making, including being as evil as Satan and being as ugly as sin. So let's take it that if for some F there are no b-objects, the comparison can't be made, and so F fails to be great-making. On Hill's account, then, no properties are great-making.

Hill seeks to fill out the concept of a divine being purely by way of judgments about greatness. It's possible to be a perfect being theologian without trying to do this, or believing in a property of greatness *simpliciter*. We have better intuitions about what makes for a better case of *person* than about what makes for a better case of *being*. So a Christian can take it from Scripture that God is live, conscious, personal etc., and make *qua* perfect-being theologian well-grounded judgments about what makes one person a better person than another. A perfect being theologian can just use perfect-being reasoning to fill out a Scriptural concept of God in more detail. Talk of God as a perfect being then becomes a shorthand for talk of God as being perfect in all relevant respects, rather than a claim that God has to the maximal degree a property of greatness *simpliciter*. This approach strikes me as more hopeful than Hill's.

Maximal Power

Hill's account of omnipotence is full of good sense and interesting twists. Still, there are things to pick at. Hill offers as an analysis of power applicable to the powers of an omnipotent being that

> X has the power to perform an action, A, if and only if, if X had the opportunity, know-how and the overriding desire to perform A, then x would perform A. (p. 127)

But it seems possible that someone actually lack the power to do A, but be such that were he/she to acquire the opportunity, know-how and the overriding desire to perform A, he/she would also acquire the power and so succeed. Still, this analysis plays no real role in Hill's discussion. A more substantive point concerns omnipotence and time.

Assuming that it is metaphysically impossible to bring about the past, Hill asserts that being omnipotent does not require having the power to bring it about that some event has happened (p. 166). Now Hill holds that if one conjunct of a state of affairs obtains, whoever actualizes the other actualizes the whole conjunctive state of affairs (p. 81). To me this is anything but obvious; if Lincoln dies and later I fry an egg, surely it is Booth and I, not I alone, who bring it about that Lincoln is dead and an egg is fried. But if this principle about conjunctions is true, then absent some account of why temporal order should matter here (Hill provides none), it is hard to see why it would not also be true that:

1. if x brings it about that S, and then it comes about that S*, then x has brought it about that S and S*.

Without an account of why temporal order should matter, if (1) is false, so presumably is Hill's principle. But if (1) is true, we all bring it about that events have happened: for we all cause events and then have time pass.

Hill defines maximal power in terms of direct potence classes (DPCs), classes of states of affairs an agent can bring about directly: as one does some actions by doing others, but the most basic actions one simply does, so one brings about some states of affairs by bringing about others, but the most basic ones one just directly brings about (p. 166). To get a grip on the notion, consider examples: one can't bring about conjunctive states of affairs directly, for one brings about conjunctions by bringing about at least one conjunct (p. 168). So too for disjunctions (p. 168). If states of affairs do not include a time of actualization in their makeup, one can only bring about *a raindrop's falling on Jan. 1* by bringing about *a raindrop's falling*, and so dated states of affairs are not brought about directly (p. 172). Now while directly bringing about is an unproblematic notion, one use to which Hill puts it is troubling. Hill individuates powers by what they can directly bring about (p. 169). So on his terms, the only genuine powers are powers to directly bring about. What about powers to move things through space? Plausibly I move an object a foot by moving it first one inch, then another, etc. If that's right, then for Hill, there is no spatial interval small enough for anyone to directly bring it about that something moves through that interval. If so, the power to move objects through space is not a genuine power at all, and I do not have genuine powers to perform any of the body-movements that are usually taken as paradigm basic actions, e.g., raising my arm. I can say multi-syllabic words only by saying syllables, syllables only by making consonant- and vowel-sounds, and I can make those sounds only by moving my lips, tongue etc.; so even if we suppose that I have a genuine power to move things through space, I won't have one to speak. But if these are not genuine powers, I lose my grip on what it is for power to be genuine.

Hill also insists that no-one can directly bring about good or evil states of affairs, as none are basic (pp. 171–72). I'm not so sure. I would blaspheme were I sincerely to assert that:

J. Jesus was a liar.

Suppose that I do so mentally, without uttering a sound. If a mental asserting consists of mentally tokening words or syllables, there are more basic states of affairs I bring about such that by doing so, I bring it about that Leftow sincerely asserts (J). But this is only contingent. There could have been a single (say) consonant-sound mental tokening which asserted (J), and so let's suppose that there is. (If that example seems questionable, we can abstract a bit further: there could have been some basic state of affairs by bringing which about I sincerely assert (J).) One might then try *Leftow tokens (J) assertively* and *Leftow tokens (J) sincerely*. But it's not clear that asserting really analyzes as tokening assertively: the "assertively" in the *analysans* suggests that something fishy is going on. (Compare "analyzing" redness as being reddish-colored.) Tokening with intent to assert either varies this only verbally or amounts to tokening (J) and intending to assert (J). The latter, though, does not entail asserting, for it does not entail that the token I token is one I intend to assert: I might just intend to assert (J) sooner or later, or to intend to assert (J), but not in the thought I in fact have. One might next try something on the lines of something like *Leftow asserts (J) and his asserting is sincere.* But this arguably really amounts to something like *Leftow brings it about that: (x)(x is an asserting of (J) and x is sincere and x=s)*, where s names the event in question. This isn't made true by my bringing about something more basic; it is not conjunctive. The logical form of action-sentences is of course tricky terrain; my point is that it is not at all clear that the right analysis of my sincerely asserting (J) is going to give Hill what he needs. Still, even if it does, there might be states of affairs I can't directly actualize (at least in certain circumstances) without thereby doing evil. If I have done whatever else is necessary sincerely to assert (J), I can't bring about the last basic state of affairs involved without thereby doing evil. Again, if by mentally tokening the right single syllable, I do something else—assert a proposition—my (J)-case was a case of this.

Hill's definition of maximal power is that

> For every being x, x is maximally powerful if and only if for every metaphysically possible being y, y's direct potence class does not strictly include x's. (p. 170)

Now *pace* Lewis, merely possible beings don't *have* DPCs. Possibilia have no powers, and if Hill's account of having power allots them some, so much the worse for it. Still, this is easily fixed: we can talk about the DPCs possibilia would have were they actual. Given that there are states of affairs that can't be brought about directly without thereby doing evil, consider two DPCs: God's (let's say) includes all and only states of affairs He can directly bring about without thereby doing evil. Schmod can actualize some but not all of these—thus Schmod's DPC does not strictly include God's—but also some he cannot directly bring about without thereby doing evil, e.g., making

a decision whose propositional object is that he shall mentally blaspheme. There are more of these in Schmod's DPC than there are possibly morally acceptable ones missing from it. So God is maximally powerful even though there is an intuitive sense in which Schmod can directly bring about more. Or we can suppose that Zod's DPC contains a higher-order infinity of states of affairs than God's but not all that God's does; then again, God is maximally powerful even though it is strictly true that Zod can do more. Thus on Hill's account, it is conceivable that someone be maximally powerful though someone else can directly bring about more. But on a proper conceptual analysis of maximal power, this should not be conceivable. Moreover, this could be not just conceivable but possible for all Hill's definition tells us, for it does not ascribe any particular range to maximal power.

Again, questions arise about parts and wholes. Does God create wholes by creating their parts, or *vice-versa*, or neither? If neither, God has to make two creative volitions, one to make the chair, one to make all of its parts. That seems a needless duplication. One might think not: the chair and the parts are distinct objects, each able to exist without the rest, so (one might think) it should take distinct volitions to make them all. But God can conceive of the chair as including some determinate set of parts, and if He has this conception, He can will "let there be *that*," and get both into being in a single volition. One might think that this is another sort of "neither" case, since "let there be *that*" does not seem to create wholes by creating parts or *vice-versa*. But not necessarily: if the whole exists because the parts exist and are appropriately arranged, then in this case God in a single volition creates the whole by creating the parts. This gets rid of the "two volition" consequence, but only by removing "neither" as an option for a different reason.

If "neither" remains problematic, we might consider "both": perhaps God does it one way in some cases and another way in others. Aristotle, for instance, held that artifacts exist because their parts do (and are rightly arranged), but functionally-defined parts of substances exist because the whole substance does. But this option would complicate the argument below without affecting its substance, so we can ignore it and simply ask, does God create wholes by creating their parts, or *vice-versa*? If the first, it is on Hill's terms part of what makes Him maximally powerful that He can create quarks and electrons, but not part of what makes Him maximally powerful to be able to create tables and chairs. If the second, it is part of what makes Him maximally powerful to be able to make universes, but not part of what makes Him maximally powerful that He can make stars, quarks and electrons—in fact, if the second, only universes figure in God's DPC, and His power with respect to these is enough to render Him maximally powerful. Either way, we have the oddity that a being can have more powers than those that suffice to make it maximally powerful—which sounds like a more than maximal set of powers. Surely if a thing manages to be maximally powerful, it takes *all* its powers to get it there; every power it has helps constitute its maximal overall power. For Hill, again, the only genuine powers are powers to directly bring about. Thus on Hill's terms, if (say) God makes wholes by making parts, either there are genuine productive powers in addition to making quarks, electrons and other possible simples, but God has none of them, or there are no such powers. If the latter is true, we have no genuine productive powers. If the former, we have genuine powers to produce macroscopic objects, but

oddly, God does not (and again we wonder what "genuine" means here, since God genuinely manages to produce them). So it seems that Hill has a problem no matter which way he goes. Some of these problems could be blunted were Hill able to show that necessarily, every maximally powerful being is also omnipotent, since he defines omnipotence roughly this way: x is omnipotent just if, for every state of affairs S, if S is in some possible being's DPC, S is in x's DPC (p. 169). Hill does not argue for this, and the problems just outlined are reasons to think that it can't be shown.

Reviewers should praise and not just bury; I'll say again that this is a book worth reading. Routledge should be encouraged to come out with a paper edition: the book's price is an outrage.[2]

NOTES

1. My thanks to Joseph Jedwab here.
2. My thanks to the author, correspondence with whom considerably improved this review.

Rethinking the Ontological Argument: A Neoclassical Theistic Response, by Daniel A. Dombrowski. New York, Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. vii and 172. Cloth $70.00.

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As its title suggests, the book purports to defend Anselm's famous argument from a distinctly process philosophical perspective, namely that of Charles Hartshorne. The book's six chapters can be further reduced to four categories: (a) a historical survey of the argument (Plato's anticipation, Anselm's initial articulation, various versions and interpretations after Anselm, and Hume's critique), (b) a critique of the contemporary opponents in the non-analytic tradition (Richard Rorty and Mark Taylor), (c) a critique of the most prominent contemporary opponent in the analytic tradition (Graham Oppy), and finally (d) a criticism of classical theism. This book is, as one can see, more than just a philosophical examination of the validity and soundness of the argument itself. So, those readers who are solely interested in seeing an 'analytic' discussion of the argument will likely be disappointed, as is evident in William Lane Craig's searing review in *Philosophia Christi* (9:1). While sharing some of the disappointment, which will be shown below, I wish to pay closer attention to Dombrowski's central claim throughout his work, that the ontological argument's cogency and merit—both philosophical and religious—logically requires the neoclassical view of God.

Let us first examine Dombrowski's formulation of the argument and its defense against Oppy's critique, and secondly his criticism of classical theism. He sees two distinct versions of the argument in Anselm's *Proslogion*, one in chapter 2 and the other in chapter 3, favoring the latter as the stronger of the two. Although he questions its truth later, Dombrowski grants, for the sake of argument, that Kant's objection, 'Existence is not a