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Sandra Menssen and Thomas D. Sullivan, THE AGNOSTIC INQUIRER: REVELATION FROM A PHILOSOPHICAL STANDPOINT

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crimson cube. The relevant Berkeleyan ideas of blue, ball or sphere, crimson, and cube are then all collectively in my particular unified mind at a certain point in time. What then unites the color blue with the ball shape and not with the cube shape, and the color crimson with the cube shape and not with the ball shape? The answer certainly cannot be my finite will, which Berkeley and Roberts agree is insufficiently efficacious. God's will would better serve, but for this solution to have traction, we would need to invoke Berkeley's distinction between the *ectypal* and *archetypal* existence of ideas respectively in finite minds and in God's infinite mind. Roberts, remarkably, has nothing to say about this crucial distinction in Berkeley's metaphysics of spirit, despite its being so manifestly essential to understanding Berkeley's solutions to idealist puzzles about the sameness of physical objects seen from different perspectives as consisting of different ideas by different finite spirits at the same time.

Despite my misgivings, I recommend Roberts's book as a thoughtful, sympathetic approach to Berkeley's philosophy in its development of a descriptive rather than speculative metaphysics. Here I have focused primarily on what I see as some of the sticking points in Roberts's historical exposition. Roberts's project is nonetheless to be commended for its contribution to making Berkeley's anti-materialistic idealism more relevant to today's philosophical scene generally, and especially with respect to Berkeley's philosophy of religion. Certainly, Berkeley thought of his undermining of atheism to be every bit as important as his undermining of skepticism, grounded in what he understood to be common sense. Anyone with serious interests in Berkeley's philosophy and the eighteenth-century European enlightenment will find much to appreciate in Roberts's historical commentary.

The Agnostic Inquirer: Revelation from a Philosophical Standpoint, by Sandra Menssen and Thomas D. Sullivan. Eerdmans, 2007.

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Menssen and Sullivan challenge the primacy of standard natural theology in philosophy of religion. Menssen and Sullivan use the phrase "standard natural theology" to refer to projects in natural theology that do not identify the content of revelatory claims as especially important evidence for the existence of a good God (45). The basic idea is that one "cannot obtain a convincing philosophical case for a revelatory claim without first obtaining a probable case for a good God" (52). Menssen and Sullivan believe that standard natural theology is a handicapped project because it is not working with a full database. For example, this kind of natural theology "lands the agnostic inquirer in a quagmire of theodicy-building without adequate resources: absent appeal to the content of revelatory claims, it is

difficult to find the notion of an afterlife plausible; yet most theodicies and defenses of divine goodness rely on that notion" (51).

Moreover, standard natural theology cannot generate enough evidence to answer the great question of revelation affirmatively. This claim may sound counterintuitive at first because many people believe that the further claim that *A good God has revealed* on top of the claim *there is a God* imposes a greater burden of proof on the believer. However, Menssen and Sullivan have given cogent arguments to doubt this claim. For example, they point out that the "statement 'There is a heavenly body beyond Uranus that is perturbing its orbit' embeds the sub-statement 'There is a heavenly body beyond Uranus,' but it was perfectly rational to try to determine the truth of the embedded statement by simultaneously determining the truth of the more complex, embedding statement" (59). Similarly, it is not impossible that an agnostic inquirer may have reason to accept *at once* both the claim that there is a good God and the claim that a good God has revealed. Although a stronger claim has a smaller probability than that of a weaker claim, "the strong claim could still be more *believable* than the weak claim. Some propositions are more credible when they are part of a bigger picture than when they stand alone" (61).

Menssen and Sullivan's strategy is to argue first that it is not highly unlikely that a world-creator exists. They try to do that by a defense of the kalam cosmological argument (98–108). Then they argue that on this assumption, "investigation of the contents of revelatory claims might well show it is probable that a good God exists and has revealed" (63). This second stage is carried by an inference to the best explanation (IBE) defended extensively in the whole book. The strategy involved is likened to the following situation: "when we are in doubt about the existence of some being *x*, if we come to see that the existence of *x* is not highly unlikely, then the content of a putative communication from *x* can show that *x* exists" (68). For example, suppose the SETI program does receive a long series of prime numbers coded in a signal from outer space. Then the best explanation of the situation is "Some highly intelligent life form in outer space has sent this signal." Although this stronger claim contains the weaker claim "There is highly intelligent life in outer space," the evidence we have allows us to infer to the stronger claim in a single step.

Menssen and Sullivan are keenly aware of many possible objections to their project and they carefully consider them one by one and produce replies to them. Due to limited space, I can mention only some of the wide-ranging topics that have been covered in this book. In response to various objections, they argue for the following claims: Kant's case against transcendent metaphysics or natural theology is obscure and unconvincing (28). *Pace* the atheist scientists like Steven Weinberg, "there is plentiful reason to be suspicious about whether scientists will one day explain 'enough' for us confidently to conclude that the world is a physically closed system—a system that admits no supernatural causes" (38). Sober's criticisms of the appeal to divine design as explanation are unsuccessful

(79–81). The case for the causal closure of the physical does not succeed either (109–113). The problem of evil is not conclusive (136ff).

Moreover, Menssen and Sullivan contend that revelation claims do have good explanatory power with respect to the following facts (or what they call CUE-facts): Humans have a special place in the universe (234ff); consciousness has a function (242ff); humans have libertarian freedom (245ff); human beings are equal and have inalienable rights (251ff). I cannot go into the details of these arguments but their discussions are in general of a high quality. I think the authors have made a very good case for the possibility of a kind of non-standard natural theology, one that starts with revelation claims in the very beginning.

In conclusion, it is useful to compare Menssen and Sullivan's work to *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation* by William Abraham. Although both books agree that we should begin with revelation claims in some sense, the approaches are in fact quite different. Menssen and Sullivan do not argue that we should begin with the *acceptance* of some revelation claims; nor do they make use of the idea of *oculus contemplationis*. Their contention is that if we adopt the methodology of IBE, we can treat the entire content of revelation claims as the hypothesis to illuminate the data we have. While the starting point is different, the project is still a kind of natural theology. As indicated by their book title, they look at revelation *from a philosophical standpoint*. In contrast, Abraham's argument is that natural theology is not necessary because revelation can stand on its own feet. However, the two projects are not contradictory either. In fact Abraham writes the foreword for Menssen and Sullivan's book, and both Menssen and Sullivan's recommendations of Abraham's book appear on its back cover. In response to both books, I suggest that if revelation can stand on its own feet, this does not mean that a supportive natural theology is impossible. In fact Menssen and Sullivan's strategy of using IBE to vindicate revelation claims can fit in Abraham's complex rational appraisal of revelation. So both projects are in fact complementary, and together they show that we do need to take robust revelation claims seriously in both natural theology and revealed theology.

Transformation of the Self in the Thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher, by Jacqueline Mariña. Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. 270. Cloth (\$110.00).

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Friedrich Schleiermacher is often called the "father" of modern theology. But in her excellent new book, Jacqueline Mariña introduces us to Schleiermacher the philosopher, explicating Schleiermacher's philosophical achievements in an intellectual history that traces the evolution of Schleiermacher's thinking, especially concerning the self and its ethical