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Book Review: Philosophy And Miracle: The Contemporary Debate

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of individual essences elsewhere.⁵

The Audi/Wainwright collection ought to be useful to almost anybody doing research in philosophical theology. It explores new directions in religious epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics, and with greater historical sensitivity than is often the case in analytic philosophy of religion. It ought to stimulate a great deal of further work.

NOTES

1. Cf. Alvin Plantinga, "The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 1980.
2. "In Search of the Foundations of Theism," *Faith and Philosophy*, II, 4 (October, 1985), p. 480.
3. "On Taking Belief in God as Basic," delivered at the Institute in Philosophy of Religion, Bellingham, Washington, summer 1986; also part of Gifford Lectures and Payton Lectures, 1987.
4. A good example is Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Harvard University Press, 1985.
5. "Individual Essence and the Creation," in Thomas V. Morris, ed., *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, Cornell University Press, 1988.

Philosophy and Miracle: The Contemporary Debate, by **David and Randall Basinger**. (Problems in Contemporary Philosophy, Vol. 2.) Lewiston, New York and Queenston, Ontario, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986. Pp. 124. \$39.95

Reviewed by WILLIAM J. WAINWRIGHT, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

This book assesses recent discussions of miracles. David Basinger is primarily responsible for chapters I and IV and Randall Basinger for chapter V. The authors are jointly responsible for chapters II and III.

The Basingers have several controversial theses. Chapter I argues that even though it makes sense to speak of God directly causing events that are "permanently inexplicable by science," the concept of a *violation* of natural law is incoherent. (The Basingers admit that we can coherently talk of divinely caused nonrepeatable counterinstances to natural laws. They argue, however, that these shouldn't be called violations since this implies that the laws and the event's occurrence are formally inconsistent. I doubt whether most theists have used "violation" this strictly. However, the objections of critics like Flew show that the term can easily lead to misunderstanding.)

The authors also contend that though one might have sufficient evident that reported occurrences are incompatible with well established nomologicals

(chapter II), we wouldn't be justified in concluding that they were permanently inexplicable by science (chapter III). Chapter IV argues that "while theists may under some circumstances be able justifiably to affirm, for themselves, that God has directly intervened, it cannot be argued that conditions exist under which all theists would be forced to admit that God has directly done so." *A fortiori*, no conditions exist under which all people would be obliged to do so. (The argument of chapter IV heavily depends on that of chapter III. It is largely because they think we can't rule out the possibility of scientific explanation that the Basingers doubt the possibility of evidence that would compel all theists to speak of divine intervention.)

These claims raise serious issues. For example, the Basingers contend that "as long as seeming counterinstances are not repeatable, the scientist can (and indeed should) continue to affirm the adequacy of the laws in question while continuing to search for new or modified laws to accommodate the recalcitrant events." This seems mistaken. Either there is strong evidence for the nonrepeatability of a seeming counterinstance or there isn't. If there is, the scientist has excellent reasons for continuing "to affirm the adequacy of the laws in question." But by the same token, he or she *also* has excellent reasons for thinking that the laws can't be revised to accommodate the recalcitrant events. (The Basingers insist that "only repeatable counterinstances falsify scientific laws," presumably because scientific laws are only designed to deal with repeatable events.) If, on the other hand, there is only weak evidence for the occurrence's nonrepeatability, the scientist should "search for new or modified laws to accommodate" the event. It is doubtful, however, whether he or she should *also* "continue to affirm the adequacy" of the laws to which the event is a seeming counterinstance. (Though it may be reasonable to still *use* them.)

The most striking contention is developed in chapter V. Classical theists believe that God sometimes performs miracles to forestall or mitigate natural evils. But they also believe His power and goodness are unlimited. Why, then, doesn't God perform miracles more often? The authors seem to think that classical theists must answer this question in one of two ways. The "uniformity defense" states that "if nature is to support and make possible free, moral agents, it must be characterized, by and large, by [natural] order and uniformity." Natural evil is an unwanted but unavoidable consequence. Other classical theists think that God prearranges things so that "events in nature will uniformly and predictably unfold in correlation" with our actions and choices. On this view, natural evil is an indirect consequence of people's behavior. Both views explain why miracles rarely occur. According to the first, frequent miracles are inconsistent with the uniform operation of natural law. Since the latter is necessary for freedom, wholesale intervention would result in the loss of a great good. According to the second, natural evils are appropriate to the psycho-physical, moral and

spiritual conditions of free agents. Since they are appropriate, their occurrence isn't evil all things considered. Both views can thus account for the rarity of miracles. But both have unpalatable consequences.

Why is this the case? (1) The uniformity defense implies that God doesn't "directly" or "specifically" ordain, or "unilaterally determine," most evils. They are instead "unwanted but unavoidable by-products of a world which, as a whole, is good." (2) But if so, "God is not in total control of how nature affects particular persons" and hence isn't truly omnipotent. (3) The prearrangement hypothesis protects God's power but destroys the distinction between general and special providence. All events are responses to "the specific needs [and conditions] of particular persons." (4) It also implies that evils "flow directly and specifically from the divine will." (5) And yet if God "is directly responsible for all specific evils," His goodness is "placed in jeopardy."

I don't find this convincing. For example, 2 seems false. The most that follows from the uniformity defense is that the evils which result from nature's operations aren't willed *for their own sake* or as *means* to an end (in the strict sense, that is, as something produced or permitted to *bring about* a certain result). The evil which results from nature's operations may be unavoidable but are the Basingers suggesting that God's power is imperfect if He is unable to achieve certain goods without permitting evils? If so, most forms of the greater goods defense are in trouble.

3 seems true only if the prearrangement hypothesis implies that each good and evil that befalls someone is ordained because it is appropriate to his or her psycho-physical, moral and spiritual condition. I doubt whether many Western theists have held this. A more common view, surely, is that while some goods and evils are of this sort, others are ordained to secure a more general good or the good of some other person. Only the former are direct responses to "the specific needs [and conditions] of particular persons."

4 is false if "flowing directly from the divine will" implies "unilateral determination." As the Basingers recognize, on one version of the prearrangement view, God coordinates events with actions which He foresees but does not determine. In this version, *our* actions are partial causes (or conditions) of at least some of the evils that befall us.

It is also difficult to see the force of 5. As Jonathan Edwards points out, God is responsible for any evil He could prevent. But in *any* more or less traditional form of theism, God can prevent *all* evil by not creating. He is thus responsible for it. The authors' point may be that while the uniformity defense makes evils by-products of God's creative activity, the prearrangement hypothesis implies that they are deliberately chosen means; His responsibility is thus greater. But *is* one less responsible for the foreseen by-products of one's activity than for one's means? In any case, it isn't clear that even *total* responsibility endangers

God's goodness if God has a morally sufficient reason for ordaining or permitting evil. On the prearrangement hypothesis, He clearly has.

The Basingers' theses are, then, controversial. But their book has several virtues. Flew and the other philosophers discussed are treated carefully and fairly, and the authors' arguments are often thought provoking. While I am not convinced by their contentions, I suspect that many readers of this journal will find some of them more persuasive than I do.

Knowing the Unknowable God. Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas, by **David B. Burrell**, C.S.C. Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1986. Pp. x and 130. cl. \$15.95.

Reviewed by ROBERT SOKOLOWSKI, The Catholic University of America.

This book is a historical and systematic study of the way the Muslim, Jewish and Christian religious traditions worked together in the middle ages to yield the theological understanding of God as *esse subsistens*. In his Introduction, Burrell observes that the central theme to be addressed is how God and the word are to be distinguished. As a context for this distinction, he examines, in Chapter 1, an "imaginative scheme" or "background picture" that was shared by Jews, Christians, and Muslims, a scheme in which all the parts of the cosmos emanated from a divine source. This picture emphasized the connection between the world and God and provided "an enveloping tapestry" in which people were able to locate themselves. Burrell says that Aquinas' emphasis on the otherness of God worked against this scheme; Aquinas claims that God creates not through intermediaries but directly. In Chapter 2 Burrell discusses Ibn Sina, who is said to anticipate the full understanding of the distinction between the world and God. He shows how Ibn Sina modifies the metaphysics of both Alfarabi and Aristotle; Ibn Sina claims that existence is not a presupposition simply, but that it can be thought about as something that happens to a thing. Existence becomes an issue. In this same chapter, Burrell also discusses Aquinas and Maimonides as questioning existence, and he also speaks about the function of the act of judgment in becoming aware of existence as an issue.

In Chapter 3 he examines Aquinas more closely. One of the best points in this chapter is the distinction Burrell draws between ordinary properties and formal properties, those that "are not so much said of a subject, as they are reflected in a subject's very mode of existing, and govern the way in which anything whatsoever might be said of that subject" (p. 47). The attributes of God are formal properties. Here, as in many other passages in the book, Burrell neatly puts logical themes to theological use. Chapter 4, on the names of God, concentrates on Maimonides. Burrell tries not only to discuss how it is that many names can be said of God, but also to show how this issue is related to the