Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 6 | Issue 1 Article 12

1-1-1989

David B. Burrell, C. S. C., KNOWING THE UNKNOWABLE GOD. IBN-SINA, MAIMONIDES, AQUINAS

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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.

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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

distinction between theological language and religious language, the language of piety.

Chapter 5 is about God's knowledge of particulars. Here Burrell shows that belief in creation forced a change in the kind of knowledge we use as our model in speaking of how God and the world are related. From a contemplative model, which is appropriate to an emanationist scheme, we must turn to the model of practical knowing, the kind of knowing that occurs when we make or do something. This is a very provocative theme and Burrell exploits it in this chapter and in Chapter 6. In Chapter 6 he also shows that it is misleading to think of God as contemplating a series of possible worlds and possible things, then selecting certain beings for existence, leaving the others as eternal counterfactuals. This misleading picture arises from trying to state the issue of creation in terms of contemplative, not practical knowing. In practical knowing, the artisan, say, does not entertain alternative counterfactuals. His concentration is on the thing that is brought into being, and "alternative designs remain a penumbra, or virtual part of an artist's creative act of making" (p. 98). Burrell's remarks about this issue are very helpful. He shows that contingency should be understood as a mode of being, and hence as a formal feature of the way the world is to be taken (involving a change of heart in those who become able to take the world this way). Contingency is not merely the fact of being able to be otherwise.

I would like to suggest that Burrell's appeal to practical knowing, enlightening as it is, can be refined one step further. Burrell speaks primarily of such knowing as it occurs in making, but it would be helpful to discuss more fully the knowing that is at work in moral actions or transactions. A development along these lines might go even further in clarifying the logic of creation. As I have indicated in my summary of its contents, this book raises very interesting speculative questions and it abounds in attractive formulations. It is an excellent example of using historical information to clarify current problems. Burrell uses not only the classical texts of the authors he examines, but also an abundance of commentators and recent thinkers.