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Mark C. Murphy, DIVINE HOLINESS AND DIVINE ACTION

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impairment, there seems to be no reason to deny that someone might both (a) enjoy the post-mortem beatific vision and (b) retain a pre-mortem disability. At the very least, Christian discussions of the afterlife must take account of the testimony of those persons with disabilities who think that, in this life, they are every bit as *whole* as persons without disabilities, and who have no desire to be “cured” in the life that is to come.

As I have already suggested, this collection of essays collectively makes the case that the agenda for analytic theology ought to include engagement with topics such as race, gender, disability and sexuality. Even if one rejects the conclusions at which some of these essays arrive (indeed, even if one finds some of them downright offensive or antithetical to one’s religious commitments), one ought to recognize that each essay addresses a topic of theological significance. And once the theological significance of these topics is clear, it becomes difficult to deny them a place on the analytic theology agenda. Indeed, it becomes difficult to deny that analytic theology can only be *enriched* by engagement with the topics addressed here. As such, Panchuk and Rea have done the field an enormous service by creating this volume, and anyone interested in analytic theology would surely benefit from reading it.

Divine Holiness and Divine Action, by Mark C. Murphy. Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. xi + 272. \$100 (hardcover)

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I. Summary

Mark Murphy’s latest book, *Divine Holiness & Divine Action*, articulates an account of holiness that is also supposed to provide an explanation of divine action. In the first part of the book, Murphy develops an account of holiness, and in the second he argues that holiness provides a compelling framework for understanding divine action. I will briefly summarize the main sections and themes of Murphy’s book, and then I will offer reflections on some of the main arguments that he offers.

First, in chapter 1, Murphy critiques previous theories of divine holiness. He lays out two criteria for a good account of holiness: first, a successful account should tell us what it is to be holy, and second, it should also be consistent with the general platitudes about holiness articulated by those who have mastery of the concept of holiness (10). He considers



five general views of holiness: holiness as divinity, holiness as simple separateness, holiness as moral goodness, holiness as divine personality, and holiness as exalted status within a privileged genus. He argues that none of these accounts adequately explain the concept of holiness; the first, for example, renders holiness synonymous with divinity, and by extension with being God. When we ascribe holiness to God, however, we are drawing attention to a particular feature in a way that is different from drawing attention to another of his attributes (10–12). So, this account does not adequately explain the concept of holiness.

Having critiqued extant theories of holiness, Murphy devotes chapter 2 to developing a more satisfactory account. He begins by focusing on our experience of holiness, using the phenomenological account of holiness offered by Rudolf Otto (32). Otto characterizes the experience of holiness with the Latin expression *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. This expression captures two central features of the experience of the holy: that the holy one is supremely desirable, and that we are supremely unfit for union with the holy one. Though Murphy thinks there are several good reasons to adopt this account of holiness, one justification for doing so is that it will provide a satisfactory framework for thinking about divine motivation in the second half of the book.

In chapters 3 and 4, Murphy uses this phenomenological account of holiness to explore what it is for God to be holy (primary holiness) and what it is for created things to be holy (secondary holiness). For God to be an absolutely holy being, it must be the case that union with him is overwhelmingly worth seeking for any creature; at the same time, it must be the case that there is a level of intimacy with God that creatures are simply unfit for (46). From absolute holiness, we can infer that God is absolutely perfect, for it is God's perfection that makes it unfitting for creatures to attain a certain degree of intimacy with him. Absolute perfection includes every great-making feature, such as power, knowledge, etc. These great-making features explain why union with God is so supremely attractive, too. Murphy thus arrives at an Anselmian perfect being theology.

In chapter 5, Murphy turns to divine action. He is specifically interested in the question of what necessarily motivates divine action. By necessary motivation, Murphy means something that gives requiring reasons, such that not doing x would be irrational. Contingent motivation, on the other hand, provides justifying reasons, such that there are *prima facie* reasons against doing x , but one has a justification for doing x nonetheless. Murphy problematizes two existing frameworks for divine motivation: the moral goodness framework and the love framework. On the moral goodness framework, morality is what necessarily motivates God, whereas on the love framework, love provides necessary motivation. I will explore Murphy's response to these frameworks in the next section, since there are some issues with his position. In brief, he thinks both frameworks constrain God's freedom in ways that the holiness framework does not. Having eliminated two main theories of divine motivation, Murphy devotes

chapter 6 to arguing that the holiness framework can explain divine motivation. Recall that absolute holiness entails absolute perfection; Murphy thinks that one component of absolute perfection is infinite value, and some actions appropriately express value. So, on the holiness framework, God is motivated to act in ways that express God's own infinite value.

While the holiness framework explains God's necessary motivation, God can also choose to be loving and thus contingently motivated by love. This, Murphy explains in chapter 7, is why God chooses to create. Holiness, Murphy thinks, actually comes into tension with creation, since creation brings God into union with creatures who are not fit to be in union with him. Since, however, God can choose to be loving, he can have justifying (though not requiring) reasons to create. Similarly, an apparent issue arises in chapter 8 with respect to the Incarnation. Since human nature is so unfit to be in union with God, the holiness framework seems to give requiring reasons against the Incarnation; however, that is compatible with there still being *justifying* reasons in favor of the Incarnation. This is the puzzle, then, that an adequate theory of the Incarnation should solve.

In chapter 9, Murphy turns his attention towards the Atonement, critiquing Stump's love-based theory of the Atonement. In this chapter, Murphy does not intend to set forth his own theory of the Atonement, but instead to explain how our understanding of the Atonement should be shaped by the holiness framework. In general, the Atonement is intended to remove the obstacles to union between humans and God. Stump argues that this obstacle is psychological in nature: that is, the human's memories, guilt, and shame about sin impede their ability to be united with God. Murphy critiques this theory, arguing instead that there is a *normative* obstacle to union with God, since flawed, sinful humans are so radically unfit for union with God on the holiness framework. In a similar vein, he spends chapter 10 exploring theories of the afterlife in light of divine holiness; while other accounts have difficulty explaining a populated hell, his challenge is to explain a populated heaven. Again, he must appeal to God's contingent love for humans.

Lastly, in chapter 11 Murphy discusses divine humility. This, I believe, is where the holiness framework appears the strongest. Murphy understands divine humility to be, first, not acting in a way that holiness entitles God to act; second, acting in ways that holiness gives *prima facie* requiring reasons against. For example, because of God's exalted status, he has reasons not to create and enter into relationships with lowly creatures. God thus lowers himself in acting, not according to these reasons, but rather according to reasons of love.

II. Comments

At the beginning of part II, Murphy discusses and eliminates two possible accounts of divine motivation: moral perfection and divine love. The first would entail that God necessarily acts in accordance with morality; the

second that he necessarily acts in a loving way. Murphy problematizes both accounts, arguing that they limit God's freedom. In response to the morality framework, he writes:

Suppose—this is just picture-thinking—that God is entertaining two options, and sees that there are perfectly good, fully adequate reasons for either option. But, due to some psychological feature, God *just can't* choose one of the options, in spite of God's seeing that there are perfectly good, fully adequate reasons for taking that option. That looks like paradigmatic unfreedom. But that's what the situation would be if God had to act in accordance with morality even in the absence of decisive reasons to do so. (97)

He argues that moral theories cannot provide decisive reasons for God to act a certain way, even though they may do so for humans. On Hobbesian and Aristotelian accounts of morality, the decisive reason to act in accordance with morality is that it promotes one's own well-being; on a Kantian account, the decisive reason is that we must recognize the equal importance of all people's well-being; on a Humean account, altruism is motivated by a rationally-optimal human passion (92). None of these accounts, then, provide decisive reasons for God, because God's well-being cannot be dependent upon acting morally towards creatures, and because, unlike human-to-human relationships, there is such a chasm between God and creatures that our well-being is in no way on par with God. Murphy therefore concludes, "If Hobbesianism, Humeanism, Aristotelianism, or Kantianism about our reasons and their explanation is correct, then the standard divine perfections do not entail that moral perfection is among the reasons of an absolutely perfect being" (92). If God were nonetheless necessarily motivated by morality, without having decisive reasons to act in accordance with moral standards, then God would not be perfectly free. As a result, Murphy concludes that God cannot be constrained by moral goodness.

I am nonetheless unconvinced that the morality framework limits divine freedom. On Eleonore Stump's interpretation of Aquinas, moral goodness flows from God's nature, and so God can be constrained by morality without having his freedom limited (Eleonore Stump, "Dante's Hell, Aquinas's Moral Theory, and the Love of God," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 16, 2 (1986): 184–186). On such a view, it is possible for some action to be unavailable to an agent without constraining the freedom of that agent. We can understand this point by considering another divine attribute, omnipotence. A quintessential puzzle about omnipotence is whether God can create a rock that is too heavy for him to lift (Joshua Hoffman and Gary Rosenkrantz, "Omnipotence," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Spring 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed.). The dilemma is that if God cannot create that rock, there is something God cannot do (create that rock); if God *can* create that rock, there is also something God cannot do (lift that rock). A solution to this dilemma is to say that the first branch does not actually undermine divine omnipotence, since it is not

a limitation to be so powerful that you cannot do something that would undermine that power. Being able to will something that is immoral is relevantly similar: the ability to do it is itself a limitation. So, being unable to will something immoral is not a limitation on God's freedom any more than being unable to create a rock so heavy God cannot lift it. Thus, proponents of the morality framework can avoid Murphy's critique.

Murphy similarly argues that the love framework would limit God's freedom. For this not to be the case, he argues that love would have to contribute to some excellence in God. Murphy thinks this could only be the case if 1) union with humans in some way contributed to God's flourishing, which seems false, or 2) love falls under moral perfection and we adopt the morality framework (104, 100). If, as I noted above, there are ways to formulate the morality framework such that it is still on the table, then by extension the love framework could also be on the table.

Moreover, there are advantages to adopting the love framework. First, the Doctrine of the Trinity suggests that God is necessarily loving. Murphy himself acknowledges this:

Christian theists should affirm that each of the trinitarian Persons loves the others, and maximally so. The interior life of God is a life of the mutual love of the divine Persons. This love is necessary and maximal, and none of the arguments against the love framework that I raise below—all of which concern how we should understand the love of God *toward creatures*—would make any trouble at all for the claim that the Persons of the Trinity necessarily, maximally love each other. (98)

Now it seems that the only way for God to be only contingently motivated by love is if he is only contingently loving; after all, loving someone is a motivation to seek or sustain union with them, to wish for their well-being, etc. If God is necessarily loving in some respect, then it seems he must also be necessarily motivated by this love, but Murphy thinks God is only contingently motivated by love (135).

There is another advantage to saying that God is necessarily, not contingently, loving: the latter is inconsistent with divine simplicity. As Stump notes, it follows from the doctrine of simplicity that God cannot have intrinsic accidental characteristics (1986, 184–5). In other words, every characteristic of God must be essential, because every characteristic of God is identical to God's being. But if God is contingently loving, then he is accidentally, and not essentially, loving, and thus has one intrinsic attribute that is not identical to the rest.

Murphy could respond that God's love of creatures is in fact an extrinsic, not an intrinsic, characteristic. As Stump uses the terms 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic,' she is distinguishing between real and 'Cambridge' properties (Stump, 185). Murphy could argue that 'loving creation' is merely a Cambridge property, which is to say that God has it only in relation to creatures. However, I do not think this is an adequate view of love. Consider the tell-tale sign of a Cambridge property: you can lose

the property without actually changing. For example, if you remain 5'4" but your son has a growth spurt and is now taller than you, you no longer have a property you had before (taller than your son). You, however, have not actually changed. Love is remarkably unlike this, though; if you stopped loving someone, the change would reside in *you*, and not in something or someone external to you (though the change in you would naturally result in a change in the relationship). Similarly, we can imagine a scenario where God creates for some reason other than love, and does not love us; the difference between this scenario and one where God does love us is in God, and not in something extrinsic to God. Thus, love is an intrinsic characteristic of God, and by saying that God is contingently loving, Murphy attributes to him an accidental intrinsic characteristic, thus violating divine simplicity.

III. Conclusion

Overall, Murphy offers compelling arguments for his account of divine holiness. His adoption of Otto's account of holiness as an experience of the *tremendens et fascinans* accommodates many intuitions about the concept of holiness, and Murphy's reconciliation of this account with potential difficulties, such as the Incarnation or creation, is both interesting and well-argued. However, some of his arguments for rejecting the morality framework or the love framework of divine motivation are lacking, which leaves room for readers to still reject Murphy's position in favor of these others.

The Principles of Judaism, by Samuel Lebens. Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. xvii. + 331. \$100 (hardcover)

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The stated goal of this remarkably ambitious and erudite book is to provide a "minimal axiomatization" of Orthodox Judaism (henceforward, OJ). Lebens seeks to articulate in a logically rigorous manner those doctrines which are necessary for the foundations of OJ. Lebens regards this effort as not merely a philosophical exercise but also a religious one, for he considers that there is a Biblically based commandment to *know* God, which presumably includes knowledge of important doctrines about God

