

REVIEWS / CRITIQUES

Jonathan Fuqua, Robert C. Koons (eds.), *Classical Theism: New Essays on the Metaphysics of God*.

London: Routledge, 2023, X + 344 pp.

Jonathan Fuqua and Robert C. Koons's *Classical Theism: New Essays on the Metaphysics of God* offers an overview of Classical theism in the field of the philosophy of religion. The book is divided into two sections, *What is Classical Theism?* and *Classical Theism: Problems and Applications*, with seventeen new and original articles in total. As the very section title states, the first part deals with defining Classical theism and discusses what should be understood under that label or at least what was understood under it by its pioneers like Aquinas or Anselm.

Thus, Edward Feser in his article lists some of the important characteristics of Classical theism which are consistently adopted in further articles, whether they argue for or against it. Timothy O'Connor later in his paper actually denies one such characteristic, that is, God's absolute simplicity. Besides dealing with defining the term of Classical theism, the first part also

argues for the existence of such a God. Robert C. Koons offers arguments and answers that such a God of Classical theism does indeed exist.

God, as so understood, is argued to be consistent with Islamic claims about God (Enid Doko and Jamie B. Turner), Jewish claims (Samuel Levens), and Buddhist, Daoist, and Hinduist conceptions as well (Erik Baldwin and Tyler Dalton McNabb). Authors offer textual evidence in support of the claim that the God of classical theism is not necessarily contradictory to those Eastern religious traditions.

Because absolute divine simplicity is the central part of Classical theism, Alexander R. Pruss argues in favor of the doctrine wherein all of God's attributes are identified with God himself (e.g., love, wisdom). Daniel De Haan discusses Aquinas's *Triplex Via* theology — *Via Causalitatis*, *Via Negationis*, *Via Eminantiae* — by which both prove God's independence, simplicity, and perfection, respectively.

Seeing as all authors agree that God is all in all ineffable, the theme of Gyula Klima's article is concerned with the way we speak about God. It offers different conceptions to those of Augustine, Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and Ockham. Katherine Rogers discusses

Anselm's version of Classical theism, focusing on the reconciliation of God's foreknowledge and creaturely libertarian free will.

The second part of this work deals with some specific problems and applications of Classical theism. We find discussions about the reconciliation this time of divine ideas and simplicity (Gregory T. Doolan), the modal collapse argument that concludes God necessarily has to create on the basis of his acts being identified with himself, against which Christopher Tomaszewski argues. Other discussions include arguments denying God's compassion or love in the context of Classical theism (James E. Dolezal), discussions about divine action in the context of Aristotelian–Thomistic and Newtonian ideas of causation (Mark K. Spencer), the possibility of the Incarnation of a simple God in the person of Jesus Christ (Tim Pawl), and of the reconciliation of two big Christian traditions, that is, Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christianity, with Gregory Palamas and Thomas Aquinas as respective representatives (James Rooney).

As one can see, this work offers a comprehensive view of Classical theism, taking into consideration not just the three big monotheistic religions, but certain Eastern traditions as well, such as Buddhism or Hinduism. Authors argue in detail for their positions, going into the depth of the issues by offering us each time a well-rounded and clear train of thought, constantly referring us to further literature. And that is exactly one of the best features of this volume, given that every author lists extensive sources, both primary and secondary, regarding the issues they discuss. That way, a reader is in

a good position for potential further studies. Because of such a diversity of topics and problems, one is offered a wide range of views and arguments for consideration.

Since Classical theism is no longer a presupposed view in the philosophy of religion, this book is a welcomed addition to the discussions with opposing viewpoints. Perhaps the biggest reason for a kind of decline of Classical theism lies in the fact that God, as this tradition sees him, looks to be too static, abstract, if not even dead, based on his seeming distance, indifference, insensitivity, or impersonality. Of course, the kind of death here in question is not the kind Nietzsche spoke about, but it does seem a certain death of its own kind has taken place with the negation of the God of Classical theism in favor of ideas such as Neo-theism or Theistic Personalism most evidently, according to Davies as Feser in his article points out, in Plantinga or Swinburne. These authors take God to be a person first rather than a Pure Act or Being like Aquinas does, for example, by denying as they often do absolute divine simplicity as well.

Also evident is a tendency of certain authors such as Feser, Koons, or Pruss to rely on the Bible to show that their theories are more in line with the received Christian tradition, mainly Catholicism. Those quotations are not meant to serve as primary arguments but rather as further evidence of the validity of Classical theism and God's attributes of simplicity, impassibility, independence, atemporality, and the like.

When dealing with theologians and philosophers like Aquinas, Ockham, or Anselm, it is clear that the authors are well acquainted with their

work and thinking. For example, the article by Daniel De Hann is an excellent introduction to and display of Aquinas's method that leads to God. He offers the reader a fine starting point for understanding the philosophy of the Angelic Doctor. That is why this work is also an exploration of the orthodox ideas of Christianity, both in philosophy and theology. Building their own theories on those (re)interpretations of classical ideas, the authors are nevertheless analytically stringent, seeing as the book is written in the spirit of analytic philosophy. As such, this book is a great addition to contemporary discussions in philosophy and theology (these two sciences have always come together throughout history), offering valuable contributions to both fields. In any case, there is a need to go back to the roots in view of the new and often complex ideas circulating, and that is another great feature of this book. It succeeds on two counts — historical (providing new interpretations and applications) and analytic (holding fast to clearly defined terms and employing rigorous argumentation). That, after all, is the main contribution of this book. Taking into account the advanced language and terminology of the articles, the book is primarily aimed at advanced students and experts. However, precisely because of the clear and understandable style of writing, and despite

advanced terminology, readers less versed in the field of philosophy of religion will certainly benefit from reading this book.

Because of that analytic spirit, which the modern way of philosophizing requires, the book is extremely relevant and important in advancing and enlivening the ideas of Classical theism, not just in its mere historicity, that is, by solely repeating what was said, but in the application of its principles in the ever new and increasingly more and better-elaborated counter-arguments. That way, Classical theism does not remain a kind of historical artifact that can be peacefully ignored without major consequences. Rather, it proves to be a very lively option with a strong spirit and very capable of defending its positions in not only solving old problems in a new way but also developing its ideas in new directions.

To conclude, let us sum up by stating that the editors have succeeded in carrying out their plan by offering a variety of ideas, perspectives, problems, and themes in seventeen articles written by some of the best experts in the field of contemporary (analytic) philosophy of religion. Readers will certainly benefit from this work in many ways, even with its frequent analytical and technical terminology and argumentation.

Ilija Teklić
