

Universität Siegen

Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King (ed.), *Is Goodness without God Good Enough? A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009.

The title of this book is maybe a bit misleading or even silly, but its basic meaning and the underlying topic is not: Generally speaking, the question is how to think about the relation of God to morality. One answer would be that there is none because one of the relata is missing; there is no God, therefore there is and can be no relation between God and morality. Another answer would be that there is no morality because there is no God (along the lines of the often quoted Dostoyevsky remark that, if God does not exist, then everything is permitted – except that it wouldn't even be true that everything is permitted because the very idea of permission only makes sense if there are actions that do have the moral quality of being permitted in which case there is morality). According to this answer, God's existence is in one way or another related to morality such that there can be no morality – i.e. there can be no universal, objective, intrinsic rules or goods – unless there is God. One way to understand this is such that God's volition makes actions or states of affairs good; another would be that God himself is goodness. Yet another way to look at these things would be to hold that God does exist, and yet morality (or at least most of it) exists independently of God just as the realm of logic is independent of God (a position defended in our times and in this book by Richard Swinburne). On the other hand, some even claim that if there is morality, then there is God such that the reality of morality is evidence for the existence of God.

The book is structured as follows: After an introduction by the editors, Paul Kurtz and William Lane Craig lay out their answers to the leading question of whether goodness without God is good enough. Though they set the stage for the entire book they don't reflect sufficiently the very meaning of this question; both Hare (p.85) and Murphy (p.117 f.) note this critically. Part II presents "new essays" by C. Stephen Laymen, Louise Antony, John Hare, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, Mark C. Murphy, Donald C. Hubin, and Richard Swinburne. These essays are supposed to react to the arguments put forward by Kurtz and Craig; but they do so only in a very limited way. In turn, part III allows Craig and Kurtz to reply to these essays and to clarify their positions.

Given his previous philosophical and theological works as a Christian apologist, it's no surprise that William Lane Craig lays out a theistic view according to which there can be no objective moral world without God, whereas Paul Kurtz (and later Walter Sinnott-Armstrong), being a secular humanist, pictures morality as something that needs no deeper ontological foundation so that one can and shall be moral without God. Although I ultimately agree with Craig's general position, neither he nor Kurtz wins the debate. Still, Craig's critical position is well taken: Unless we understand goodness as an intrinsic property of goods or actions, there's no way to account for the objectivity of morality. Now Kurtz seems to agree with this by saying that the human life "is intrinsically *good in itself*" (28); but he simply can provide no answer to the question from whence this quality stems (especially in a world described in terms of naturalism). Craig, on the other hand, doesn't reckon with the possibility of what C. Stephen Layman calls "*moral Platonism*" (51), i.e. that belief that goodness is a Platonic quality that is no more (but certainly no less) stunning than any other property there is; it's simply there. Layman sketches a moral argument for the existence of God, claiming that the germane moral quality (the overridingness of moral obligations) is best explained by God (and/or an afterlife). Louise Antony criticizes Divine Command Theory for well known reasons and even thinks that there is reason not to believe in God because perfect contrition could only be possible if there is no God. John Hare sketches what he has developed elsewhere at quite some length. Basically, the (Kantian) idea is that we ought to care for our own and other people's happiness and that we ought to become better, less self-centred human beings; since ought implies can, and these aims cannot be achieved without God, it would be rationally unstable not to believe in God. Sinnott-Armstrong provides no arguments that have not already been articulated in his book with William Lane Craig (*God? A debate between a Christian and an Atheist*). Again, he sharply attacks Craig's theistic approach and tries to defend his own "harm-based morality" (101); still he does not give an argument *why* any harm, that is not my own or that of my beloved, should bother me. (What's wrong with harm anyway? Its wrongness must be intrinsic, and this is something atheists like Sinnott-Armstrong don't buy into.) Maybe the best paper is Murphy's; in any event, he is the one who develops in an intelligible way the basic questions that need to be answered (what is morality, after all, and how can it be grounded?) though his own

answer is based on Robert Adam's social concept of obligation that has difficulties of its own.

The topic of this book is old and has been debated almost ever since there is philosophy (just think about Plato's Euthyphro-problem: Does God command good actions because they are good, or are actions good because God commands them?). The book does not offer any substantial new perspectives or aspects on this topic; this is partly due to the fact that it is very hard to come up with anything new anyway, partly due to the fact that those thoughts that are somewhat fresh (say by Craig, Hare, Murphy, or Swinburne) have been published, and published in much more detail, in similar ways by these and other philosophers elsewhere. Still the book is laudable: It provides a good overview of what the main problems and arguments in this field are, and most papers are written by philosophers who know their stuff and express their thoughts in integrating contemporary moral philosophy and epistemology.

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Anna Marmodoro and Jonathan Hill (eds.), *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, Oxford University Press, 2011.

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... and the Word became flesh and lived among us', so writes John the Evangelist in the prologue of his Gospel. But how could the Word become flesh? That is, how could God become human? Answering this question is the primary concern of this anthology.

According to the Gospel of Luke, when the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would bear a son, she replied 'How can this be?' since she was a virgin. The angel replied that it would be by an overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. One can view the papers in this anthology as possible continuations of the angel's answer, for having given an account of how a virgin could conceive and bear a son, the question remains how the son she is to bear could be God the Son. For this anthology aims to provide an account of how it is that God, or more precisely, God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, could become human while remaining divine and a single person. In this anthology, Jonathan Hill provides