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## Slote, GOODS AND VIRTUES

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Existence and Nature of God*. Edited with an Introduction by **Alfred J. Freddoso**. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983. viii + 190 pp. Cloth \$16.95.

Reviewed by WILLIAM E. MANN, University of Vermont.

Those seeking an account of what goes on in this book are advised to read the admirably lucid Introduction by Alfred Freddoso. It would be pointless for me to attempt to duplicate Freddoso's feat. So I give you the punch line first: if you have any serious interest in the philosophy of religion, read the essays in this book; they are on the average very good. Moreover, this collection may be a case in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In ways in which the authors did not anticipate, common issues reverberate through many of the essays. I shall pick out some of these issues for discussion. In addition to Freddoso's Introduction, the volume contains seven essays: "Over-Power and God's Responsibility for Sin" by Nelson Pike, "A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell" by Richard Swinburne, "Divine Conservation, Continuous Creation, and Human Action" by Philip L. Quinn, "Maximal Power" by Thomas P. Flint and Alfred J. Freddoso, "Creation II" by James F. Ross, "Descartes's Meditation V Proof of God's Existence" by Clement Dore, and "The Names of God and the Being of Names" by Mark D. Jordan.

Ordinary theists believe that God is omnipotent. Reflective theologians have found reasons to worry about this affirmation. We can express some of their worries by this series of questions. What is it for a being to be omnipotent? What is involved in the concept of omnipotence? Can we understand the notion? *Qua* omnipotent, God is supposed to be the creator of all things. What is it to create, and how is God's creative activity related to the continued existence and behavior of temporal objects? What implications does God's omnipotence have for the scope of human freedom and power? How is the existence of an omnipotent God compatible with the existence of evil?

Flint and Freddoso seek to provide a definition of omnipotence *ab omni naevo vindicatus*. In particular, they want a definition of omnipotence which is compatible with divine impeccability. The finished product of their labors is this:

*S* is omnipotent at *t* in *W* if and only if for any state of affairs *p* and world-type-for-*S* *Ls* such that *p* is not a member of *Ls*, if there is a world *W\** such that

- (i)  $L_s$  is true in both  $W$  and  $W^*$ , and
  - (ii)  $W^*$  shares the same history with  $W$  at  $t$ , and
  - (iii) at  $t$  in  $W^*$  someone actualizes  $p$ ,
- then  $S$  has the power at  $t$  in  $W$  to actualize  $p$  (99).

The definition is relativized to times and possible worlds. The authors believe that there are states of affairs which could have been actualized at one time but which now cannot (logically) be actualized. They also believe that there are contingent states of affairs—states of affairs which are actual in some possible worlds—which not even an omnipotent being can actualize. The leading examples are supplied by “counterfactuals of freedom,” represented by propositions roughly of the form “If agent  $S$  were in circumstances  $C$  at time  $t$ ,  $S$  would freely do action  $A$  at  $t$ .” The authors assume that libertarianism is true, that is, that for an action to be free, it must have no sufficient antecedent causal conditions. Employing a variant of a well-known argument of Alvin Plantinga’s [5, pp. 180-84], the authors argue that the truth or falsity of a given counterfactual of freedom entails the existence of some state of affairs which no being (not identical with  $S$ , the agent) can even weakly actualize. The set of all and only such true counterfactuals of freedom in a given world over which an agent,  $S$ , has no actualizing control is the “world-type-for- $S$ ,”  $L_s$ . Since it is logically impossible for  $S$  to tamper with the elements of the world-type-for- $S$ , the existence of such a set of true, contingent propositions ought not in itself impugn  $S$ ’s claim to omnipotence.

Clause (ii) of Flint and Freddoso’s definition is more subtle than it may first appear to be. The problem is to specify a way in which two worlds can share a history up to a time  $t$  without the specification implying that the worlds will continue to have the same career after  $t$ . Unrestricted quantification over states of affairs creates the problem. If Socrates’ sitting obtains at  $t$  in  $W$  and an eclipse of the Sun obtains at  $t + 2,400$  years, then at  $t$  in  $W$  the future-infected state of affairs, *Socrates’ sitting being 2,400 years earlier than an eclipse of the Sun*, also obtains. Hence in order for  $W^*$  to share the same history with  $W$  at  $t$ ,  $W^*$  must also feature an eclipse of the Sun 2,400 years later. But surely we expect an omnipotent being to be able to intervene in  $W^*$  after  $t$  to prevent the occurrence of the eclipse, either by altering the laws of nature in  $W^*$ , by contravening them, or annihilating relevant portions of the furniture of  $W^*$ . Drawing on earlier work of Freddoso’s [2], the authors suggest an Ockhamist restriction on the states of affairs which make up the history of a world. All future-infected and past-infected states of affairs are expunged from the roster of states of affairs which obtain at a moment. Thus  $W$  and  $W^*$  can share a history at  $t$  but deviate radically thereafter.

It should be noted that Flint and Freddoso’s definition is flexible enough to be adopted by determinists and by anti-Ockhamists. Determinists can insist that

$W$ 's world-type, the set of all true counterfactuals of freedom for  $W$ , is the null set. Ockhamists and anti-Ockhamists alike can assent to clause (ii) and still haggle about the kinds of states of affairs that are admissible under that clause.

Those who have followed the literature know that definitions of omnipotence are generally offered in the spirit of waiting for the other, counterexamplarian shoe to drop. I have no such shoe. I am bothered, however, by the authors' choice of states of affairs as the vehicle of definition. The choice seems under-motivated. The only help the authors give is to claim that a definition framed in terms of *tasks* runs afoul of the logically possible task of "saying something which is (at the same time) being said only by Jones" (84). The authors seem to believe that no one other than Jones can possibly perform the task; thus no one but Jones could be omnipotent. That is clearly false. I can say something which, as a matter of fact, is being said only by Jones. Were I to say it, what is a circumstance about Jones' performance would not be so. It is not the case, however, that every change in circumstance entails a change in task. Of course, anyone who seeks to define omnipotence in terms of tasks must be prepared to say something about the identity conditions of tasks. But there is no reason to think at the outset that such a project is doomed.<sup>1</sup>

Tasks are not the only possible alternative to states of affairs. One can try to use *actions*, as James Cargile has, in a paper which unfortunately has been neglected [1]. An approach even more fundamentally divergent from Flint and Freddoso's is provided in the work of James Ross. In *Philosophical Theology* Ross defined omnipotence in this way:

$S$  is omnipotent if and only if for every logically contingent state of affairs,  $p$ , whether  $p$  or  $\sim p$  is the case is logically equivalent to the effective choice, by  $S$ , that  $p$  or that  $\sim p$  (respectively) [6, p. 211].

In "Creation" [7] and in "Creation II" Ross has clarified and refined this definition in two important ways, but he has not abandoned it; instead he has embedded it in a rich theory about God's relation to the created world.

The two refinements are these. First, the scope of contingent states of affairs must be curtailed to exclude states of God's own willing; for one reason why, see [4]. Second, in "Creation II" Ross maintains that the definition gives the *extent* of an omnipotent being's power, but not the *nature*. *Contra* Flint and Freddoso, Ross maintains that any definition put in terms of states of affairs traffics in a "shadow ontology" of entities which are parasitic on what really exists. God's will actualizes states of affairs, but to say just that and nothing more is, on Ross' view, akin to confusing epiphenomenon with substance. God's causal activity is "metaphysical": he causes things to *be*. (As a by-product of this activity, states of affairs are actualized.) Metaphysical causation is distinct from and presupposed by nomological causation, which connects antecedent

events or states to their outcomes by universal laws. On the contrary, God's creative force is

a universal transcendent force, constant, invariant, whose entire *effect* is the *being* of everything and every other force that there is, and whose entire effect *might* have been the being of whatever else is merely possible (118).

Ross offers some salient analogies as an aid to understanding what metaphysical causation is like. The analogies fall into two main categories. Abstract formal structures can sometimes be causes. The structural features embodied by a particular crystal make it to be and continue to be the kind of crystal it is and to behave in the way it does. The structure is not a localized part of the crystal; moreover, it can be exemplified simultaneously by other crystals. This sort of analogy emphasizes the dependence of some things on their metaphysical causes along with the (potential) ubiquity of a metaphysical cause. But Ross does not want to suggest that God is a formal cause; his causation is efficient. "God's causing is *analogous* to authoring, composing, singing, inventing, dreaming, imagining, and thinking up" (127). The danger, of which Ross is fully aware, is to take analogies for literal truth. God is like an author in some ways (we may think of an author making up her characters) but not in others (an author's characters are fictional, but God's creatures are not). (Readers may also wish to consult [8].)

Foes of rigorous thinking may at this point be prepared to throw in the towel, urging that we are not in a position to understand God's omnipotence or anything else about God, for that matter. As an antidote I suggest Mark Jordan's paper. It is a sensible discussion of the seventh question of Aquinas' *De potentia*, which deals with a series of issues concerning predications made about God. One problem is to see how we can say things which are (importantly) true about God, but which at the same time emphasize the radical difference between God and us. Jordan claims that a crucial element in unravelling this problem is Aquinas' doctrine of God's simplicity. This doctrine underwrites the transformation of what appears to be a mundane predication like 'God is good' into the startling 'God is goodness'. This is the beginning of a long tale, not designed to be told in Jordan's paper, nor in the present review. One characteristic of the approach taken by Jordan is that it minimizes or at least postpones issues of analogical predication, whereas Ross' approach confronts those issues *ab initio*. It is unclear to me to what extent the differences are merely differences of emphasis.

One of the essential features of Ross' notion of God's metaphysical causation is that nothing created can continue to exist without God's sustaining it in existence. "The metaphysical cause is 'everywhere' in its effect, and its causing is coextensive spatiotemporally with the being of the effect . . ." (120). On this

issue Ross joins the ranks of Descartes, Leibniz, and Berkeley, who maintained not only that God creates all contingent beings, but also that his power is necessary to conserve every contingent being in existence for every instant at which it exists. These philosophers insisted, moreover, that divine conservation just is continuous creation. It is the latter doctrine that Philip Quinn is especially concerned to explicate. As Quinn convincingly shows, there is a set of initially plausible theses about conservation and continuous creation which has hard-to-swallow consequences. We might think, intuitively, that for God at  $t$  genuinely to create something is for God to bring it about that that thing exists at  $t$ , when it did not exist at any time before  $t$ . And if conservation is continuous creation, then it would seem that a thing is conserved in existence by God if and only if he continuously creates it, that is, creates it at every instant at which it exists. If so, then no created thing can exist for more than an instant. Quinn argues further that no human action can be performed instantaneously. It follows that no created human agent lasts long enough to perform any action. Epicharmus, inspired tongue-in-cheek, perhaps, by Heraclitus, argued long ago that we should not be held accountable today for the acts we did yesterday, because we are no longer the same persons we were yesterday. Derek Parfit argues nowadays that what matters in survival is not identity of person but connectedness of earlier and later selves. Compared to the theory of conservation as continuous creation that Quinn first canvasses, Epicharmus' and Parfit's views are paragons of stability.

The key to Quinn's second, "improved" theory is to loosen up the definition of 'create' so that the same thing can be created many times. The theoretical advantage of this maneuver is that creation and conservation become the same relation between God and creatures, so that for any being whatsoever, God continuously conserves it just in case he continuously creates it. The continued existence of a created being is thus made possible, along with the possibility of temporally extended human actions.

On either theory of creation and conservation, Quinn claims that it follows that God is the only being who is capable of creating, for common to both theories is this principle:

(P1) For all  $x$ , if  $x$  is contingent and  $x$  begins to exist, then God creates  $x$  (60).

(P1) in itself, however, is not enough to secure God's uniqueness as creator: for all (P1) says, God might be a co-creator. Quinn supplements (P1) with a diagnosis of our (mistaken) tendency to think that human agents can create: we confuse creation with alteration.

The fabrication of a statue is not a case of coming to be at all; it is a

case of alteration. A certain chunk of stuff alters in respect of some of its properties, shape included (60; see also 72).

I think it can be shown that if one adds this diagnosis to Quinn's theory of creation, one gets a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. That result is surprising, and should be brought to the surface for examination.

We might think that 'create' specifies a triadic relation, represented in English by 'x creates y from z'. Let us then ask why the case of the statue is not an instance of this relation. A tempting answer is to say that in this case, the 'y' and 'z' places are occupied, so to speak, by the same chunk of stuff, which was an ingot of bronze and now is a statue of Pegasus. The sculptor's activity thus counts as alteration, but is not sufficient to qualify as creation.

I suspect that we will get the same verdict from Quinn even if the 'y' and 'z' positions are occupied by different stuffs. Do I create acetylene gas by mixing calcium carbide with water? Surely it is implausible to think that there is some chunk of stuff which was calcium carbide and water and now is acetylene gas. But if the sculptor's activity is not creation, why should mine be? If his is just a case of physical alteration, then mine is just a case of chemical alteration. Similarly, the coming to be of a zygote is a quasi-mechanical case of chromosomal alteration.

And so it goes. We might begin to wonder what a genuine case of creation would be, if we accept Quinn's diagnosis. It does not appear that merely filling in the 'x' place of the three-place schema with 'God' will do the trick. If God were to make acetylene gas by mixing calcium carbide with water, then that would be divinely caused alteration, but alteration nevertheless.

If one pursues the question in this fashion, one will see that the doctrine of creation out of nothing is virtually irresistible. God creates something, not by rearranging pre-existent materials, but by bringing these very materials into existence with the created thing. (Recall Ross' claim that God causes things to be.) So, finally, creation really is not a triadic relation (unlike alteration); there just is no 'z' spot to be filled.

Central to Nelson Pike's paper are the two theses that God's omnipotence, understood correctly, poses no threat to human freedom, but that the price of compatibility is to be paid by the so-called Free Will Defense. If God is omnipotent, then he has complete control over every event. To have control is not necessarily to exercise it, however. Suppose that for some event, *E*, God can bring about *E* and he can bring about not-*E*. Then he has complete control with respect to *E*'s occurrence. Suppose further that some other agent, *x*, can bring about *E* and can refrain from bringing about *E*, conditional upon God's forbearing from bringing about *E* and from bringing about not-*E*. Then *x* is free with respect to *E*'s occurrence if God has and exercises his forbearance with respect to *E*. In

these circumstances God, *qua* omnipotent, has complete control over *E*, yet *x* is free regarding *E* because of what Pike calls God's "over-power," that is, God's power to leave the occurrence or nonoccurrence of *E* up to *x*.

Since *x* is free regarding *E*, *x* is a fit subject for moral praise or blame if his performing or not performing *E* is morally significant. The Free Will Defense maintains that the existence of moral evil is an outcome of God's creating agents who are genuinely free, which entails at a minimum that God exercises his over-power with respect to those agents. Now Pike argues that the Free Will Defense fails to exculpate God from responsibility for our freely-committed wrongdoings. *We* are responsible, to be sure, but so is God, for, seeing that we are about to sin freely, he could cease exercising his over-power and intervene to prevent us. Pike concludes that a successful theodicy cannot rely too heavily on the Free Will Defense, and suggests that theodicians turn their attention to what is in effect the Greater Good Defense.

Pike has broached a cask of issues which deserve further, leisurely sampling. For instance, here is one central difference between Pike and Ross. Pike believes that God's over-power—his power to forbear from bringing about the occurrence of nonoccurrence of an event—is necessary if persons are to be free. Ross' definition of omnipotence logically precludes God's having over-power, for God's not willing that *E* occur is necessarily equivalent to *E*'s not occurring, which in turn is necessarily equivalent to God's willing that *E* not occur (117; and see [4]). For Ross, human freedom does not presuppose God's over-power. Moreover, Ross seems to be using a conception of freedom that is much the same as Pike's (cf. 13 with 132). We will understand the issues more deeply when we can lay out the rationales and draw up an assessment of the two positions.

A fundamental eschatological doctrine of Christianity is that some people will achieve as an eternal reward a life in heaven and others will end up in hell as a punishment. Yet if God is omnipotent and perfectly good we might wonder why he does not arrange things so that all people end up in heaven. Swinburne suggests that the answer lies in understanding what sort of person would be equipped to appreciate a life in heaven. (The material in this paper also appears in [9].) Such a life would be a life of supreme happiness, but the correct characterization of happiness involves both conative and cognitive elements. To be happy is to be doing what one wants to be doing; however, the desires one has must be shaped by one's correct beliefs about the relative values of various things and activities. For the Christian, God is the perfect good. The person fit for the beatific vision of God, which will be the principal activity in heaven, must already have begun to desire to do those things on earth, such as "developing our understanding of the world and beautifying it, developing our friendship with others, and helping others toward a deeply happy life" (41), which are the "tasks of heaven" (50). And that person must do these tasks for their sake, not



for the sake of attaining happiness. Not only does happiness supervene on activities, but its existence is diaphanous: to intend to achieve it for its sake is to ensure that one will not achieve it. Hence only those people who have the right sorts of desires, informed by correct beliefs, will be able to savor a life in heaven.

Anticipating an obvious objection, Swinburne maintains that it would be wrong for God to prevent people from making choices which result in their damnation. (Contrast this view with Pike's objection to the Free Will Defense.)

Otherwise the situation would be like that of a society which always successfully prevented people who would otherwise live forever from committing suicide. A society has no right to do that, and plausibly even God has no analogous right to prevent people from destroying their souls (49).

I am unconvinced by the analogy. If my committing suicide is wrong, then it takes some argument to show that my society has no right to prevent me. The difficulty for Swinburne is compounded by the fact that although I do have some rights against my society, it is not clear that I have any rights against God, other than those which are explicitly vouchsafed by his covenants.

It is an indication of present trends in the philosophy of religion that only one paper in this collection deals with a proof for the existence of God. Clement Dore defends the ontological argument, as it is presented in Descartes' Fifth Meditation, against a series of objections. According to Dore, the sound core of Descartes' argument is something like this:

- (1) The concept of God is the concept of a supremely perfect being.
- (2) The concept of existence is the concept of a perfection (relative to God).

Thus: (3) It is a conceptual truth that God exists.

Thus: (4) God really exists (see 144).

I believe that the objection which Dore is least successful in rebutting is supplied by William Rowe, although its pedigree goes back to Gaunilo. If Dore's argument works, then we can construct a whole galaxy of ontologically preposterous counterexamples. Here is Rowe's nominee:

- (1') The concept of a minor deity is the concept of a being who has all perfections, but only a modest degree of perfections which vary in degree, like knowledge and power.
- (2') The concept of existence is the concept of a perfection (relative to a minor deity).

Thus: (3') It is a conceptual truth that a minor deity exists.

Thus: (4') A minor deity really exists (see 151).

And here is the gist of Dore's rejoinder:

The concept of God is such that it is a necessary truth that if God exists, then God is a radically unique being, in the sense that it is logically impossible for any being even to come close to rivalling him with respect to the degree and number of his perfections.... But the concept of a minor deity is such that it is a necessary truth that if minor deities exist, then they rival God with respect to the *number* of their perfections. It follows that, given that God exists, minor deities are logically impossible (152).

I am not certain whether Dore has not also "proved" the necessary nonexistence of persons, since persons have some of God's attributes, albeit to a feeble degree (think of persons as *very* minor deities, created, remember, in God's image). More to the point, it seems to me that Dore's rejoinder begs the question. Let us recapitulate the dialectic. Dore has presented an argument with the conclusion that God exists. Rowe has presented a structurally identical counterargument whose conclusion is the unpalatable claim that a minor deity exists. Dore's response is that *given that* God exists, a minor deity cannot exist. But the point of Rowe's counterargument is to challenge the argument by which Dore seeks to establish God's existence, which Dore is now taking as given.

#### NOTE

1. Flint and Freddoso credit Alvin Plantinga with the modern discovery of McEar, the man capable only of scratching his left ear. Plantinga discovered McEar, but McEar's baptism is due to Richard La Croix; see [3].

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*Goods and Virtues* by **Michael Slote**. Clarendon Press, 1983. pp. 148. \$19.95.

Reviewed by ALASDAIR MACINTYRE, Vanderbilt University.

Michael Slote has written an admirable book of a kind too seldom attempted by philosophers. His central concern is not so much to develop a systematic point of view as to identify a range of important considerations which have too often been ignored or put on one side. What he provides is both an agenda of difficulties for moral enquiry and a series of summonses to greater complexity. His central theses are all developed at some length, but he allows himself to make some interesting brief excursions and in so doing not to be haunted by a need always to say something conclusive. This is moral philosophy self-consciously understood, as all philosophy ought to be understood, as contributions to a continuing conversation.

In his first chapter Slote advances objections to the view developed by Thomas Nagel according to which rationality requires that all the periods of a person's life be treated as equally relevant and given equal weight in providing reasons for action at any given moment. So that if it is true that I am going in ten years time to have a reason for doing something or other (and I know it—the formulation of this view raises interesting questions about both the logical and the epistemological status of future contingents), I now have a reason for doing something or other in ten years time. Hence anything that I must do now, if I am to do whatever it is in ten years time, I now have a reason to do. Not so, says Slote. There are some specific periods in human life one of whose central characteristics is that from the point of view that they afford what has happened or is going to happen at certain other periods is unimportant. There are goods which are specific to particular periods of a person's life, which are irrelevant in other periods.

Slote notes that this view commits him to a way of understanding the unity of a human life which is very different from that advanced by Nagel and suggests, obviously rightly, that his own view has some affinity to Aristotle's. He does not pursue this suggestion and therefore does not notice how much of Aristotle's moral and political thinking presupposes that the activities, goods and virtues important at one stage of life differ from those of others. This is, for example, the key to Aristotle's thesis about the place of *theoria* in human life.

In his second chapter Slote argues that some virtues too are specific to particular