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Did Jesus Rise From the Dead?: The Resurrection Debate, by Gary Habermas and Antony Flew, ed. by Terry L. Miethe. San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1987. Pp. xvi + 190. \$14.95.

Reviewed by STEPHEN T. DAVIS, Claremont McKenna College.

This is a fascinating book, of interest to Christian philosophers and to all who wonder whether Jesus rose from the dead. The word "debate" in the subtitle is accurate; the heart of the book records an actual debate that took place on May 2 and 3, 1985 at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. The book's two authors were the debaters, and it is hard to imagine a more interesting pairing—Flew, the noted English philosopher known for his religious skepticism and his skillful defense of a Hume-like position on miracles; and Habermas, a member of the philosophy department at the host university and an able defender of a theologically conservative position on the resurrection.

The debate begins with an opening essay from each participant and a rebuttal of the other's essay. Then there is a brief *mano-a-mano* discussion between the two, followed by a question and answer session involving Flew, Habermas, the book's editor Terry Miethe, and W. David Beck, both of Liberty University. The next section of the book is a longish discussion of the issues among the same four (this was the second day's event at the actual debate). The book then includes a helpful and illuminating set of reactions to the debate written by three noted scholars of quite different persuasions—German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg, American process philosopher Charles Hartshorne, and British evangelical thinker James I. Packer. The book concludes with "Some Final Thoughts on the Resurrection" by Habermas—a response to the essays of the three outside commentators.

Flew's basic argument is that while Hume made mistakes in his discussion of miracles, his basic insight remains. That is, "the criteria by which we must assess historical testimony, and the general presumptions that make it possible for us to construe leftovers from the past as historical evidence, are such that the possibility of establishing, on purely historical grounds, that some genuinely miraculous event has occurred is ruled out" (p. 5). Flew also argues that the biblical accounts of the resurrection are so late, inconsistent, and otherwise problematical that it is impossible for us today to know what did in fact happen in the days after the crucifixion. In any case, he says, the biblical evidence is nowhere near strong enough to make us overturn our commitment to the idea that the dead stay dead.

Habermas argues: (1) that rational persons do not approach this issue with an *a priori* rejection of the possibility of miracles: (2) that the New Testament contains testimony by eye-witnesses who claim to have seen Jesus alive after his death, testimony that is much earlier and more reliable than Flew wants to allow; (3) that none of the naturalistic explanations (including the hallucination theory) of what happened after the crucifixion or of the rise of the church

succeeds; and (4) that there are twelve facts accepted by virtually all New Testament scholars (and four core facts among the twelve) which together point decisively toward the reality of the resurrection. Accordingly, he says, the proper conclusion is that Jesus was indeed alive after his death. (Habermas also considers the Shroud of Turin to be confirming evidence of the resurrection.)

The debate has some limitations. First, by mutual consent, there is no discussion of the existence of God. This agreement is understandable; the debaters wanted to talk about the resurrection without raising other difficult and controversial topics. Yet this omission creates in places a slight air of unreality (as I believe both debaters recognize). Surely the existence of God (or at least of the kind of God Christians believe in) is crucial to their topic. For example, those who believe in such a God will be far more easily swayed by Habermas' points than those who don't. Second, Flew is not well informed on the arguments and conclusions of contemporary New Testament scholars. This too is understandable—Flew is a philosopher, not a scripture scholar. Nevertheless, much of the current scholarly debate about the resurrection of Jesus involves biblical scholars and the kinds of issues they professionally consider. Flew's ignorance of much of their work puts him at a decided disadvantage. (He can, I think, be mildly criticized here. If I were going to argue against the resurrection of Jesus at one of the major educational centers of American fundamentalism, I would have done my homework better than Flew appears to have done.) Third, the debate is somewhat repetitive; the same points keep getting made again and again. (Habermas recognizes this fact, and attributes it in part to Flew's unwillingness to face some of his central arguments.)

The three best things in the book, in my view, are: (1) the sparkling interaction between two articulate philosophers of diametrically opposed views; (2) the incisive comments of Pannenberg and Packer (those of Hartshorne are interesting but quite beside the main points at issue in the book); and (3) the fact (as a Christian I naturally applaud this result) that Habermas seems effectively to rebut Flew's arguments and makes an excellent case for the conclusion that Jesus rose from the dead.

It should be noted that Flew scores points too. Habermas frequently argues that the book of Acts (which records the resurrection of Jesus) is trusted in its historical details by respected Roman historians. Flew correctly replies that the general historical reliability of Luke's writings on ordinary historical events does not entail that Luke is correct in his claim that Jesus was miraculously raised from the dead (see pp. 110-11).

Despite my enthusiasm for the book—I believe it is must reading for all who are interested in the topic—there is something about it that makes me uneasy. For three reasons, one senses in its design and content a degree of unfairness toward Flew. (1) Flew's contributions seem to be verbatim reports of what he

said at the public debate. Apart from his obviously prepared opening essay, there are no footnotes, and one occasionally comes across the kinds of incomplete sentences, interjections, and even verbal incoherencies that mark the spontaneous oral deliverances of most of us. Habermas, however, was apparently allowed to polish his contributions before publication; they are smooth, well written, and even include footnotes. (There are 166 footnotes scattered throughout the book from Habermas, and four from Flew—all in his opening essay.)

(2) Oddly, Flew (arguing *against* belief in the resurrection) opens the debate; surely Habermas (the defender of the affirmative) should have begun. More importantly, in every section of the book, Habermas has the last word. Furthermore, in the Discussion chapter Miethe and Beck at times seem to join Habermas in “ganging up” on Flew. (3) Most importantly, the book includes a concluding essay by Habermas but none by Flew. The editor explains in the Introduction that Habermas was allowed to write the final essay because seven of ten outside panelists (five professional debate judges and five philosophers) voted that Habermas won the debate. I myself concur in this judgment, but the reason given seems a bit lame. If Habermas was to write a concluding essay, Flew should have been asked to contribute one too.

With two relatively minor exceptions, I was delighted to find that the overall case Habermas makes for the resurrection is impressive. (I will raise no objections to Flew’s arguments because, as noted, Habermas does an effective job of doing so in the book.) First, I think Habermas’ use of the notion of an “eyewitness” will be confusing to careful readers (as Flew recognizes—see pp. 54, 56). He continually argues that in I Corinthians and in the Gospels we find “eyewitness testimony” to the resurrection. What I think he means (he occasionally says so clearly) is that Paul and the evangelists spoke to eyewitnesses and then recorded their testimony accurately. I agree with that point fully. But in the heat of the debate he sometimes seems to push the much stronger and more dubious point that I Corinthians 15: 3 - 7 and the resurrection accounts at the end of the Gospels constitute or contain direct eyewitness testimony. The I Corinthians text, he says, “is an eyewitness report” (p. 56). And “we have some eyewitness testimony from the Gospels” (p. 57). And surely this is misleading.

I can illustrate in this way: Suppose that Jones robs Smith. Suppose later that Smith says to Brown (who was not present at the robbery), “Jones robbed me.” Suppose that Brown then correctly says to some fourth party: “Jones robbed Smith.” Then (I say) Brown’s words (“Jones robbed Smith”) do *not* constitute “eyewitness testimony”—even if Brown is (as in this case) virtually quoting Smith. To *quote* (someone else’s) eyewitness testimony is not to *give* eyewitness testimony. My own view is that Habermas ought to lay less emphasis on claims about eyewitness testimony to the resurrection in the New Testament (though there is some of that—e.g., I Cor. 15: 8) and stress instead claims about reliable

testimony to the resurrection.

Second, those like Habermas (and like me) who wish to defend a theologically traditional interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus find themselves arguing these days not only against those who deny that it happened at all but also against those who affirm the resurrection of Jesus but claim that it was a spiritual event. What was raised was not Jesus' body but rather—they vaguely say—his person, soul, or spirit. The only point I wish to make here is that contrary to what he says on pp. 26 - 27, Habermas' four core facts do not necessarily point in the direction of *bodily* resurrection. Nor (with the exception of the empty tomb, which Habermas recognizes is denied by some reputable scholars) does the larger set of twelve accepted facts. The appearances of Jesus after the resurrection—such interpreters of the resurrection will say—were spiritual rather than bodily appearances.

What this implies, I think, is that conservative interpreters of the resurrection must argue strongly in favor of both the empty tomb and of the claim that the resurrection appearances were bodily appearances. (As Pannenberg notes, this requires conjoining the empty tomb tradition with the appearance traditions.) Habermas of course recognizes that both must be argued for. I merely point out that they do not strictly follow from facts virtually all recognized scholars accept.

The Possibility of an All-Knowing God, by Jonathan Kvanvig. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986. Pp. xvi and 181.

Reviewed by JOSHUA HOFFMAN, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

The Possibility of an All-Knowing God is an essay on omniscience and divine omniscience, in which the author examines several salient issues relating to these concepts. The first such issue pertains to what the author calls the range of omniscience. The issue, in other words, is over the answer to the question, what must an omniscient being know? In considering this issue, Kvanvig takes up a pair of subsidiary ones, each having to do with knowledge of the future. He first discusses Geach's thesis that the future is unreal, rejects this thesis, and concludes that an omniscient being must know about the future, at least to some extent. The second subsidiary issue has to do with knowledge of the future actions of free individuals (other than the knower). R. Swinburne has argued that since it is impossible for any knower to know such actions, an omniscient being need not know them either. Kvanvig examines and disputes the two conclusions that comprise Swinburne's position: (a) that it's impossible for anyone to know the future actions of free individuals; and (b) that an omniscient being need not have this sort of knowledge. One might accept (a) and reject (b); in doing so, one would be committed to the impossibility of an omniscient being, at least given