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Hoffman & Rosenkrantz, THE DIVINE ATTRIBUTES

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viduates a material substance need not be that which determines its identity over time and possibilities as well. What Oderberg is offering us is merely a principle of individuation, not a principle of identity. It is not entirely clear to me that this separation of the principle of individuality from the principle of identity is coherent.

Here is a simple argument. To say that something is an individual is to say that it is *exactly one thing*. It is to say that it has *unity* or *oneness*. Thus, the question "Is this an individual?" is fundamentally the question "How many things are there here? One or many?" Consequently, the question "What makes this thing to be an individual?" is logically equivalent to the question "What makes it the case that there is exactly one thing here?" Thus, the principle of individuation is supposed to answer this question of "how many?" Now, if the principle of individuation answers this question of one or many, at a certain place, at a certain time, then one might expect the same principle to answer the same question of one or many *over time and across possibilities*. If so, then the principle of individuation for a material substance should also serve as a principle of identity for that substance across time and possibilities. For this reason, I am not certain that matter possessing indeterminate quantity could serve as the principle of individuation, since it fails as a principle of identity across time and possibilities.

The Divine Attributes, by Joshua Hoffman and Gary S. Rosenkrantz. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002. Pp. 204. $62.95. $26.95 (paper).

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This book, complete with a glossary of technical terms, offers a remarkably lucid exposition of the idea of God as a maximally great being. At times the authors shift from talk of *idea* to talk of *nature*. They thus identify their main purpose as giving "a rational account of the *nature of God*, that is, of the God of the three major Western religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam" (p. 3). Caution is in order here, given a common use of "the nature of *X*" in ordinary language. If God must exist in order for there to be "the nature of God," the authors' stated purpose must be reformulated. The authors, however, do not use "the nature of God" in a way that has existential import regarding God. Their talk of "defining the nature of God" is synonymous with their talk of "defining the idea, or the concept, of God" (cf. p. 4). The authors thus do not begin with the assumption that God exists. On the contrary, the book concludes with some doubts about rational belief that God exists.

What do the authors mean by "a *rational* account of the nature of God"? They do not mean "an account indicating that commitment to the reality of God's nature is epistemically rational." They focus instead on an account indicating that the concept of God as a maximally great being is "coherent" (p. 6). Given that "rational" is ordinarily used to connote an epistemic status exceeding logical and conceptual coherence, it may have been more straightforward for the authors to talk instead of a *logically and conceptually coherent* account of the concept of God. They mainly seek consistency in the

concept of God relative to the necessary truths of logic, metaphysics, epis-
temology, and ethics. In their words, "the existence of God should be not
only formally consistent, but consistent with the necessary truths of meta-
physics, epistemology, and ethics, at least to the extent that these can be
ascertained" (p. 2). The authors refrain, in any case, from commitment to
the epistemic rationality of theism.

The authors' stated method of exposition is that of "rational theology,"
that is, "a theology that accepts the canons of rationality, " which include
the laws of deductive and nondeductive logic (p. 1). The relevant canons
are the "canons of epistemic rationality or justification." In particular, "...
one ought to accept a proposition only if one is epistemically justified in
believing that proposition, ... [and] the degree of confidence one has in a
proposition ought to be in proportion to one's epistemic justification for
believing that proposition" (pp. 2-3). If the uses of "ought" here are epis-
temic (rather than, say, prudential), the canons offered are above reproach.
The book, however, is not a full-scale treatment of the bearing of rational
theology on the idea of God as a maximally great being. It avoids, as any
200-page book must, rational assessment of much of the alleged evidence
for theistic belief. The book focuses rather on the idea of maximal greatness
and its implications for divine substantiality, incorporeality, necessary exis-
tence, eternality, omniscience, perfect goodness, and omnipotence.

Rational theology, according to the authors, underwrites some of the
traditional divine attributes but not others. The following survive: concrete
substantiality, personhood, incorporeality, simplicity (being without parts),
incorruptibility (divine greatness cannot decrease), necessary existence,
maximal knowledge, omnibenevolence (given a purely non-consequential-
ist moral theory), and maximal power. The following do not survive:
omnipresence, timelessness, self-explanatoriness, omniscience regarding
every truth, immutability, and omnipotence regarding every state of
affairs. The relevant arguments are rigorous, plausible and at times origi-
nal; they uniformly merit careful consideration. Various details aside, the
authors offer a compelling argument for the conceptual coherence of tradi-
tional monotheism.

As for necessary existence, the authors go conditional: "On the assump-
tion that God exists, he has necessary existence...." (p. 168). They find it
conceivable that the existence of God is a necessary brute, unexplained
fact: "... conceivably, the necessary fact that God exists is simply a brute
fact" (p. 89). The latter way of putting the matter can mislead. The authors
do not hold that it is a necessary fact that God exists. They rather hold that
if God exists, then God exists necessarily (cf. p. 80), that is, in every possible
world. Specifically, if God exists, the true proposition that God exists is
included in every possible world (cf. pp. 82, 77). In addition, the authors
hold that it is conceivable that God exists necessarily and that God's neces-
sary existence is an unexplained fact. Even so, the authors reject conceiv-
ability as a guarantee of logical possibility; they thus set aside certain
Humean arguments for the impossibility of God's existence (pp. 80-81).
Whether it is a "necessary fact that God exists," however, remains wide
open by the book's arguments.

Readers may wonder about the coherence of the suggestion that if God

exists, then God exists necessarily, but possibly God does not exist. In rejecting a version of the ontological argument, the authors remark that "the claim that the existence of God is possible is not justified." They add: "To justify the ... *epistemic* claim that the concept of God is *coherent* is *not* to justify the ... metaphysical claim that the existence of God is *possible*" (p. 181). How, if at all, is coherence related to possibility? Consider this remark: "A conception of God is coherent if and only if the divine attributes are intelligible taken both individually and in combination" (p. 1). The question thus becomes: How, if at all, is intelligibility related to possibility? We noted above that the authors reject conceivability as a guarantee of possibility (cf. pp. 80-81). They would, I suspect, likewise reject intelligibility as a guarantee of possibility.

The authors endorse a necessary connection between logical coherence and their "*rational* account of the nature of God." They remark: "From the perspective of rational theology, if the concept of God is logically incoherent, then he cannot exist. Consequently, a rational defense of the existence of God requires a [logically] coherent conception of God" (p. 2). More to the point: "... rational theology cannot accept an account of the divine which logically entails a contradiction...." (p. 1). It follows for the authors' own rational theology that "... to justify the ... *epistemic* claim that the concept of God is *coherent*" is to justify the logical claim that the concept of God is logically coherent.

What, then, is possibility, and how is it related to logical coherence? The authors adopt the following definitions: "A proposition is impossible if and only if it implies a contradiction.... A proposition is possible if and only if it is not impossible" (p. 197; cf. p. 76). So, a proposition is possible if and only if it does not imply a contradiction. According to the Law of Non-Contradiction, "... it is not possible for a proposition to both be true at a time and not be true at that time" (p. 196; cf. p. 76). So, a proposition is possible if and only if it does not imply that a proposition is both true at a time and not true at that time (p. 76). Hence, a proposition is possible if and only if it is logically coherent.

Justifying the epistemic claim that the concept of God is coherent, according to an implication of the authors' position noted above, entails justifying the logical claim that the concept of God is logically coherent. Another implication of the authors' position just noted is that logical coherence is sufficient for possibility. So, for the authors to affirm the epistemic claim that the concept of God is coherent requires that they affirm that it is possible that the concept of God is instantiated. In short, their alleged epistemic claim about the coherence of the divine attributes requires, by the authors' own standards, that they affirm that God's existence is possible.

The authors *might* try to find refuge in some technical notion of *metaphysical* possibility in contrast with the kind of possibility they have characterized. The book, however, does not do this. Its definitions and characterizations of possibility concern the kind of possibility mentioned in the previous quotations. The authors do not use "metaphysical possibility" as a defined term; rather, they evidently assume that claims about possibility in the aforementioned sense are "metaphysical" claims. If they assume otherwise, they are working with an ill-defined notion of possibility.

Since the authors seem logically committed, then, to hold that God's existence is possible, they have no easy escape from the ontological argument. I am not suggesting that the ontological argument is rationally compelling. I have argued rather that the authors' account, contrary to their suggestion, gives them no easy way out of the ontological argument. So far as their position goes, they have to acknowledge that God's existence is possible, and this lands them in the grips of an ontological argument.

Another apparent inconsistency arises in the authors' characterization of theism, atheism, and agnosticism. The authors call *theism* the position that "the evidence from reason and experience favors belief in the existence of God" (p. 179). They call *atheism* the position that "the evidence from reason and experience favors belief in the non-existence of God" (p. 179). They then propose that agnosticism "requires that one withhold judgment concerning both theism and atheism, that is, that one should neither accept nor reject either of them" (p. 180). This is a mistake. As the authors have defined *theism* (namely, in terms of evidence favoring belief in God), agnosticism as a thesis about inadequate evidence is the rejection of theism (epistemically defined). In addition, as the authors have defined *atheism* (namely, in terms of evidence favoring belief in the non-existence of God), agnosticism as a thesis about inadequate evidence is the rejection of atheism (epistemically defined). The authors would have been well-advised to stay with the nonepistemic, ontological characterizations of theism and atheism mentioned earlier in the book (cf. p. 4).

The authors conclude with some sketchy misgivings about rational belief that God exists. They claim that the world's evil yields a serious challenge to theism. Specifically, they claim that, to answer the problem of evil, theists must "justify the claim that every evil falls into one or more of the following three categories: (i) an evil that God has no choice but to allow in order to obtain a greater good; (ii) an evil which God is not obligated to prevent given the nature of moral perfection; and (iii) an evil which God fails to prevent due to God's ignorance...." (p. 186). The difficulty for theists, however, is not so much with the reality of evil as with what exactly is being demanded by way of the relevant justification. Must the justification assign each instance of evil presented to one of the three categories? Surely that demand would be excessive. Why should we think that humans would be in a position to do that if God exists? In the absence of compelling epistemic demands here, theists can *reasonably* acknowledge that our limitations on categorizing evil relative to God's character and purposes are extensive indeed. In other words, the conclusion of the book of Job is as cognitively relevant today as ever.

In sum, this book repays careful attention. It would serve very well as a textbook in graduate and advanced undergraduate courses on the nature of God.