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# Review: God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism

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*God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism.* By Stephen E. Parrish. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997. 332 pages. \$47.50.

Formulated in the trenches, this text is essentially Parrish's Ph.D. dissertation in the area of philosophy. It was drafted for a committee that almost totally disagreed with him about the truth of theism. The basic ideas reached their present form while being honed over four more years of research and writing after graduation.

In this work, Parrish attempts two main tasks: determining the meaning of the concept "necessary" and examining "what kind of being, if any, could coherently be called necessary" (ix). Along the way, the reader is treated to a plethora of relevant ideas in philosophy of religion, many of which differ from the way the subject is often presented in evangelical circles.

Chapter 1 defines many of the major terms that will be employed or assumed throughout the volume. Parrish then turns to a discussion of two kinds of necessity in Chapters 2 and 3. He rejects the concept of a factually necessary God, charging that it is incoherent. Then he defends the notion that God is logically necessary, indicating a being existing in all possible worlds.

A modal version of the ontological argument is presented in Chapter 4, set in the context of contemporary discussions, both pro and con. Chapter 5 presents various versions of the teleological and cosmological arguments for God's existence, with the author concluding that no one has ever shown that either sufficient reason or existential causality is necessarily true apart from an a priori belief in a logically necessary God.

Chapter 6 is one of Parrish's strongest. Arguing that one's presuppositions determine the a priori plausibility that is assigned to typically theistic beliefs, such as miracles, he launches into a discussion of antecedent improbability. Here Parrish makes a noteworthy contribution to a prominent subject in recent discussions, arguing that such notions can only be discussed in regard to a particular world view. Apart from a particular outlook, the assumed probability structure does not hold and thus cannot be used to challenge the belief in miracles. To do otherwise is question-begging.

Parrish begins the heart of his book in Chapter 7, by identifying "three positions as to why the universe exists in the manner it does" (183)—Brute Fact Theory, the Necessary Universe Theory, and the Necessary Deity Theory. Possible forms of each are investigated according to the answers they offer in three areas: natural law, ontology, and epistemology.

Chapter 8 may well be the strongest contribution in the volume. Parrish indicates multiple problems for the Brute Fact Theory, concluding: "Brute Fact Theory is totally and utterly unable to justify order, being and especially knowledge. Indeed, knowledge of any kind is impossible in the Brute Fact

Theory" (214). As a result, "its falsity must be presupposed in order for there to be any justification or validity in thought" (215).

Analyzing several varieties of the Necessary Universe Theory in Chapter 9, Parrish concludes that "the core problem is simply that it is impossible to deduce contingent truths from abstract ones." Moreover, Necessary Universe Theories collapse into some form of Brute Fact Theory, and so they similarly fail in the same three areas (250).

Parrish concludes that a successful theistic proof must establish that God's existence is logically prior to all justified beliefs. Chapter 10 discusses rival forms of Necessary Deity theories like emanational concepts and process theology, leading the author to state that only classical theism can adequately explain natural order, ontology, and epistemology.

While Parrish thinks that many contemporary arguments for God's existence are valuable, concluding that they often produce strong evidence, they are not proofs. Even so, his transcendental argument is built on his own renditions of the ontological, teleological, and cosmological arguments for God.

Parrish opts chiefly for the transcendental argument, charging that "the existence of the God of classical theism is a necessary presupposition to all thought, and is therefore a concept which enters, at least implicitly, in all thought . . . all non-theistic alternatives fail because *they cannot give an account of the universe as it is*" (Parrish's emphasis, 183). He thinks that this argument avoids the problems of the cosmological and teleological arguments, which "depend upon knowledge of the universe." The transcendental argument does not necessarily do so, he claims, although it is stronger if sense perception is legitimate (215).

Following in the footsteps of evangelical scholars who have also favored versions of the transcendental argument, such as Cornelius Van Til and C.S. Lewis, Parrish proceeds far beyond the mere mentions by the former, as well as differing at several important points from the latter. At any rate, placing his argument against the backdrop of contemporary philosophical discussions is another of his distinctions.

Parrish's conclusions will be regarded differently by readers of *Philosophia Christi*, depending on their own philosophical and apologetic stances. Some would challenge his assertion that arguments for God's existence are problematic if they rely on factual necessity, as several appear to do, in that these attempts ultimately depend on chance, thereby being reduced to Brute Fact Theory. For instance, Parrish charges that Thomistic conceptions of God are especially vulnerable here.

Other readers may think that Parrish spends too little time on some of the alternative challenges that he investigates, wishing that he would slow down and develop more of the details in his critiques. Even so, this review-

er thinks that most readers will grow to appreciate the thoroughness of many of the discussions.

Whatever the differences, the philosophical reader with an evangelical perspective should find much to commend itself in this text. Parrish offers some outstanding criticisms of both Brute Fact and Necessary Universe Theories. The former, which he asserts is the predominant view among contemporary atheists and agnostics, is perhaps the chief focus of this research. An indication of the noteworthiness of Parrish's treatise, as mentioned at the outset of this review, is that it was written for a doctoral committee that, while being very fair, was certainly in strong disagreement with his assertions. (Unless this reviewer is mistaken, Parrish's dissertation director is a Brute Fact theorist.)

Furthermore, Parrish exhibits a strong familiarity with contemporary philosophical literature. An excellent bibliographic interaction is obvious, along with thoughtful discussions of many areas not frequently found elsewhere. His evaluation of certain philosophical elements in recent discussions of miracles is an example of such a "gem." Overall, there is much to commend itself in this book, whatever one's philosophical perspective. It deserves interaction and careful thought, especially in areas where evangelical thinkers can sometimes tend towards stagnation.

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