

A final weakness is found in the chapter on aesthetics. After defining art and describing its function, the authors make a compelling case for an aesthetic objectivist theory that they name “aesthetic ethicism.” “Clear moral boundaries must be respected in all art forms. Art, like all human projects, is an inherently moral activity. No artist can escape this fact, however much she might claim otherwise. And every art object has moral implications, however neutral it might appear to be” (436). Building on this theory, the authors spell out some extremely practical guidelines for aesthetic judgment. However, in a discussion on necessary and gratuitous depictions of evil (*The Exorcist* as an example of the former and *Friday the 13th* as an example of the latter), the authors make the following claim: “Just as depictions of sex acts in pornography are by definition gratuitous, so is violence in teen horror films” (443). As stated, this claim is true. But the claim fails to take into account the wide chasm between the production process of a pornographic scene and that of a scene of cinematic violence. Actual violence is very rarely committed in the production of a horror film, and any violence that is committed is accidental. In stark contrast to this, pornographic scenes involve the actual commission of sex acts. So, while we may be able to equate the gratuitous nature of cinematic violence and sex from the perspective of a moviegoer, we must acknowledge the radically greater ethical violation committed in the production of pornography than in the production of horror films.

These weaknesses should not cast doubt on the enormous value of the book. For every criticism there are a multitude of praises that could be offered. Whether for a Christian college or university class or for a nontheist investigating Christian answers to the greatest philosophical questions, Cowan and Spiegel have provided an invaluable standard for elementary understanding and future discussion.

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Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: Four Views. Edited by Bruce A. Ware. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 200. 273 pages. \$15.10.

The declared purpose of the book *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: Four Views* is to inform and assess. The editor states, “the purpose of this book is to put before the reader a sampling of some of the most important proposals for understanding the doctrine of God from within evangelical theology” (1) and “to provide argumentation [readers] can assess in their own endeavors to understand the God of the Bible rightly” (4). For each perspective considered, there is a lead essay followed by three critical responses.

In the first essay, Paul Helm attempts to locate the “Classical Calvinist Doctrine of God” as “The Traditional Doctrine of God.” In Helm’s opin-

ion, a book showcasing four “perspectives” on God is unfortunate, since it implies parity between the tradition and the deviating views discussed, a parity that Helm denies. As such, any deviation from the tradition ought to be viewed with suspicion, and the burden of proof is on the deviator to justify his movement away from “the main spine of Christian theism” (6). Helm’s dialectical strategy is surprising and not entirely persuasive given the format of the book. He begins by documenting Augustine’s, Anselm’s, and Aquinas’s teachings on predestination. He then shows Calvin to be at home within these teachings and argues that predestination is a biblical concept that entails the traditional view (which is the Calvinist view!) of God. Opposing views are judged faulty, not because they are scripturally prohibited or logically incoherent, but because they deviate from the tradition.

Helm asks, “What kind of God can be a predestinating God?” (25). A predestinating God is a God who exerts meticulous providence over good and evil. God sovereignly predestines the elect to salvation and the reprobate to hell. Just how the goodness of God is to be reconciled with divine determinism in which “God wills the total order of things” (29) is left unexplained by Helm, a mystery “perhaps necessarily unfathomable” (21). After reading Helm’s chapter, one is left with the impression that Scripture quite obviously teaches the Reformed system of theology, and thus one is unfaithful if one disagrees, wrongly motivated by philosophy or an unreasonable desire to explain realities (such as the origin of evil and sin) that are best kept mysterious.

Ware begins his essay by affirming the Reformed tradition’s understanding of “God’s preeminent and prevailing sovereignty over all of the created universe he has made” (77) as of central importance in developing a doctrine of God. His tone is more irenic than Helm’s and his approach more appropriate to the stated goal of the book. Ware’s view is “A Modified Calvinist Doctrine of God” because he modifies the Reformed tradition with respect to God’s temporal mode of being and the doctrine of divine immutability, and he attempts to marry the doctrine of middle knowledge to a compatibilist view of human freedom in order to account for evil.

God is utterly transcendent and self-sufficient, argues Ware, yet with respect to the created order God is also immanently near. God enters into genuine relationship with the created world and this fact raises questions for certain attributes of God, classically understood, that seem to insulate God from any genuine involvement. With respect to divine eternity, Ware argues for a view similar to William Lane Craig’s: apart from creation God is timeless, but subsequent to creation God is temporal. Regarding divine immutability, Ware helpfully makes a distinction between ontological and ethical immutability (God’s nature and promises cannot change) and relational mutability (God changes his attitude and disposition towards us when we turn from rebellion to repentance). Ware’s most novel proposal is found

in his explanation of God's relation to evil. How can the goodness of God be maintained in light of evil, given divine determinism? How is it that God is not responsible for evil? Ware argues that there is an asymmetry between God's control over good and evil: God is the direct causative agent of all things good, but merely an indirect permissive agent of all things evil. But the question remains, given divine determinism, isn't God still the ultimate cause of evil? Ware attempts an answer by employing a compatibilist version of the doctrine of middle knowledge. Since human freedom is freedom to act according to our deepest desires, and since God knows that we always act according to our natures, God can, through his middle knowledge, regulate the factors of a situation and "occasion" (118) a particular choice to be made, rather than causing a particular choice to be made. Thus, asserts Ware, God is off the hook with respect to evil: "without causing a person to do evil, he nonetheless controls the evil they do. He controls whether evil is done, what evil is done, and in any and every case he could prevent the evil from being done" (118–19). But it is not clear that Ware's novel proposal works: If divine determinism is true, as Ware claims, and divine permission is efficacious (which it must be given God's use of middle knowledge to render every human action certain), then it seems that the causal buck stops with God. He is the cause of evil and the claim to asymmetry fails (or it is not helped any by using compatibilist middle knowledge).

Next, Roger Olson defends "The Classical Freewill Theist Model of God." Minimally, free-will theism is a denial that God is the all-determining reality—God has gifted human beings with a modicum of free will. God has limited his own power and control. This gift of self-limitation in God and libertarian (or noncompatibilist) free will allows for voluntary and thus genuine moral responsibility and relationship with God and others. Such a vision of the God-creature relationship is not driven by a desire to elevate the philosophical doctrine of libertarian freedom; rather, argues Olson, it is a God-centered vision driven by divine revelation. And Scripture reveals a wholly good God showing love to *all* that he has made. God exerts general sovereignty by determining the ultimate outcome of history and overseeing its course, but he does not cause or control every decision and action creatures make.

Olson is anxious to show that the Classic Freewill Theist position finds its root and support in the Bible and not in philosophy or experience. But there is no "proof text" one can appeal to for direct evidence of libertarian freedom. It must be read in between the lines. Thus, Olson levels his attack on divine determinism and argues that his view is "the only viable alternative to a morally ambiguous, tyrant-like God who gets pleasure and glory out of the eternal suffering of the wicked" (163). If divine determinism is true, then however you slice it, the existence of sin and evil must be traced back to God. Add to this the reality of hell and the result is that "God is virtu-

ally indistinguishable from the devil” (154) since Satan wants *everyone* in hell whereas the all-determining God wants (merely) *some* people to go to hell. Since this is inconsistent with the revealed goodness of God throughout Scripture, especially as revealed in Jesus Christ, “then [libertarian] freewill must exist. It is the precondition for understanding and explaining hell in light of God’s goodness” (161). Libertarian freedom *must* exist? The *only* viable alternative to a tyrant-like God is free-will theism? The divine determinist’s God takes pleasure in the eternal suffering of the wicked? These claims, made by Olsen, seem to overstep. As one who endorses libertarian freedom, my sympathies are with Olson. Yet I fail to see an entailment relation between the biblical data and libertarian freedom in the same way that, say, the Trinity or the two natures of Christ seem to be entailed by, though not explicitly mentioned in, Scripture. Undoubtedly divine determinists would resist the charge of worshipping a tyrant-like God who takes pleasure in eternally punishing the wicked, and they do so by appealing to the whole counsel of Scripture (as indeed Helm and Ware do in their response to Olson).

The last perspective discussed in this book is a version of free-will theism called Open Theism, a view that has garnered considerable attention over the last two decades. John Sanders begins by stating that the watershed issue between divine determinists and free-will theists is whether God is ever affected by and responsive to human decisions and actions. Free-will theists affirm that God took a risk, deciding to grant humans libertarian freedom and thus the ability to either accept or reject divine initiatives. Divine determinists affirm that God controls everything down to the smallest detail. According to Sanders, this watershed issue is so significant that profitable discussion does not really take place between the two camps. Thus, the virtues or vices of the openness view are best understood and discussed internally, among other free-will theists. As such, open theists argue that two beliefs customarily affirmed by other free-will theists need adjustment: the doctrine of divine timelessness and the view that God has exhaustive foreknowledge of future contingent events. The openness view argues that God is temporal and does *not* have exhaustive foreknowledge of future contingent events.

To anyone familiar with the debate, the reasons offered in support of the openness view and the objections provided by the dissenters in response are by now well-walked paths. What I found most helpful and interesting in Sanders’s discussion was his musing at the end of the chapter on various misunderstandings that have been leveled against the openness view over the past two decades. According to Sanders, the openness view does not place *limits* on God, rather God *restrains* the full exercise of his power in order to give humans libertarian freedom; “dynamic omniscience” is not the same as “limited omniscience” since there is no ontological reality called the future about which God knows nothing; open theists do believe in divine sover-

eignty, just not meticulous providence; and open theism is not the same as process theology, even though they hold some things in common.

In conclusion, I will mention a couple misgivings about the book. For starters, the title is slightly misleading. As it turns out the book is mostly about *divine providence*, a much narrower topic than I had envisioned given its title. Issues rarely touched include whether God is simple or complex, how an immaterial substance can causally interact with a material world, and God's relationship to necessary truths and abstract objects (if there be any). Regarding divine providence, I wonder why the Molinist perspective, surely one of the important proposals currently held by a number of prominent evangelical philosophers and theologians, was not included. Another concern has to do with the imprecision of important terms often used by the authors in developing their case. For example, the notion of libertarian freedom was often painted with such broad strokes (no mention of "soft" libertarian freedom) by Helm and Ware that it was difficult to take their arguments seriously. Further, some of the authors' unfamiliarity with the salient distinctions involved in modeling God made the discussion obscure at times. To cite one instance of such obscurity, Ware (whose article is one of the best in my mind) states, "the eternal existence of God is the eternal existence of all perfection, infinitely and intrinsically possessed, within the eternal triune nature of God" (79). Undoubtedly, such a statement is true. But in failing to unpack such controversial notions as "perfection," "infinitely," "intrinsically possessed," "eternal," and "nature," this reader is left wondering whether Ware is endorsing Perfect Being Theology, how divine predication is to be understood (the language of "intrinsic possession" seems to suggest a Platonic understanding of divine predication), and just what notions such as "infinite" and "eternal" really amount to. Still, there are many interesting issues ably discussed in this volume: omniscience and God's relation to sin and evil, the notion of divine freedom vis-à-vis human freedom, and most of all, divine providence. Thus, I recommend the book as an introduction to these issues.

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The Christian Delusion: Why Faith Fails. Edited by John W. Loftus. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2010. 422 pages. \$21.00.

In *The Christian Delusion* John Loftus brings together a series of articles by contemporary free thinkers all focused on a common epistemological critique. It is the sequel to Loftus's *Why I Became an Atheist: A Former Preacher Rejects Christianity*.