

REVIEWS

THE METAPHYSICS OF THEISM: AQUINAS'S NATURAL THEOLOGY IN SUMMA CONTRA GENTILES 1 by Norman Kretzmann, *Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997, pp 302. £35.00.*

Students of Aquinas will enjoy this book, philosophers of religion will certainly want to read it. It is not an easy read or a particularly tidy text (a product perhaps of its genesis as the Wilde Lectures, 1994), but it speaks good sense about Aquinas and is full of helpful directions for reading *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Those who come to 'the other Summa' from *Summa Theologiae* should cope with Kretzmann whether their interest is primarily theological or philosophical, though philosophers will be at an advantage. Kretzmann is a first-rate philosopher who has made his work mediaeval texts, particularly Aquinas, but who is keen to introduce his readings as contributions to contemporary philosophical debates.

Natural theology is philosophy of God that does not depend on revelation. As such, it does not so much seek evidence for faith but rather clarification of faith and thus argumentative support for it. Kretzmann believes Aquinas's natural theology is the best available, and that modern philosophers ought to concentrate on this theology 'from the bottom up' rather than enquiring into theology 'from the top down', i.e. from the perspective of dogmatic theology. Of course, natural theology is ultimately part of revealed theology (part of the subject matter of *sacra doctrina*), but natural theology proceeds from knowledge of natural things, the familiar objects of the world, rather than from premises of God's existence or nature. Thus the theology Aquinas examines in *Summa Contra Gentiles* is largely independent of Christian faith—until Book 4 where it is clearly identified with revelation.

Kretzmann is selective in his examination of Aquinas's arguments, but the few he chooses are meticulously investigated. Thus in Chapter 2 Aquinas's second proof of God's existence *ex motu* is analysed so as to demonstrate that there is a difference between being a self-mover (e.g. an animal) and being an immovable mover (e.g. God): the part of self-movers that does the moving can itself be moved *per accidens* (e.g. the human rational soul can be moved by a movement in the nutritive soul), but in an immovable mover no part is moveable, even accidentally. Chapter 3 emphasises the philosophical nature of natural theology by seeking to prove the (necessary) existence not of God, but rather of an ultimate explanatory principle, 'Alpha', later to be identified with God. Kretzmann believes Aquinas does prove Alpha, a genuine immovable mover, but that this is not sufficient for Deity which requires additional attributes, thus investigation of Alpha's nature.

This investigation involves two methods of thought: the eliminative

method, in which we exclude from Alpha attributes we know from natural, finite objects, and the relational method, in which we investigate Alpha's relation to natural, finite objects. Chapter 4's discussion of the eliminative method includes excellent analysis of the existence/essence distinction. Implicit in the concept of Alpha that emerges are the traditional attributes of deity (power, infinity, knowledge, goodness...), implicit but not yet established. Proof requires use too of the relational method and takes us into the complex issue of Alpha's likeness to natural entities, explained by Kretzmann in terms of God's agent (or efficient) causation. This discussion of agent causation is superb, clearly demarcated from the modern description (or scepticism about) causation as a relation between two events, and suggesting an alternative, mediaeval description (in terms of agent cause, material cause, and form) which is of great power when applied to contemporary debates on causation and responsibility.

If Alpha is an agent containing the forms of all things it creates, all things' 'perfections', in something like the way in which a human artisan does, Alpha is 'universally perfect'; thus, Aquinas (and Kretzmann) argue, Alpha is unique and infinite: it is God. Chapters 6 and 7 add intellect and will, i.e. personhood, to God's attributes. The discussion of will and freedom is again excellent, with familiar points summarised and new suggestions made. On God's freedom to choose to create Kretzmann argues for a 'Dionysian Principle' ('goodness is by its very nature diffusive of itself and (thereby) of being') to explain the 'necessity' of Creation, but distinguishes this from the question of just what to create—concerning which God is said to have free choice (though Kretzmann does not like Aquinas's arguments for this).

The final chapter is probably best. Here Kretzmann argues that God has rational, non-emotional *affectiones* ('attitudes'). These include divine joy (Kretzmann is insightful on the parallels with human joy) which can include the good of his creatures (cf. 'the joy the finest concert pianist take in a beginner's getting something right', p. 237). They also include certain (non-passionate) moral virtues (particularly liberality), and divine love. He struggles to find in Aquinas an explanation of God's experiencing for humans the (binding and unitive) love we experience for each other. He fails to find this love between God and man, but is not disconcerted for 'true love can be love unfulfilled by real union... Not even omnipotence can compel the willing participation of the beloved, and without it love's culminating union can't be achieved' (p. 247). There is no complete account of God's love; it only goes so far: 'the next move is up to the beloved' (p. 249).

The first response to this book is astonishment at just how much of the story Aquinas manages to tell purely by philosophy. Of course it will seem pale and weak for someone who knows the full story, someone who has the faith, but what he manages to establish by argument alone is astonishing. A second response is gratitude to Kretzmann for attempting to revive scholarly interest in *Summa Contra Gentiles* and

doing it so well. A more measured response concerns the lengths to which he is willing to go to find in Aquinas an answer to the question 'whither the Universe?' The answer to this question is clearly 'God', meaning by this something not in or of the Universe. So long as this merely refers to Alpha, there is no problem with the question (though the answer is necessarily incomplete). However, when it refers to one who is intelligent, willing, loving and virtuous, to a divine person, then there is a problem. For here we do not have merely an uncontrollable, Dionysian overflow of being, but a real person with thoughts, volitions, virtues and affections who chooses to make a (the) Universe. Creation does not just happen: it is chosen with intelligence, care, even enthusiasm. Why would the God of the theologians decide to create?

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE edited by Colin E. Gunton, *Cambridge University Press*, 1997, xix + 307 pages, £12.95 paperback.

The 'brainchild' of Alex Wright, to whom (as the editor says) 'the theological world is immensely indebted ... for his enterprise and initiative over recent years', this book takes us through the main Christian doctrines — Trinity (Ralph Del Colle), creation (Gunton), human being (Kevin Vanhoozer), redemption (Trevor Hart), church and sacraments (Robert Jenson), eschatology (David Fergusson), Christ (Kathryn Tanner), and Holy Spirit (Geoffrey Wainwright) — in quite a wide intellectual context (Stanley Hauerwas on doctrine as ethics, Gerard Loughlin on doctrine in the church, Francis Watson on biblical interpretation, Bruce Marshall on the Jewish people and Christian theology, Jeremy Begbie on Christianity and the arts, and an introductory survey of where theology now is by the editor). Karl Barth is cited more often than any other theologian except Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Everyone assumes that the specifically Christian doctrine is belief in God as Trinity. There is disagreement: Hauerwas's Aquinas is much more of a Christian theologian than Gunton's seems to be, for instance. But on the whole this is a remarkably self-consistent exposition of traditional Christian doctrine, much of it by radically orthodox younger theologians, entirely immune to the temptations of liberalism, Catholic and Protestant. Highly recommended.

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION, Second Edition, by Alister McGrath, *Blackwell*, Oxford, 1996, xxi + 604 pages, £13.99 Pb.

Expanded and updated this *tour de force* by the Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, is the most widely used textbook throughout the English-speaking world. Karl Barth is quoted with respect and affection in the opening sentence; the doctrine of God as Trinity is 'found in the pervasive pattern of divine activity to which the New Testament bears