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Review Of "Does God Exist?: A Believer And An Atheist Debate" By A. Flew

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treatment of such correspondences of ideas, Chapter 6, "Emerson and Antinomianism," pp. 143–67, is particularly interesting.

Much of the book will be mainly of interest to Emerson specialists and scholars of American literature and the history of ideas. Of particular concern to the historian of preaching is Emerson's treatment of preaching as a form of eloquence—which from the beginning seems to have been the work to which he felt primarily called. Mott's study combined with Toulouse's gives a fascinating picture of a brilliant mind focusing on how insight is communicated. While Mott's thesis appears to have been demonstrated and while his immersion in the literature seems total, it is to be regretted that the flow of his thought is not the pellucid stream one finds in Toulouse.

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Does God Exist? A Believer and Atheist Debate. By Terry Miethe and Antony Flew. Foreword by Hans Küng. HarperSanFrancisco, 1992, 296 pp. \$12.95 (paper).

Philosophical investigations of the existence of God have usually taken the form of extended monographs by individual authors. Only occasionally have such investigations been presented as debates. A notable exception was the exchange on radio between Bertrand Russell and Frederick Copleston in 1948 which has been reprinted several times. Perhaps these two friends, Antony Flew and Terry Miethe, hoped to repeat and expand upon this earlier success.

Like Bertrand Russell, Antony Flew is a British Empiricist atheist; and like Frederick Copleston, Terry Miethe is a believer who finds in the natural theology of St. Thomas Aquinas the paradigm for Christian metaphysics. Flew is well known in philosophical circles as a tireless exponent of the philosophy of David Hume. Miethe is not so well known, but is equally well read in the recent philosophical literature. In a pattern of argument and counter-argument, the reader is led through complex material in a series of presentations and critical engagements. In the process, fundamental differences are clarified. Although the major part of the book is given over to the debate, an added bonus is the inclusion of essays by A. J. Ayer, "The Claims of Theology," and "What I Saw When I Was Dead"; by Richard Swinburne, "Evidence for God"; and by Hermann Häring, "Does God Exist? The Argumentation of Hans Küng." These essays give additional and significant perspective to the issues discussed.

The debate format has several advantages. It encourages lively exchange while allowing each author to develop his position coherently and in depth. However, debates also have disadvantages. In a debate, the first to present his

case in large measure defines the issues and controls the discussion. Like presidential candidates, the responder often feels that he must reply to every error in the other's presentation. Terry Miethe has chosen to do just that. As a result he is slow in presenting fully his own point of view. For example, he does not present his argument for the existence of God until page 130. By this time the reader is getting restless with the delay.

The fact that this is a debate and not a dialogue may explain why differences are made clear but little progress is made in resolving them. Both protagonists seem more interested in stating their own positions than in convincing one another. They seem to be talking not to each other, but past each other to the reader. For example, both agree that they are discussing the existence of the God of the Bible, but they disagree as to who that God is. Flew insists that the Biblical conception of God entails a denial of freedom of the will and a complete determinism, whereas Miethe insists that the God of the Bible would naturally have created free and independent beings. This crucial disagreement cries out for more discussion than is given.

A similar issue concerns Flew's methodological presuppositions. Miethe insists that Flew is a logical positivist, and Flew that he is nothing of the kind. Here Miethe seems unable to see distinction between "logical positivism," sometimes called "logical empiricism," and "classical British empiricism" which Flew favors. To many this will seem such an obvious misunderstanding on Miethe's part that they will be disappointed that it is not cleared up.

Even the most fundamental disagreements between them are given surprisingly little attention. Miethe keeps challenging Flew to show that atheism provides a consistent world view (pp. 49; 83; 198). However, Flew sees the philosopher's task very differently. He rejects the notion that he is required to show that atheism is a consistent outlook. After all, he is looking only for evidence or lack of it for the existence of God. Hence he refuses to take up Miethe's question.

Other disagreements include the possibility of an infinite regress, the value of the Ontological argument for the existence of God, the validity of crucial premises in St. Thomas Aquinas's Third Way, the problem of evil, the intelligibility of incorporeal existence, and the notion that spontaneous generation might be a viable account of the coming-to-be of the universe. No real attempt is made by the protagonists to reach agreement on the grounds that might resolve their disputes. I wish that they had wanted to understand, and not just to confront, each other. Perhaps, as has been suggested, this outcome is almost inevitable given the debate format.

In spite of these reservations, *Does God Exist?* has considerable merit. There is a great deal of solid and penetrating discussion embedded in the engagements and rejoinders. Flew and Miethe are both well informed and enhance their discussion by drawing on contemporary literature. Who will profit most from this book? It is not a book for the professional who is already abreast of the issues; nor is it really a work of "popular philosophy." Some prior knowledge of the state of the question will be of enormous benefit to the reader. Those who look for a more ordered discussion, one without repetition and backtracking, will not enjoy the debate format but might have preferred two lengthy essays by each of the

major contributors. But then the freshness and liveliness of the discussion would largely disappear. Let me suggest that the readers who will find this book most appealing are those who enjoy the rough and tumble of debate, and who enjoy the process of teasing out and pursuing the issues. I can see this book as a stimulating and thought provoking text in courses and seminars in the philosophy of religion, in apologetics, and in contemporary thought, or for a study group of clergy with a philosophical bent. It will take work for upper level students and for graduates who have not recently thought about these issues to get out of it what this book has to offer, but they will be rewarded.

LINWOOD URBAN

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A. Fundamental Practical Theology. Descriptive and Strategic Proposals.
By Don S. Browning. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991. xii + 324 pp.
\$29.95 (cloth).

This work which received the Academy of Parish Clergy's Book of the Year Award is an excellent contribution to the literature dealing with practical theology and its role as a critical discipline within the broader spectrum of theological studies. Its author, Don S. Browning, is a very learned man in theological, psychological, and sociological inquiry and his breadth of understanding is evident in this study.

His fundamental task is to demonstrate the practical character of all theological inquiry and to correct the error in classical approaches which start with theory and then attempt to apply that theory to practice. He invokes the primacy of the practical reason in a way similar to the Heidelberg Kantians (Windelband, Rickert, and Kroner). *Praxis* comes first followed by *theoria* and then a return to *praxis*. He uses the recent work of Gadamer, Ricoeur, MacIntyre, Tracy, Habermas, and many others in the presentation of his thesis.

His work is divided into four parts. Part One delineates what a fundamental practical theology should entail. In this section he introduces three religious communities or parish churches which serve as an empirical anchor throughout the book. These churches are the Wiltshire Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church of the Covenant, and a Black church, the Apostolic Church of God, and its pastor, Arthur Brazier. He develops five validity claims for a fundamental practical theology. They are: (1) the visional level which inevitably raises metaphysical validity claims; (2) the obligational level which raises normative ethical claims; (3) the anthropological dimension which raises claims about human nature, its basic human needs, and the kinds of pre-moral goods required to meet these needs; (4) an environmental-social dimension which raises claims that deal pri-