

TYLER DALTON MCNABB

*University of Glasgow*

**Paul M. Gould, *Beyond the Control of God?: Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects* (Bloomsbury Studies in Philosophy of Religion), Bloomsbury, 2014**

In the introduction of *Beyond the Control of God?: Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, Paul Gould introduces an inconsistent triad that philosophers who endorse both the existence of abstract objects and theism will have to face (p. 2). The inconsistent triad goes as follows:

- (1) Abstract objects exist. [Platonism]
- (2) If abstract objects exist, then they are dependent on God.
- (3) If abstract objects exist, then they are independent of God.

By God, Gould specifies that he has in mind ‘a personal being who is worthy of worship (which is in line with perfect being theology)’, and by abstract objects, he has in mind such terms and predicates as ‘property’, ‘proposition’, ‘relation’, ‘set’, ‘possible world’, ‘number’, and the like (p. 1). Gould thinks that by denying one of the options in the above triad, one will have to formulate a way to avoid certain undesirable consequences (p. 4). Thus, the rest of the book contains essays (and responses) expressing six different views, in regard to which tenet in the triad one should reject and how one can overcome the undesirable consequences of rejecting that particular tenet.

The first view that is discussed is Keith Yandell’s God and propositions view. This view endorses that both God and mind-independent (including independent of God’s mind) propositions exist (p. 21). Yandell’s first concern is to demonstrate that there are no Scriptural reasons for thinking that this view is incompatible with the existence of the God of Christianity. He argues that Col 1:16-17, which express that God has created all things in heaven and on earth, does not rule out the existence of abstract objects, as the point of this passage and others like it is to demonstrate that ‘thrones or power or ruler or authorities’ do not pose a threat to God’s sovereignty (p. 24). Taken with the fact that abstract objects are neither in heaven nor on earth, this passage has nothing to say about the existence of abstract objects (p. 24).

Yandell’s main reason for why abstract objects cannot be tied to God in any way is that there is no way to know if God is a necessary being. The argument that Yandell focuses on that attempts to demonstrate that God

is a necessary being, is Plantinga's modal ontological argument, which like Plantinga, he concludes could rationally be accepted but fails to act as a proof that God is logically necessary (p. 29). Yandell thus, thinks he has made a plausible case for rejecting (2) in the triad. In response, both Welty and Craig mention that there are other reasons for thinking that God is a necessary being, and thus, even if one granted that the ontological argument didn't succeed as a proof for God's logical necessity, it wouldn't follow that God isn't a necessary being (pp. 39-41).

The next view is Gould's and Brian Davis' view of modified theistic activism. In their essay, the authors attempt to make plausible that conceptualism holds with respect to propositions, but that it doesn't hold as it pertains to properties and relations (p. 52). In regard to establishing the former, Gould and Davis first argue that propositions are truth bearing intentional objects as propositions are about things (p. 52). Gould and Davis briefly entertain a nominalist approach of having sentences or linguistic items fill the role of propositional truth bearing, but they reject such a strategy based on their reasoning that the parts of a sentence or linguistic items still aren't about anything (p. 56). Gould and Davis proceed to argue that it doesn't appear that such aboutness can be accounted for in Plato's heaven either, as the forms in Plato's heaven are impotent to account for the intentional nature of propositions (p. 56). Thus, propositions should be understood as divine thoughts and concepts.

Though Gould and Davis think that the best explanation for how propositions are grounded is in the mind of God, they reject that properties and relations could be grounded in this way as it would make every material object to be a collection of divine concepts (p. 59). Thus, for the authors, the best way to view properties and relations is through the understanding that propositions are divine conceptions and properties and relations exist in a strictly Platonic realm and exist there because God created them (p. 61). In rejecting (3), Gould and Davis argue that they can avoid the undesirable consequence of falling prey to the bootstrapping objection, (this is the objection that argues that God can't create properties unless He already has those properties of being able to create them), by arguing that God has certain properties that exist a se and inhere in the divine substance (p. 62). It is notable to report however; that Gould and Davis fall short in convincing all of the other authors that they have avoided falling prey to such boot strapping.

In the third view, theistic conceptual realism, Welty argues in a similar way (though in more detail) to Gould and Davis, that propositions should be considered as divine thoughts or ideas. In using an inference to the best explanation approach (IBE), Welty analyzes what theory best can account for the nature of propositions. He argues that a theory must capture the following six conditions: objectivity, necessity, intentionality, relevance, plenitude, and simplicity (pp. 84-87). The two main nominalistic theories Welty entertains are linguistic nominalism and set-theoretic nominalism. The former theory according to Welty argues that propositions are linguistic tokens of some sort (p. 89). Welty argues that this theory lacks the scope to explain the plenitude and necessity of propositions as 'there simply aren't enough human sentences to go around and human sentences exist just as contingently as human thoughts'. In regard to the latter nominalist theory, Welty explains that it attempts to supply 'sets' of concrete objects as candidates for propositions (p. 90). Welty argues that this isn't plausible for several reasons, concrete objects lacking intentionality or aboutness being one of the primary reasons for its implausibility (p. 90).

After establishing that nominalism lacks the scope to explain the needed facts surrounding the nature of propositions, Welty quickly explores why old fashioned Platonism also fails. He argues that traditional Platonic realism multiplies ontological kinds beyond explanatory necessity. This is because Welty's conceptual realism posits only thoughts that functionally fulfil the role of abstract objects, while a Platonist will have to postulate a different kind of entity altogether (p. 90). With this much argued for, Welty thinks he has shown why rejecting (3) is the most plausible solution to the above triad. As William Lane Craig points out however, the plausibility of his arguments rest on propositions existing at all, and one could avoid his argument by endorsing deflationary theory of truth (p. 101). Whether this is a good response to Welty, it will be up to the reader to decide.

Moving on to Craig's anti-Platonist position, in arguing for his anti-Platonist view, contra Yandell, Craig spends a good deal of time going through the biblical warrant for thinking that God both exists *se* and is responsible for everything that exists. 1 Cor. 8:6, 1 Cor. 11.12, Jn 1.1-3, and the Nicene Creed make up his main biblical support (pp. 113-115). It should be noted that Craig more so than any of the other contributors focused on the biblical evidence.

The rest of Craig's chapter focuses on how rejecting (1) of the triad wouldn't entail any undesirable consequence. Craig argues that the indispensability argument is the chief challenger to nominalism and thus, Craig gives arguments for why he thinks this argument fails (p. 116). In responding to Craig's view, Welty argues that one could easily modify the argument to avoid a lot of Craig's criticism of the indispensability argument and Gould and Davis argue that there are other problems outside of the indispensability argument that would still give the anti-Platonist trouble (pp. 129-131).

The last two views are probably the most similar out of all of the views. Both Scott Shalkowski and Graham Oppy either endorse or are sympathetic to nominalism and deflationary theory (pp. 162, 174), and both argue that the truths about realism are irrelevant to the existence of God (pp. 144, 175). Though Oppy focuses more on how there isn't one view that makes theism more or less likely and Shalkowski spends a greater time arguing for why realism about abstract objects is false, there is little substantive difference between the two views. In fact, the biggest difference that comes out between the contributors is on if the universe is necessary (p. 189), though as one can imagine, this isn't too central to either contributor's argument.

Overall, it seems that the crux of the debate between the realists about abstract objects and the anti-realists is if endorsing a deflationary theory of truth is a plausible substitute for endorsing the existence of propositions. Welty, Gould, and Davis for example, make very compelling arguments for divine conceptualism that are based on the character of propositions; however, as Craig points out (p. 101), one could deny the existence of propositions altogether and avoid the consequence of their arguments. Of course, Welty, Gould, and Davis responded briefly (and their responses were given even briefer responses) to the anti-realists in the book who argued this way, but due to the format of the book, there was hardly any room to make a thorough response (or a counter response). This being so, I think a lot of readers who do not yet have an opinion on deflationary theory, will go away unsure of what position to prefer and those who already have an opinion, aren't likely to be challenged to rethink their current position. The brief responses (and even briefer counter responses) aren't thorough enough to make the winner of this debate obvious.

With this stated however, I think the book clearly gives an articulate and updated account of each position. Moreover, if this book is seen as

an introduction to this debate, I think it will help the reader understand the current questions that need to be asked, in addition to equipping the reader with the basic tools to answer them. In concluding, it would behoove anyone who wants a good introduction into this field to read this book.

JAMES ARCADI

*Fuller Theological Seminary*

**J. P. Moreland, Khaldoun A. Sweis, and Chad V. Meister (eds), *Debating Christian Theism*, Oxford University Press, 2013**

*Debating Christian Theism* is a unique text with a creative format. The structure will make it an attractive volume for many purposes. In what follows I will describe and evaluate the format, before weighing in more specifically on a select subset of the overall contents.

This text divides into 20 debated issues under a general heading of Christian theism. Each of these 20 issues is treated by two scholars, one defending a traditional understanding of the issue, one demurring from said understanding. Thus, for instance, under the issue-heading 'Science and Christian Faith' Keith Ward defends the view that the title of the essay captures: 'Science is not at Odds with Christianity' while Julian Baggini demurs with 'Science is at Odds with Christianity'. Not all chapters fit as neatly into a *pro- / contra-* structure, but the general format of defend/demure occurs throughout. Each chapter is relatively short and focused.

What is particularly helpful is the manner in which the editors have chosen contributors who are or were participants in the debates on these issues in the contemporary literature. According to the introduction, the contributors were not privy to their issue-interlocutor's work for this volume, nevertheless many of the articles interact with their issue-interlocutor's publications from other venues. This often results in something like a real dialogical debate and not just two unrelated opposing treatments of an issue.

What this dialogical format also entails, is that these articles are not 'state-of-the-art' summaries of the debate on an issue in the contemporary literature. Occasionally that happens in piecemeal form, but more often these chapters are new contributions to the literature or the updating of the author's previous contributions to the field. The first half of the