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**Dirk Evers. *Gott und mögliche Welten. Studien zur Logik theologischer Aussagen über das Mögliche* [God and Possible Worlds. Studies in the Logic of Theological Discourse on Possibility]. Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen 2006.**

It is as remarkable as it is important that systematic theology – especially continental theology – has started dealing with the impact of analytic philosophy. While Catholic theologians seem to be shy in approaching analytic philosophy, some parts of Protestant theology (especially in Germany) are truly at the forefront of the reception of analytic philosophy. Dirk Evers' book looks, at first glance, like a most needed step towards closing the gap between the valuable discussions occurring in modal logic (especially the so-called possible worlds talk) and the different aspects of modal language within the theology of God. A variety of different topics related to modal semantics have been discussed in one way or another in systematic theology. Modal semantics has been used as a means to elucidate medieval discussions about 'possibilia' and the different perspectives on the Anselmian argument. Nevertheless, no systematic work has attempted to present the logical and metaphysical impact of possible worlds talk on the theology of God, or on the framework of the philosophy of religion.

Evers' monograph – published as a 'Habilitationsschrift' in the Tübingen book series *Religion in Philosophy and Theology* – seems to be an attempt at this most promising endeavour, though only at first glance. The book, as a result, is a riddle. The effort to write the book in question somehow gets negated by a theological point of view which makes it debatable whether possible worlds talk has any theological value at all. Considering this the reader is left with a puzzle. The book covers a huge area of modal discourse and modal metaphysics. Nevertheless, when it comes to the theology of God, it remains altogether within a Barthian framework. Thus, for instance, when it comes to the illustration of a difference between God and the world, Evers states that God cannot be an entity that exists in a possible world (or in all possible worlds), and that He cannot be regarded as an entity at all (p. 291). This conclusion is

as surprising as it is problematic, since it puts into question the whole of Evers' endeavour. One might ask: What is the purpose of the book? What is the lesson one should learn from it?

The book is not a fundamental critique of possible worlds semantics or a critique of modal metaphysics. Quite the opposite: For the most part the book's goal seems to be to introduce modal semantics and modal metaphysics into continental systematic theology. And *per se* this is a really praiseworthy undertaking, since large parts of Catholic and Lutheran systematic theology in the German speaking world still regard analytic philosophy as a threat, even as a disease, while they remain biased by the critique of religion that emerged in the earliest stages of analytic philosophy. Within this framework Evers' book, which arises out of Eberhard Jüngel's Tübingen school of Lutheran philosophical theology (which was brought into contact with analytic philosophy by Jüngel's student Ingolf U. Dalferth), is a much needed monograph on modal semantics and its impact on theological discourse. Yet some remarks, like the one mentioned above, seem to indicate that modal semantics has no real impact on theological discourse. Once one denies that God is an entity existing 'in' possible worlds, it is not at all surprising that the applicability of modal semantics to theological language disappears instantaneously. Beneath the ruins of this result the old debate on the 'analogy of being' seems to wait for further treatment.

Evers' book digs into the roots of modal semantics, starting with an impressive chapter on Leibniz (pp. 5–120). It offers a fine-grained overview of the basic concepts of Leibniz's philosophical theology insofar as they are relevant to modal semantics and possible worlds talk. Evers discusses the notions of truth, modal concepts, contingency and reality, as well as the problem of different realms of truth. He introduces the basic idea of possible worlds in Leibniz and the notion of 'compossibility'. The larger part of this chapter is dedicated to the concept of God, the notions of goodness, the problems of evil, and the place of creation within Leibniz's philosophical theology (pp. 31–104). Although Evers presents a very sound introduction to Leibniz, two aspects of this chapter remain noteworthy: There is almost no discussion of interpretations or debates concerning Leibniz in the secondary literature. Evers doesn't seem to care about secondary sources at all, so that the result looks like a systematization of

primary sources. This is surprising insofar as Evers' book served as a dissertation, which is meant to place itself into a certain realm of discourse. Secondly, it is hard to see the relevance of Leibniz for the rest of the book which deals with 20<sup>th</sup> century modal semantics. So the reader is left with the impression that the selection of topics presented in Evers' book is a tribute to a certain 'encyclopaedic' tendency which has been evident in the typical 'German Habilitationsschrift' for over three decades now.

The second chapter of the book is dedicated to contemporary modal metaphysics and modal semantics (pp. 121–264). It starts with a basic introduction to modal logic and the required semantics (pp. 123–152) in order to continue with a discussion of the metaphysical burdens of modal discourse. Evers presents Quine's critique of modal semantics (pp. 152–171), discusses David Lewis' modal realism (pp. 172–185), the concept of rigid designation developed by Saul A. Kripke (pp. 189–214), Alvin Plantinga's modal metaphysics as spelled out in *The Nature of Necessity* (pp. 215–233), and some alternatives to the possible worlds talk developed under the headline of 'possible situations' (pp. 234–253). Step by step Evers guides the reader into the basic ideas of modal metaphysics and some discussions related to it. However, it is again surprising that Evers' discussions remain at the introductory level. Specific discussions of modal metaphysics are pretty much left out of the picture. The chapter presents information which can be found in many introductory textbooks on logic and metaphysics. Some things are part of the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy. One might ask, in what sense is this chapter innovative? Or is it just meant to introduce theologians to a still more or less unknown domain of discourse? If the latter is the case, then Evers' book might truly serve as a splendid textbook which can build a bridge that leads contemporary students of theology to the adventurous realms of analytic metaphysics.

But again, it is noteworthy that Evers is not at all interested in discussions that have engaged these topics already. In German theology a number of Lutheran and Catholic authors have already approached Kripke's concept of rigid designation or Plantinga's modal metaphysics or epistemology. The fact that Evers does not connect his systematization to any Lutheran or Catholic author who has already treated and discussed the very same topics in the recent past severely brings into question the scientific impact of Evers's monograph. The reader is left wondering if

there is a specific point of connection with contemporary theological discourse that Evers' book is meant to allude to. Moreover, the fact that the author for the most part refuses to discuss Catholic authors who have treated the same topics is a highly problematic prolongation of a German Lutheran attitude: *Catholica non leguntur*. Given the situation of both theological camps, this attitude is a real shame, since the reception of analytic philosophy within theology, regardless of its denominational flavour, may be the only way to ensure the intellectual survival of theology as such given the academic challenges that lie ahead.

The third and final chapter of Evers' monograph is meant to delineate the theological outcome of possible worlds talk and modal metaphysics. It starts with a widening of the metaphysical horizon by dealing with Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Scholz and Hartmann (pp. 266–291). This section is followed by a rather Barthian discussion of the relation between God and reality (pp. 291–305). The third subchapter is dedicated to the ontological argument – especially to Hartshorne and Plantinga. But this is not the final chapter. Evers adds yet another, more philosophical one, on worlds and individuals (pp. 331–361), and a subchapter on faith and belief which predominantly deals with Plantinga's religious epistemology and the problem of theodicy (pp. 362–407). A summarizing chapter offers an overview of the core ideas of the book: the relationship between faith, belief and modality (pp. 408–412).

Evers' treatment of the ontological argument entails a harsh criticism of Plantinga's concept of God as 'maximal greatness' (p. 328). It seems that Evers' very own concept of God as self-determining ground of being, which seems, at face value, to stem from Leibniz, but which comes rather from Karl Barth, serves as the crucial standard for the assessment of any other philosophical concept of God. As a consequence Evers dismisses a clear logic of divine attributes in order to keep the idea of God as a self-defining being (beyond being).

Evers' subchapter on worlds and individuals tries to specify the concept of possibility by borrowing a number of ideas from Eberhard Jüngel. The possible should be distinguished from nothingness on the one side, and simple chaos on the other side. God has to be seen as the only one who is able to make a distinction between what is possible and what is entirely impossible. But it is not at all clear what this specification and

modification of modal concepts has to do with the modal semantics Evers has dealt with for most of the book. Jüngel's theological vocabulary is not easily compatible with the concept of modal semantics stemming from contemporary metaphysics. Evers' attempt at translation has failed at this very point.

Does this prove in the end that certain basic axioms of Lutheran theology (especially within a Barthian framework) won't fit into contemporary metaphysics? Or does it mean that the business of translation has not really started yet – despite the remarkable attempts of Evers and other authors linked to Jüngel's Tübingen school? It is revealing that Evers uses the concept of rigid designation to underline what is called a 'relational ontology' of persons (pp. 353–358). Evers' chapter on worlds and individuals uses philosophical concepts to dress up an old hat: that the justification of the sinner is the crucial point of identity even for the identification of the human person as person. At that point the so-called reception of analytic philosophy through German Lutheran theology becomes yet another case of 'the Emperor's new clothes'.

The final chapter which deals with faith and belief moves slightly from modal semantics to religious epistemology. A brief connection is made by means of a concept developed by Wolfgang Lenzen. According to this concept convictions can be interpreted as sets of possible worlds, which a person who holds beliefs treats as surrogates of the actual world (p. 363). But this concept is set aside to treat Plantinga's earlier religious epistemology which, actually, doesn't require the vocabulary of modal semantics. So, the move from Lenzen to Plantinga remains somewhat artificial, if not arbitrary. What is left is a very short introduction to Plantinga's Reformed epistemology. And again, it is noteworthy that Evers does not even touch discussions that can be found in the secondary literature. Instead, Evers ends with a rather theological critique of Plantinga's concept of belief by underlining the necessity of doubt within the framework of faith (pp. 387–396).

It is not at all surprising that Evers' treatment of theodicy (which is wrapped around Leibniz and Plantinga) ends with a very basic attack on philosophical rationalism as such (pp. 406–408) and seems to foster the message that any sort of rationalism has to be overcome by what Evers calls pragmatism and the perspective of the 'truly involved person'. But

this message seems to underestimate the extent to which the problem of theodicy remains an intellectual problem (as well as an existential one).

In his concluding remarks Evers finally proves what the reader has already glimpsed here and there: the Barthian framework doesn't allow him to start a real dialogue with modal metaphysics. Metaphysics as such seems to be just another case of the arrogance of human reason. Actually, we know this story already.

There is a huge task awaiting contemporary systematic theology, namely a dialogue between theology and analytic metaphysics. Evers, like other Lutheran authors in the German speaking world, is at the forefront of this endeavour. Unfortunately these authors are bound, even imprisoned, by their Barthian concepts which remain incompatible with rational metaphysics. As a result, this task is not fulfilled. Evers' book reveals the heart of the problem. It is necessary to take a step back and to develop strategies of translation which do justice to theology and analytic philosophy simultaneously. The mixture of metaphysical concepts and rather idealistic vocabulary – a mixture one will find in the more theological chapters of Evers' monograph – is not helpful for either side of the translation. To sum up: Evers' book proves that the true reception of analytic philosophy in systematic theology has not really started yet.