

involved, but it cannot absolve the individual from the task of making his own decisions for himself' (p. 175). This seems to detract from much of what Rudd was saying in the bulk of his book, namely that there are certain criteria which can guide us in making ethical choices. Furthermore, although it is true that these choices are ultimately up to the individual and that it is philosophy's task to clarify what is involved in these choices, Kierkegaard himself is surely aiming at more than this, namely at guiding the reader to the position where it becomes possible for him to make what Kierkegaard sees as the *right* choices. Having said this, the weaknesses of Rudd's book are not sins of commission but merely of omission. The book remains a fine piece of work and provides many valuable insights into Kierkegaard's ethical thought and its significance for contemporary ethical theory.

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ALMIGHTY GOD: A STUDY OF THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE by Gijsbert van den Brink. *Kok Pharos Publishing House, Kampen. 1993. Pp. xii + 316. No price given.*

This book aims to provide a theology which coheres with a Christian Reformed tradition, one which is conceptually coherent, and one which reflects the theologian's human situation more generally. The subject is a 'classical' doctrine of divine almightiness, developed in Christian discussion, and meeting with growing dissatisfaction since 1918.

To find an object-doctrine recognisably fathered within the tradition, he outlines (Ch.I) (1): the career of 'almighty' or its cognates in Christian discussions, essentially following de Halleux et al. for his data; (2): the medieval distinction(s) made by the contrasting determinants *de potentia ordinata/ absoluta dei*, as applied to putative attributions to divine power; and (3): Descartes' celebrated remarks on the creation of the eternal (mathematical) truths. On (1), he wants to be more precise than his sources, by distinguishing 'three types of divine power' (49), but a conceptual difference of any kind between his A-power and B-power is not obvious, and is not made plain. On (2), he considers the distinction as used from its adoption by Aquinas to a little beyond the time of Calvin: under 'Rise and original Function', 'Complicating Factors', 'Scotus and Ockham', 'God's Absolute Power and Late Medieval Extremism', and 'Reformed Protest and Correction'. He concludes: 'from a philosophical point of view the most important merit of the distinction has been to provide a conceptual tool for counteracting any form of Graeco-Arabic necessitarianism by expressing the contingency of creation'; and 'the major source of . . . quarrels about the proper interpretation of the distinction consisted in an underlying confusion about the relation between God's power and the being God is, i.e. the other properties which make up His character' (92). (But can God be said with literal truth to have a 'character'? Should God's power or 'other properties' ascribed

to him be taken as ascribed other than as “systematically misleadingly”; the expressions to be understood not as denoting anything in God, but as expressing elements of the (heuristic?) notions of God which we may make use of (under licence from assumed Revelation, and within what limits?) in our theology? And were all medieval writers, as against 20th c. historians, confused about such matters? To the last at least, it can be argued that they were not. On (3) we are left uncertain as to how Descartes should be interpreted, but are assured that this does not matter for present purposes: ‘the position that God’s power ranges over the eternal truths as well as over [what will then be the more mundane ranges of] created reality marks the first step of the secularization of the European mind, rather than being part and parcel of the Christian tradition’(113). But might not “secularization” of the receiving mind itself be a providentially disposed effect of the Gospel, preparing recipients for the city in which no temple is seen, ‘for the temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb?’

Problems set by Descartes remain to plague the final section of Ch.3, the conceptual chapter: ‘none of the options reviewed thus far [201] provide . . . a completely satisfactory view’ embracing divine power and theoretical entities. Dr van den Brink’s solution is: ‘interpreting the whole Platonic realm as existing within the divine mind as divine concepts... combines the advantages of each of the discussed alternatives while avoiding their deficiencies’(202). (But how can “divine concepts” play, as such, any explanatory role; as at least some theologies might seem to demand of the concepts they use?)

In Ch.4 he goes on from concern with the internal coherency of the doctrine he had isolated in Ch.2, to test its compatibility with other beliefs which a (Reformed) Christian, and a human being situated rather like the author, can be envisaged to have: chiefly on the relation between divine power and human freedom/ responsibility, and on a human experience of evil. On the first: they are compatible, and the grounds for compatibility need not exclude a quite rigorous Calvinism (218–40). (Though does the picture on 225 really do justice to concurrence?) On the second: a nuanced theodicy is defensible; and at least some arguments can be successful against (modern academic) theism, without necessarily being successful for atheism *sans phrase*.

More than once van den Brink expresses unease, where such theism seems to imply something incompatible with (Reformed) Christianity; yet without isolating and challenging the assumptions arguably responsible: e.g. the assumption of many that God even can be said with literal truth to have a ‘character’ (92). But this is a worthwhile review (and expression) of much 20th c. thought on a matter of central importance; from firmly within its tradition, and carried through with intellectual integrity. It is well written (with only the barest hints of Dutch, chiefly in some conditionals), well printed and well presented; with indexes (names, subjects) and a long bibliography.

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