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Logic and the Nature of God (Book Review)

Nick Van Til

Dordt College

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with a strong conscience" (p. 40). Subsequently, Hughes backs away from his earlier more absolutistic claims concerning the efficacy of conscience when he writes:

Even the regenerate conscience has much to learn and, in order to be liberated from the erroneous notions of his past, is in need of instruction in the revealed truth of God. The formation of conscience keeps step with the formation of one's understanding of the truth. (p. 41)

The above bears witness to the fact that the conscience is not innately reliable. Other writers also strongly emphasize that point. In answer to the question "Can a person really feel crushing disapproval yet be blameless before God?" James Dobson answers, "Categorically yes." He offers the example of parents who have guilt feelings concerning retarded or deformed children.²

Concerning the reliability of conscience, Lewis B. Smedes writes as follows:

Actually, conscience is easily led astray; it is like a computer that can be fed false data and print out elaborate tissues of lies. Conscience

may feel horrible when we are innocent as babes or splendid when we are guilty as Beelzebub. Conscience is by no means worthless, but left to its own devices, it is likely to pull the wool over our moral eyes.³

All those whom I have quoted agree that the conscience is in need of constant instruction from the Word. That they differ as to the extent of the efficacy of conscience attests its illusive nature, seemingly indefinable and indescribable. We should welcome not only Hughes' contribution to the discussion of conscience, but more generally the precise and specific way in which he sorts out Christian concepts of ethics and set them over against secular, that is, humanistic concepts.

Endnotes

¹ Carl F.H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957) p. 518.

² James Dobson, *Emotions: Can We Trust Them* (Ventura, Ca.: G/L Publications 1980) p. 21.

³ Lewis B. Smedes, *Mere Morality: What God Expects From Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983) p. 25, Footnote 17.

Logic and the Nature of God, by Stephen T. Davis. Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983. 177 pages. Reviewed by Nick R. Van Til, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy.

By way of introducing this book I can do no better than to use a few paragraphs from the blurb on the book's jacket. They recommend this book as follows:

A discussion of the attributes of God, written from a Christian perspective, this book is theological in that it explores claims that have been made about God by Christian theologians, and in that it aims to produce a concept of God that is or ought to be satisfying to Christians. It is philosophical in both method and content—in method because Stephen Davis writes as a philosopher trained in philosophical analysis, and in content because much of its material is provided by arguments of past and present philosophers.

After a clear introduction, Davis devotes one chapter each to several divine attributes: eternity, omniscience, immutability, foreknowledge, omnipotence and benevolence. Succeeding chapters discuss the problem of evil and the doctrine of the Incarnation and Trinity.

Davis begins his treatment of the various attributes of God by discussing God's relationship to time. He concludes that on the basis of God's involvement in

creation and human history we cannot logically think of God as eternal, that is to say, timeless. Hence we are forced to the alternative conclusion that God is everlasting. Davis is convinced that such a view of God's relationship to time fits in better with a biblical view of other attributes of God as well.

Several chapters later in the discussion of the Trinity, Davis indicates that the use of logic cannot dispel all mystery concerning the being of God. For example, the doctrine of the Trinity is bound to escape logical explanation as we cannot reconcile the "one and many" problem as we find it suggested by the intrapersonal relationships of the one triune God of the Scriptures.

Davis admits that we do not find the doctrine of the Trinity clearly and forthrightly taught in unequivocal biblical statements. We have to infer the doctrine from various passages that seem to assume that God is three persons in one being. An outstanding example of the trinity is the great commission in Matthew 28:19, which refers to the three persons specifically, coming after Jesus' declarations that he and the Father are One.

What seems to be at issue in Davis' rationalizing God as everlasting and not eternal, while accepting the Trinity as a mystery, is the question of the criteria by which the one doctrine is judged to be logically deducible while the other remains logically a mystery.

Davis suggests two criteria as follows:

First, people are rational in believing a mysterious doctrine only if there is good reason to believe that its contradictory character is only apparent. (p. 141)

God may be legitimately described as three-in-one because God is one when considered as a certain kind of thing and three when considered as another kind of thing. I believe this is indeed enough to provide good reason to believe that what we have here is not a contradiction but rather a mystery. (p. 142)

What about the second criterion? It says that people can rationally believe a mystery if the mysterious doctrine makes the best available sense of other statements they have reason to believe or if they have reason to believe the doctrine was revealed by God. I believe this criterion is satisfied in the case of the Trinity. (p. 143)

I think it should be apparent that the criteria are the crux of the matter in reaching our conclusions concerning

the attributes of God. There are those who feel that holding God to be everlasting instead of eternal denigrates God to the level of creatures in the created order of time. They believe that the references to God's changelessness are not concerned to show his steadfast nature but that they indicate that God is essentially an a-temporal being.

Is there then a *reasonable* way to solve the apparent contradiction between the idea of an eternal and timeless God and a God who is involved in creation and in the history of redemption? The answer is "No." Yet by Davis's own criteria one can maintain that God is eternal by insisting that the Bible reveals God to be eternal while at the same time showing that He is involved in time. We can accept the analytical disparity by raising the whole problem to the status of mystery just as Davis did with the problem of the Trinity. Many do not want to take the route which makes God everlasting instead of eternal. They feel that it may jeopardize God's transcendence and too closely identify God with universal processes. The advantage of Davis' criteria is that it allows one to maintain either position without endangering one's analytical respectability.

And the Trees Clap Their Hands: Faith, Perception, and the New Physics, by Virginia Stems Owens. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983, 148 pp. Reviewed by Russell Maatman, Professor of Chemistry.

There have been many interpretations of the twentieth century revolution in physics, with its strange ideas about the nature of matter, time, and the limitations of our knowledge. To put it mildly, Owens' interpretation is different. Her approach is both Christian and poetic. The book abounds in poetic and allegorical uses of Scripture.

Owens explains that she is a spy. When those around her eat, talk, or watch a television program, she secretly examines seemingly very small things—the color of a woman's eyes, a raindrop splashing on the pavement, a person walking across the room to refill a plate of food—as she is on the trail of the hidden meaning of life. The secret of ultimate meaning is hidden within anything in the world, she says, and everything is linked to everything else.

There are no chapter titles; instead, the content of each chapter is introduced by literary quotations. Thus, at the beginning of the fourth chapter the quotation (from Laurel Lee), "I know I'm not seeing things as they are, I'm seeing things as I am," Owens uses to introduce "dancing," a concept she returns to repeatedly in later chapters. Thus, for her, the idea of uncertainty in observation, introduced by Heisenberg, is not satisfactory: "We're not *observing*. Heisenberg, we're *dancing*. Locked in an embrace with the world, our retinal cells

quivering at the approach of the pulsating photons like any giddy girl at the prom, we are ourselves phenomena dancing with phenomena. No more looking at things in perspective, artfully abstracting ourselves from the situation as though we feared rejection, feared finding no partner" (p. 49).

She takes this kind of dancing in an unexpected direction. Intrigued by a deduction made by John S. Bell in 1964, she accepts his conclusion that ". . . the spatially separated parts of reality cannot be independent" (p. 18). Therefore, information need not be transmitted with a speed no greater than the speed of light: "Faster than the speed of light, intelligence is passed around. . . . This is telepathy on what we have come to think of as an inorganic, dead, deaf-and-dumb level. The universe is dancing" (p. 57). She says that Heisenberg's physics is Platonic and that both Heisenberg and Descartes mistakenly attempted to separate thought from matter. She adds, "But cleaving thought from matter, excising form from content, the dancer from the dance, leaves us with a corpse dangling in our arms. And in the end a Platonic corpse smells no better than a Cartesian one. In either case, the world is killed because it is despised" (p. 87).

Owens uses two physical ideas in relating the new physics to the Christian faith. First, as already men-