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Daniel Dombrowski. *A Platonic Philosophy of Religion: A Process Perspective*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005.

Daniel Dombrowski. *Rethinking the Ontological Argument: A Neoclassical Theistic Response*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Daniel A. Dombrowski addresses a wide range of topics in these two books, but ultimately his goal in both is to shed light on important ideas and arguments in the history of the philosophy of religion from a neoclassical or process theistic point of view.

In *A Platonic Philosophy of Religion*, Dombrowski tries to reveal the dynamic aspect of Plato's theism and construct a new Platonic philosophy of religion. Chapter 1 considers Plato's cosmology, where God is viewed as the mind or soul for the body that is the whole natural world. Commentators on Plato, such as Richard Mohr, reject this World Soul thesis, arguing that it is either redundant or useless. Dombrowski responds to this allegation by appealing to a pantheistic interpretation that is informed by Charles Hartshorne's and Alfred North Whitehead's metaphysics. In chapter 2, Dombrowski focuses on Plato's idea in the *Sophist* according to which being is *dynamis* or dynamic power. He tries to show in his analysis that "it is plausible to suggest that Plato held a version of panpsychism similar to that which was held by certain process thinkers" (p. 42). In chapter 3, Dombrowski considers a central Platonic thesis, namely, the Theory of Forms. He rejects the troublesome view that the forms are free-floating ontological entities and defends instead the idea that the forms are items in the divine mind or divine psychical process. In chapter 4, Dombrowski addresses an interesting apparent inconsistency in Plato's position: on the one hand, Plato holds a dipolar categorical scheme but, on the other hand, he defends cosmological monism, according to which the World Soul subsumes everything. Dombrowski solves this problem by appealing to a neoclassical conception of God, which is based on the rejection of the classical concept of God as an unmoved mover. In chapter 5, Dombrowski discusses arguments for the existence of God: a version of the ontological argument found in the *Republic*, which Dombrowski thinks anticipates

Anselm's well-known argument in the *Proslogion*, and two different versions of the cosmological argument found in the *Laws* and the *Timaeus*, respectively. He argues that the distinction between the abstract existence of God and the contingent actuality of God, which was introduced by Hartshorne, is crucial here. In the final chapter, Dombrowski considers Plato's idea that the purpose of human life is to become like God as much as possible.

In *Rethinking the Ontological Argument* Dombrowski discusses, again from a neoclassical theistic perspective, Anselm's ontological argument for the existence of God and its modern and contemporary variations. Dombrowski tries to defend the ontological argument from its critics by appealing to the distinction between divine existence and divine actuality, which, as I have mentioned, he also discusses in chapter 5 of *A Platonic Philosophy of Religion*. Dombrowski argues that existing criticisms of the ontological argument can, at most, refute only the *a priori* derivation of the existence of God as defined by classical theism, while not similarly refuting such an argument when based on neoclassical theism, which Dombrowski finds more tenable.

In chapter 1, Dombrowski reviews the historical background of the ontological argument. He discusses the several versions of the ontological argument introduced by Anselm, Descartes, Leibniz, Malcolm, Hartshorne and Gödel. Chapters 2 and 3 feature Dombrowski's most original contribution to the debate on the ontological argument. In these chapters he critically examines responses to the argument from the point of view of continental philosophy. He considers Richard Rorty's and Mark C. Taylor's challenges. Since the majority of contemporary analysts of the ontological argument are analytic philosophers, it is interesting to see how continental philosophers approach the argument and how Dombrowski responds to this perspective. In chapters 4 and 5, on the other hand, Dombrowski focuses on responses to the ontological argument from the analytic point of view. He examines Graham Oppy's claim that the ontological argument is dialectically ineffective and worthless. Dombrowski points out that Oppy's objection overlooks a powerful process defence of the argument. Dombrowski also examines two better-known responses to the argument: (i) Gaunilo's 'island objection,' according to which if the ontological argument were successful we could construct a parallel argument that proves the existence of such an absurd entity as the

perfect island; and (ii) Kant's idea that the ontological argument fails because it treats existence, erroneously, as a predicate. In the final chapter, Dombrowski argues against the classical conceptions of God defended by Thomas V. Morris, Katherin A. Rogers and Alvin Plantinga.

Dombrowski's books share two distinctive features. First, they exhibit the remarkably wide range of his philosophical knowledge and interests. In *A Platonic Philosophy of Religion*, he analyses Plato's later dialogues, often overlooked by scholars of ancient philosophy, and relates their teachings to contemporary discussions in process philosophy of religion. In *Rethinking the Ontological Argument*, as I mentioned above, he demonstrates his knowledge of both the continental and analytic traditions by evaluating numerous responses to the argument. Very few philosophers are capable of surveying and linking thoughts in ancient philosophy, process philosophy, continental philosophy and analytic philosophy. Dombrowski's comprehension of such diverse approaches makes these books truly original. Second, Dombrowski's presentations are always succinct. Despite the variety of the topics that he addresses Dombrowski packs his discussions into two small volumes. *Rethinking the Ontological Argument* is only 154 pages in length excluding the bibliography and *A Platonic Philosophy of Religion* is only 112 pages in length, again, excluding the bibliography. Ironically, however, these positive features seem also to contribute to one of the books' weaknesses.

To take one example, Dombrowski's discussion of Oppy's objection to the ontological argument is quite shallow (chapters 4 and 5 of *Rethinking the Ontological Argument*). He responds to Oppy's arguments by referring to a number of brief reviews of Oppy's book written by other philosophers, such as Lucas, Gale, Oakes, Langtry, and Taliaferro. There is nothing intrinsically wrong in relying on book reviews, but Dombrowski merely repeats a series of relatively small points mentioned in these reviews without developing them further. To take another example, Dombrowski's discussion of the ontological argument and the cosmological argument in *A Platonic Philosophy of Religion* relies largely on interpretations of Plato's passages offered by such philosophers as J. Prescott Johnson, William Lane Craig and Norman Geisler without discussing Plato's original texts thoroughly. Dombrowski contends, following Johnson, that while Anselm is the one who first formulated the ontological argument clearly, "[a] consideration of the famous divided line in books 6 and 7 of the *Republic* ...

shows that the argument is found in Plato in at least an implicit way” (p. 81). Plato’s argument seems, however, so different from Anselm’s that it is difficult to see how it can be construed legitimately as a version of the ontological argument without a deeper analysis of their respective elements. Indeed, Dombrowski’s presentations in these slim volumes would surely benefit from fuller exposition, but to provide that he would have had either to have lengthened the books or narrowed their focus to fewer themes and topics.

In what remains of this review I provide more substantive philosophical criticisms of Dombrowski’s treatment of the arguments for the existence of God.

(a) Dombrowski on the cosmological argument

In *A Platonic Philosophy of Religion*, Dombrowski discusses William Lane Craig’s interpretation of a version of the cosmological argument found in Plato’s *Laws* and Norman Geisler’s interpretation of another version found in the *Timaeus* (pp. 85–88). He remarks, “To link this [cosmological] argument with the dipolar theism of the previous chapter, we should say along with Eslick that ‘the abstract necessity of God’s existence ... does not determine the concrete *actuality* of such existence. The latter aspect, even of God, is contingent.’ ... That is, the argument leads us to infer the existence of God, but it does not necessarily lead us to Aristotle’s or Thomas Aquinas’ unmoved mover, rather to a Supreme Self-Mover” (p. 88). It is difficult however to see how the cosmological argument proves the existence of God without specifying His concrete actuality.

Many contemporary theistic philosophers, including Craig himself, think that the cosmological argument reveals very specific attributes of God. If, as the cosmological argument says, God is the ultimate cause of motion, events and goodness, He must be uncaused (because He is the *ultimate* cause), personal (because He chooses to cause), timeless (because He causes time as well), changeless (because He is the ultimate source of change), immaterial (because He creates the material totality), and extremely powerful (because He causes the whole universe). I do not mean that the cosmological argument is obviously sound, but once we assume that it *is* sound it is unclear how Dombrowski could demonstrate that it proves only the abstract existence of God without leading us to something more concrete, such as the actuality of Aristotle’s and Aquinas’s

unmoved mover, which has at least some of the specific divine attributes mentioned above.

(b) Dombrowski on the ontological argument

In *Rethinking the Ontological Argument* Dombrowski argues that classical defences of the ontological argument go wrong in persisting with the idea that the argument derives the concrete actuality of God. He contends that the force of existing objections can be eliminated once we affirm that the ontological argument derives only the abstract existence of God. This contention, however, raises a question that leads to a difficulty that is similar to the one mentioned above: what exactly *is* the abstract existence of God, which is independent of any of God's actual attributes? As Anthony Kenny says, "to say that God exists is to say that there is something that has the divine attributes" (Anthony Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 5). Thus, it seems that Dombrowski's talk of an existence of God that is free of any specific attributes fails to refer to anything ontologically meaningful. Kenny's claim is of course based on a classical conception of God, which Dombrowski rejects, but it is hard to see how anyone can talk about God's existence non-vacuously without mentioning any actual divine attributes. Therefore, while Dombrowski's neoclassical theistic response might succeed in undercutting existing objections to the argument, it does not seem to succeed in proving anything ontologically substantial.

Suppose, however, that Dombrowski's response does somehow succeed in proving something ontologically substantial. In this case, ironically, Dombrowski's view of the ontological argument turns out to be essentially the same as the traditional view: the ontological argument proves *a priori* the existence of something ontologically substantial. If so, Dombrowski's defence does not seem any better than classical defences.

Despite the above-mentioned weaknesses, Dombrowski's discussions are refreshingly original. His books represent some of the most unique recent contributions to the philosophy of religion.