

Forrest, Peter. *God without the Supernatural: A Defense of Scientific Theism*. Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996. xi+256 pp. \$. (cloth).

For *The Journal of Religion*, 1998

In this sometimes difficult but rewarding book, Peter Forrest aims to defend "anthropic theism," belief in a deity who is sufficiently powerful and knowledgeable to create our physical universe and who has created embodied persons--e.g., humans--chiefly for their own well-being (pp. 8-9). Anthropic theism enables us to understand several familiar facts better than its rivals. What facts? These:

1. the suitability of the universe for life,
2. the fact that the universe is governed by regularities,
3. the progress of science toward the truth,
4. moral supremacy (the way moral considerations override others),
5. the beauty of the physical world, and
6. the serendipidity of mathematics.

Anthropic theism, argues Forrest, not only better explains these facts; it posits a more intelligible terminus of explanation, thereby contributing crucially to its superiority. Forrest takes it that his project fails if the theocentric metaphysical speculations he deploys are not "genuine epistemic possibilities," i.e. if they are not "too improbable on background evidence" (p. 26). More importantly, however, he says his project fails if those speculations assume God violates natural laws or posit entities with no precedent in either well-confirmed scientific theories or what we already believe in--hence the initially alarming "antisupernaturalistic" title.

With these constraints in mind, how does the overall case go? Our own consciousness provides a familiar, nonsupernatural precedent for positing the (anthropic) theistic God. God's creating a universe suitable for life can be understood either as a consequence of God's awareness of the goodness of the outcome or as the spontaneous manifestation of God's joy (pp. 46-56). Either way, God's reason to create is morally good; thus, since many persons have earthly lives not worth living, God created them also to live after death. Forrest argues that God can ensure an afterlife without violating natural laws (pp. 56-68); he explains God's power to create by developing an account of human action general enough to apply to the action of any free, conscious being (pp. 68-81); and speculates how God might create *ex nihilo* (pp. 81-85). The most plausible naturalistic rivals explain the suitability of the universe for life in terms of the life-friendly character of natural laws; but, these rivals leave the latter unintelligible (pp. 88-109). Moreover, naturalistic attempts to explain the other familiar facts fail while anthropic theism makes them intelligible (p. 110-38). The only non-naturalistic rivals that approach anthropic theism's explanatory power are John Leslie's "axiarchism"--the view that what ought to be the case causes things to come to be as they ought to be--which cannot explain human responsibility for action, and a version of "anathropic theism"--according to which an amoral God is aesthetically motivated to create--which cannot explain moral supremacy (pp. 139-62).

Now, one might accept all this and still reject Forrest's conclusion, if anthropic theism is not a genuine epistemic possibility or if evil is unintelligible on anthropic theism. Here, I

fear, Forrest is at his weakest. His "speculative understanding of evil" (pp. 213-36) fails since we can't see how the goods he articulates require the permission of so much horrific suffering. More troublesome is his attempt to render anthropic theism a genuine epistemic possibility. He argues that aspects of human consciousness cannot be understood in purely physical terms. Fine. He infers, however, that (i) there is unrestricted consciousness, "a unified consciousness to which all things appear" (p. 177), and (ii) unrestricted consciousness is God. I have no idea what (i) means, and so I have no idea whether (i) expresses a genuine epistemic possibility. Matters get worse, however, when we hear what Forrest has to say about (ii). Strictly speaking, he says, nothing is unrestricted consciousness. Nor is there anything that is unrestrictedly conscious. Rather, "the fact that there is a God" is "the fact that there is consciousness of everything" (p. 209). Thus, Forrest's "objective but nonobjectual theism" posits a fact as that to which religious devotion is directed, just as "the content of an emotion is often a proposition, not an object" (p. 210). Nevertheless, insists Forrest, this does not keep devotion to God "from being a relationship with God in something like the popular sense". Not quite a "relationship with God" in any "popular sense" I am familiar with; and an abstract object, a fact, is the joyful creator and caring provider?!! One can't help but think that something went wrong in chapters 6 and 7.

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