

Editorial Preface

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ISSN (Print) 1225-4924, ISSN (Online) 2508-3104

Catholic Theology and Thought in Asia, Vol. 83, July 2019<http://dx.doi.org/10.21731/ctat.2019.83.4>

Over the past few years, *Catholic Theology and Thought in Asia* (CTTA), formerly *Catholic Theology and Thought*, has published special editions which focus on a diversity of issues: from “The Crisis in Church and Mission,” “Priestly Formation,” “The Climate Catastrophe,” “Interreligious Dialogue,” “The Teachings of Pope Francis,” “Christology and Plurality,” and “Jesus Research in the Catholic Church.” The pages of these editions are full of the wisdom and expertise of professional scholars from across Asia, the Americas, Europe, and the South Pacific. In like manner, from the beginning of 2020, CCTA will turn its attention to the dialogue between theology and science and publish reflections which engage with the fundamental themes of creation, miracles, time, the eschaton, and the resurrection. Theology, given the preeminent role of science in modern technological civilization and its importance in shaping the contemporary worldview and its ethical systems, must engage in dialogue. To be credible, theology must be both scientifically literate and simultaneously open to refining its own insights, thinking and language. As a precursor to that rich discussion, however, this present edition turns to the fascinating debates about the existence of God.

First up, Prof. Seungchan Park (The Catholic University of Korea) delves into one of the most famous debates concerning proofs for the existence of God: namely, Anselm’s ontological argument and Aquinas’ *Five Ways* empirical proof. While Thomas critiques Anselm for creating a distinction between existence and nature, Park dem-

onstrates that Anselm's ontological argument maintains considerable validity despite the noise generated by the conceptual clashes between a comprehensive Platonism and existential experience. He also notes that, given some of its questionable premises, Thomas' *Five Ways* loses some of its intellectual congruency and sway. As such, the assessment of the various proofs from God's existence must, in the first order, be evaluated within the confines of their metaphysical parameters. We are, thus, left with the question, "what relevance, and in what way, do the medieval proofs, along with their various premises, for the existence of God affect the rationality of contemporary people?"

In his contribution, "Proofs of God against Kant," Frederic Guillaud, Ph.D (a French Philosopher) employs the concept of *aporia* in order to critique Kant for his rejection of the traditional proofs. Guillaud points to a number of key Kantian ideas: His questioning of whether causality can be applied to beings, including God, who lie beyond the realm of the world of phenomenon; his rejection of proofs from Aristotelian teleology which starts from motion and arrives at the original immutable being or prime mover; and his critique of ontological deductions about the concept of being. Kant also asks whether it is possible to move from the logical to the ontological. For him, cognition has an intuitive structure which human beings, even though unable to come to the thing-in-itself, are able through the use of reason to perceive the thing. We are left to ponder, "Is there a reasoning which moves beyond Kantian *aporia*?"

Drawing on his considerable expertise, Prof. Fr. Henri Laux, S.J. (Center Sèvres — Facultés Jésuites de Paris) examines the positive contribution which Spinoza's view of God makes to Christian understanding. Laux urges us to move beyond the traditional disputes about the philosopher's perceived atheism or pantheism. As Teilhard de

Chardin has pointed out, between the transcendence and immanence of the Christian understanding of God, Spinoza revitalizes the immanent dimension with his concept of “God in the world.”

Prof. Synghwan Shin (The Catholic University of Korea) introduces us to the Heideggerian view of God. For Heidegger, God was regarded in the bygone metaphysical age as a single being which was otherized and objectified. However, the postmetaphysical age demands a new kind of thinking which discovers being revealed in the wake of the oblivion of Being. Heidegger’s being does not equate with the historical experience of the personal God of Christianity. Rather, this being is grasped in the manifestation of the human self-transcendence.

Lastly, Prof. Fr. Gyuha Choi (The Catholic University of Korea) discusses Alvin Plantinga’s *Felix Culpa* argument in order to deconstruct the idea of theodicy. Sin and suffering in the world are justified as necessary preconditions for the incarnation and the resultant fulfilment of the purpose of creation. However, as Choi is at pains to point out, Plantinga’s *Felix Culpa* argument, which allows unjustified and gratuitous personal suffering in order to maximize the net value of the world as whole, is consequentialist and thus at odds with the Christian God who, as the cosmic creator, is not only Father to all but also responsible for the good of every individual.

How, against this rich canvas, can we prove the existence of God in an era dominated by natural science and led by atheism? Moreover, how do we link the God of philosophy with the one revealed through scripture?

More than anything else, philosophy is a way to think about existence. In truth, is there a more comprehensive concept than the idea of being? Heidegger has a point when he notes that Western philosophy’s

talk about being results in the oblivion of Being. The Being which apprehends all beings is the home of all beings. Is it enough to follow Spinoza and equate this Being with nature? If Spinoza has not recognized the supernatural, then being, including the supernatural, unfolds in an infinite realm.

However, scripture takes a different tack. In the Book of Exodus, the name of God revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai is, “*ehye asher ehye*” (I am who I am) (Ex 3:14). Moses is commissioned by this *Ehye* (I am). YHWH, the English transliteration of God’s name, derives from the verb, *hayah*, which corresponds to the verb, to be. As such, the God of the scriptures exists and is coming into existence. The God revealed on Mt. Sinai is the Creator God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This God is the saving God who comes to be understood as not just saving Israel but all creatures.

God, known as perfect being or the supreme being, is Being-itself and thus understood as the one only being. As the supreme being, God is transcendent. However, the God who authors the existence of all beings is also an immanent God, present within all beings. Without doubt, the Western philosophical emphasis on the supremacy of God has weakened our understanding of the immanent presence within the world. We are still a long way away from the Apostle Paul’s comprehensive vision: “from him and through him and to him are all things” (Rom 11:36).

Perhaps we might turn to the German philosopher and theologian, Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), and his concept of the Unity or coincidence of the opposites, *coincidentia oppositorum* to more adequately appropriate the immanence and transcendence of God. In fact, as in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, both Anselm’s deduction of the ontological proof for God and the Thomistic proof for God which starts

with motion in order to posit an unmoved mover are focused on the idea of being. In emphasising the being of God, we inadvertently downplay the significance of other beings. However, the commonality of all beings is highlighted when we speak of God as “Being-itself.” As St. Paul preached to the Athenians gathered in the Areopagus, “For in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Being is infinite and eternal. Being understood in this way, easily engages with Spinozian pantheism. Accordingly, if we understand God as Being-itself, we can, with Heidegger, speak of the coming advent of being and, with Spinoza, of the infinity of infinite attributes. For Kant, our understanding is limited to the realm of nature. However, because our intellect is a mirror that reflects and perceives being, our deductive reasoning can transcend the phenomenal world and grasp the supra-natural.

The meaning of being of which philosophy seeks is explained by Scripture from the perspective of creation and salvation. All beings come from Being-itself. Likewise, as we noted in the quote from St. Paul to the Romans above (11:36), all beings will return to Being-itself. Being-itself is none other than what we call God.

I am confident that this edition of *CTTA*, with its focus on “Arguments about the Existence of God,” will be of great help for the forthcoming series on the dialogue between theology and science. Finally, it is my pleasure to thank all those who have worked so hard to bring this edition to fruition, especially our five authors and all those involved in the editing process.

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