

Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea (eds.) *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Pp. 326. \$99.00 Hbk. ISBN No. 0199203563

Analytic Theology is a collection of fourteen new essays (and an extensive introduction by one of the editors) dedicated to the relationship between analytic philosophy and theology. The contributors are fairly evenly split between the two disciplines, and while a number of them raise significant reservations about analytic philosophy in general, and its value in addressing theological topics in particular, the volume as a whole makes a defense of 'the growing body of philosophical work on topics that have traditionally been the provenance of systematic theologians' (1). But even among those who see analytic approaches in theology as positive, there is disagreement about exactly its exact limitations and what relation to other theological approaches.

The collection opens with a fabulous introduction by Michael Rea, which alone justifies adding the volume to one's library. Rea begins with the following diagnosis:

Many theologians have very different ideas from analytic philosophers about how theology (and philosophy) ought to be done, and about the value of analytic approaches to theological topics. Whereas philosophy in the English-speaking world is dominated by analytic approaches to its problems and projects, theology has been dominated by alternative approaches.... The methodological divide between systematic theologians and analytic philosophers of religion is ripe for exploration. It is of obvious theoretical importance to both disciplines, but it also has practical importance.... The problem isn't just that academics with different methodological perspectives have trouble conversing with one another. Rather, it is that, by and large, the established figures in both disciplines don't even view mutual conversation as worth pursuing. They ignore one another. They (implicitly or explicitly) encourage their students to ignore one another.... And the divide only grows.... The present volume represents an attempt to begin a much-needed interdisciplinary conversation about the value of analytic philosophical approaches to theological topics (1f).

Attempts to begin and facilitate such discussions are not new; similar previous projects include Eleonore Stump and Thomas Flint's *Hermes and Athena: Biblical Studies and Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame University Press, 1993). If past experiences are any indication of how the present volume will fare, there is reason to doubt that the attempted dialogue will be warmly received by all parties; nevertheless, the attempt, and this collection, are certainly worthwhile.

The volume is divided into four sections: (I) In Defense of Analytic Theology; (II) Historical Perspectives; (III) On the Data for Theology: Scripture, Reason, and Experience; and (IV) Analytic Approaches Reconsidered. Section I includes Oliver Crisp's "On Analytic Theology," William Abraham's "Systematic Theology as Analytic Theology," and Randal Rauser's "Theology as a Bull Session." While Rea's introduction isn't officially part of the first section, it could easily be seen to be such. He gives the following working definitions of analytic philosophy and analytic theology (though other contributors will offer their own, slightly different, definitions):

Roughly (and I think that 'rough' is the best that we can do here), [the term 'analytic philosophy'] refers to an approach to philosophical problems that is characterized by a particular rhetorical style, some common ambitions, and evolving technical vocabulary, and a tendency to pursue some projects in dialogue with a certain evolving body of literature.... As I see it, analytic theology is just the activity of approaching theological topics with the ambitions of an analytic philosopher and in a style that conforms to the prescriptions that are distinctive of analytic philosophical discourse (Rea, 3 and 7).

Rea then outlines some of the major critiques of analytic theology, including that it is unhistorical, that it has the wrong priorities, that the analytic style subverts the proper goals of theology, that analytic theology presupposes a problematic foundationalist epistemology, and that it is idolatrous. According to Rea, 'Not all of the objections seem to me to be of equal strength; but all do seem serious and widespread enough to merit more attention in the literature—both by those who embrace them and by those who reject them. It is the hope for such further open discussion that gave birth to the present volume' (Rea, 25).

Oliver Crisp's "On Analytic Theology" explicates and defends analytic theology as a theological method. For Crisp, analytic theology has both procedural and substantive aspects. Procedurally, analytic theology involves 'the use of certain tools like logic to make sense of theological issues, where metaphysical concerns are central.... In fact, analytic theology is about redeploying tools already in the service of philosophy to a theological end' (O. Crisp, 37f). Substantively analytic theology involves 'several features that are interrelated: the presumption that there is some theological truth of the matter and that this truth of the matter can be ascertained and understood by human beings (theologians included!), and an instrumental use of reason' (O. Crisp, 35). Crisp then attempts defend such a methodology from a number of

criticisms. Abraham's "Systematic Theology as Analytic Theology" has a similar focus to the preceding chapter. In particular, Abraham responds to the frequent charge that analytic theology abandons the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob for the god of the philosophers. 'On the contrary,' says Abraham,

we need the help of analytic theology to do justice to the God we meet in the worship of the Church. We can cut to the chase by noting that the God we have identified in our initial orientation is not some idol cooked up by philosophers, but precisely the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the triune God of Christian Creed and worship.... The first take of a doctrine of God in analytic theology is to unpack as fully as possible what is involved in confessing that we believe in the triune God of the Church" (Abraham, 61f).

Abraham also criticizes contemporary theology for being too focused on theological prolegomenon, and suggests analytic theology could help establish 'a new subdiscipline in the borderlands between philosophy and theology, namely the epistemology of theology' (Abraham, 67) to alleviate this problem. The last chapter in the first section, Rauser's "Theology as a Bull Session," is a polemic criticism of two influential contemporary alternatives to analytic theology, Sallie McFague's account of theology as persuasive metaphor and the work of Jürgen Moltmann. These two theological approaches, according to Rauser, illustrate two different kinds of academic bullshit: intentional bullshit and product bullshit.

On McFague's view of 'theo-poetic persuasion', the theologian's final obligation is not to inform but to persuade (even as she makes it *appear* that she informs). Whether or not you agree that this practice of depicting God in a variety of personas to facilitate transforming love is justified does not change the fact that it is intentional bullshit (Rauser, 79).

In contrast, Moltmann's theology leads to product bullshit insofar as "Moltmann's repudiation of reasons removes the critical safeguards that weed out bullshit" (Rauser, 82).

The chapters in Section II address historical issues related to analytic theology. A frequent objection to analytic theology is that it is historically insensitive, attempting to 'impose anachronistic concepts and questions upon issues from the Christian theological tradition, while ignoring vital elements of this tradition that do not fit into analytic ways of thinking' (Lamont, 87). While not denying that this can be the case, John Lamont's "A Conception of Faith in the Greek Fathers" argues that this charge sometimes misses the mark. Drawing on recent work on

the epistemology of testimony, Lamont argues that the Greek Fathers, especially Clement of Alexandria, understood divine testimony to provide a 'motive of credibility' for believing that Christian faith is revealed by God and also provides content to that faith. Andrew Chignell's "As Kant has Shown..." is a convincing rebuttal of an influential, supposedly Kantian-inspired, objection to analytic theology:

Kant's influence is *embraced* by many theologians, scholars, and religious thinkers who maintain that he taught something crucial about the limits of our cognitive, conceptual, and therefore epistemic access to supersensible objects ('things-in-themselves') and, by way of Hegel, about the cultural and historical sources of our conceptual schemes. As a result, one often encounters statements in which a claim about the inability of our concepts to apply to reality-in-itself in general—and to God in particular—and thus the impotence of all attempts at substantive theology in a traditional 'realist' mode.... Kant's influence is typically *regretted* by would-be analytic theologians precisely because of this near-consensus picture (Chignell, 121).

Chignell contends that this widespread understanding is mistaken. Through a careful interaction with key Kantian texts, he argues that "we *can* engage in substantive analytic theology, even by Kantian lights, as long as we are careful to deny the status of belief and knowledge to our results, and agree that [Kantian] Belief [*Glaube*] is enough" (Chignell, 135). Andrew Dole's "Schleiermacher's Theological Anti-Realism," like Chignell's essay, is a response to the 'ahistoricity' objection to analytic theology. According to Dole, Schleiermacher would object to metaphysical investigation into theological topics motivated by 'truth for its own sake' (Dole, 151), since such a motive is alien to religion. Nevertheless, Dole argues that an 'awareness of Schleiermacher's theological anti-realism ... should not prompt the analytic theologian to avoid metaphysical inquiry' (Dole, 151) insofar as Schleiermacher's claims that religion and the pursuit of truth for its own sake is questionable. But Dole suggests that analytic theologian would do well to accept Schleiermacher's point that 'religious doctrines do *more than* make truth-claims; they perform functions *beyond* the description of mundane and transcendent realities' (Dole, 152). Analytic theologians should thus pay attention to the way various doctrines are deployed in the life of the Church. Section II ends with Nicholas Wolterstorff's "How Philosophical Theology Became Possible within the Analytic Tradition of Philosophy." Wolterstorff's essay, along with Rea's introduction, is a gem of the collection. He

articulates the reasons why philosophical theology has flourished in the analytic tradition in the past thirty years in a way that it has not flourished in continental philosophy. Wolterstorff's central thesis is that

the flowering of philosophical theology was made possible by the surrender, by analytic philosophers, of certain assumptions characteristic of philosophy in the modern period, and by the emergence of a new understanding of the task of philosophy and its role in culture.... It is my impression that behind attempts to belittle the significance of the flourishing of analytic philosophical theology is almost always a refusal to surrender those traditional assumptions, and resistance to accepting this new self-understanding of the task and role of the philosopher (Wolterstorff, 156).

This essay is an example of the kind of historically sensitive approach to theological issues that many claim analytic theology misses.

Section III is 'On the Data for Theology', and contains two essays on Scripture—Thomas McCall's "On Understanding Scripture as the Word of God" and Thomas Crisp's "On Believing that the Scriptures are Divinely Inspired—and two essays on extra-biblical data: Michael Sudduth's "The Contribution of Religious Experience to Dogmatic Theology" and Michael Murray's "Science and Religion in Constructive Engagement." The two essays on scripture are quite different, no doubt due in large part to the disciplines in which the respective authors work. McCall's essay is an analytic evaluation of Karl Barth's influential account of scripture. Barth's view is often presented as an alternative to the classical view of scripture, according to which (quoting from *Dei Verbum*) 'the Sacred Scriptures contain the world of God and since they are inspired really are the world of God' (McCall, 171). In contrast, Barth holds that scripture 'really *is* the Word of God—but only in the "event" that it *becomes* so' (McCall, 172). Instead of using Barth's work to leaven analytic theology, McCall 'seek[s] to show how Barth's own concerns might be addressed by the use of analytic tools ... [and to argue] that the theologian who shares Barth's fundamental theological commitments can—and indeed should—hold to the classical view' (McCall, 172). Thomas Crisp's essay uses technical work in epistemology to argue that many Christians are properly justified in believing that the books they take to constitute the Bible are divinely inspired. Such justification doesn't come by way of just any testimony, but rather by deferring to the testimony of experts: 'You defer to an

expert in your social group iff (a) you accept her testimony in the basic way and (b) you'd continue to do so if apprised of conflicting testimony by those your community deems non-expert, whether or not you had a good argument for preferring the expert's testimony to the non-expert's' (T. Crisp, 208). Despite (b), Crisp claims that expert testimony is nevertheless justified (even if not true) because 'the practice of deferring to those deemed expert by one's social group evinces proper cognitive function... [insofar as] many of the deliverances of this practice are outputs of a properly functioning, truth-aimed, belief-producing process' (209).

In his contribution, Michael Sudduth relates recent work on both natural theology and the epistemology of religious experience to each other and to dogmatic theology. Sudduth argues that religious experience is necessary for a robust form of natural theology because the latter attempts to integrate all aspects of general revelation; 'natural theology without the data of religious experience is likely to lose something in the way of the cumulative force of its arguments, its ability to suitably establish particular divine attributes, and its ability to integrate other theistic doctrines' (Sudduth, 226). Furthermore, he argues that dogmatic theology exerts a greater influence on religious beliefs and experiences than does natural theology. Third, Sudduth shows four ways in which religious experience makes salient contributions to dogmatic theology: (i) the genesis factor—religious experiences play a large role in the origin of dogmatic theology, (ii) the confirmation factor—religious experiences 'confirm some of the essential content of dogmatic theology' (Sudduth, 229), (iii) the explication factor—religious experience not only confirms but can serve to ground and develop the content of theology, and (iv) the reality factor—'dogmatic theology is rational discourse about God that is dependent on personal contact and interaction with the divine being' (Sudduth, 231). Murray's paper argues that the most promising model of the interaction between science and theology is one of 'constructive engagement'. The reader may wonder why it's included in this section, as it's not on a source of data for theology but rather on the relationship between theology and science. Nevertheless, it contains a very good and historically informed model of a healthy relationship between the two disciplines. Murray advocates 'a mature, balanced stance on the interplay between science and religion ... [in which] established science could lead to revised theological opinions (e.g., in biology), while also seeing ways in which science can confirm dogma (in

cosmology)' (Murray, 245). While a number of similar accounts of the proper relationship between science and religion have been offered, what differentiates this model from other attempts is an unwillingness to 'twist theological doctrine in just any old direction in response to the demands of scientific fancy' (Murray, 247).

The final section of the book contains three chapters which one of the editors says 'might be thought of as "correctives" to analytic theology' (Rea, 29). The section opens with an analytic philosopher, Eleonore Stump, arguing that one of analytic philosophy's greatest strengths, its attention to the details of an argument and predilection for precision, is also indicative of one of its greatest weaknesses, namely a '*cognitive hemionopia* ... [in which] its intellectual vision is occluded or obscured for the right half of the cognitive field, especially for the part of reality that includes the complex, nuanced though, behavior, and relations of persons' (Stump, 253). Through a discussion of the problem of evil and narratives, Stump argues that in its focus on 'knowledge that', analytic philosophy can (and often does) miss other important kinds of knowledge, such as the knowledge given by second-person experiences. (Stump 'can't, of course, specify what that knowledge is, since to do so would be to translate it into terms of knowledge *that*' (Stump, 259 footnote 27).) In contrast, Merold Westphal's chapter attempts to 'give a sense of how discourse to and about God (God-talk) ... can be understood in the light of two overlapping continental traditions, phenomenology and hermeneutics' (Westphal, 265). Where the reader might hope to find a critique of analytic philosophy from a leading continental scholar, Westphal's chapter is 'meant more as an alternative to than as a critique of analytic theology.... I do not see the two generically different approaches as mutually exclusive but rather as supplementary to each other. Each can do things that the other cannot, and each is prey to perils and pitfalls that can pervert the life of faith rather than nourish it' (Westphal, 271). The volume closes with a criticism of some recent analytic work on mystical experience by Sarah Coakley. Coakley offers a feminist critique of and corrective to the treatment of mystical experience by Richard Swinburne, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Alvin Plantinga, and William Alston. While the focus on mystical experience involves stereotypically feminine ways of knowing, the work of analytic philosophers of religion is missing 'precisely those traits and interests that the post-Kantian continental tradition, in

contrast, has tended to foster of late: a hermeneutical subtlety and attention to the text; a sensitivity to “apophatic” forms of speech; an interest in the integration of sustained bodily practice and epistemological investigation; a question of the hegemony of the intellect in a destabilize, postmodern self; and—last but not least—a fascination with gender itself’ (Coakley, 295).

On the whole, this is an excellent collection of essays, and one that analytic theologians and philosophers of religion will no doubt highly value. But given that the volume aims to ‘open further discussion’ between analytic theologians and other, more continentally influenced, approaches to theology, there is reason to think that some will object to the volume’s balance. For example, some may object to calling two leading non-analytic approaches ‘bullshit’ and the use of analytic philosophy to interpret and correct Barth (rather than vice-versa); others may feel that many of the contributions fail to take seriously enough the ways in which analytic approaches do violence to the subject matter. Nevertheless, *Analytic Theology* is highly recommended.

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