

BOOK REVIEW

Michael C. Rea *Essays in Analytic Theology*

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Andrew Hollingsworth 

Brewton-Parker College, Louisiana, USA
Email: ahollingsworth@bpc.edu

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Michael Rea is a well-established name in both the philosophy of religion and analytic theology (AT) disciplines, himself being one of the co-editors of the volume that many consider to be the true launching of the AT movement: *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*. Currently, Rea serves as Rev. John A. O'Brien Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame and Professorial Fellow at the Logos Institute for Analytic and Exegetical Theology at the University of St Andrews. His many published works cover various topics in the philosophy of religion, metaphysics, and philosophical theology. The work under review is a two-volume collection of essays that, as Rea himself puts it, represents 'the most substantial work in analytic theology that I have completed between 2003 and 2019' (2.1).

Being a collection of essays, the work at hand does not contain a sustained line of argument or a unified thesis. Rather, they primarily are previously published articles and book chapters that run the gamut of the major systematic-theological *topoi* in the analytical mood. The chapters are organized accordingly, reflecting somewhat the overall structure one would expect in a typical systematic theology – prolegomena/methodology, the divine attributes/nature, the Holy Trinity, sin, Incarnation, and atonement. Part II of volume 2 contains chapters on the problems of evil and divine hiddenness, sceptical theism, and prayer. This no doubt connects with the claim proposed by William Abraham in the inaugural AT volume mentioned above that AT simply is systematic theology attuned to the methods and rhetorical style of analytic philosophy (AP) (William J. Abraham, 'Systematic Theology as Analytic Theology', in Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea (eds), *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 54–69, at p. 54). As noted, the bulk of these two volumes has been previously published in various venues, though Rea does at times include postscripts to the chapters wherein he discusses more recent insights he has had into the preceding issue discussed. He typically affirms the same conclusions for which he argued in the original publication of these pieces, though he adds further clarifying comments and nuance where he sees it necessary. The only essays to not have been previously published are chapter 6 in volume 1 ('God beyond Being: Towards a Credible Account of Divine Transcendence') and chapter 9 in volume 2 ('Protest, Worship, and the Deformation of Prayer'). Chapter 4 of volume 1, up until this point, had only ever been published in German, and Rea made no additions to the material of the essay apart from minor editorial corrections (1.vii). As a result, the two-volumes at hand don't contribute much by way

of new material to contemporary discussions in philosophy of religion and analytic theology but rather bring together Rea's most important previous work in the disciplines. Those who have kept up with Rea's published work in these disciplines will already be familiar with these essays, though there is benefit in reading his added postscripts and new essays. In the remainder of this review, I will provide a broad summary of the essays and offer comments on those I found to be of particular interest.

Part I of volume 1 contains three essays: 'Realism in Theology and Metaphysics', 'Theology without Idolatry or Violence', and 'Authority and Truth'. Each of these concerns theological prolegomena, what Rea terms 'metatheology'. He argues that, contra the arguments of Peter Byrne and Bas van Fraassen, realism in theology and metaphysics is tenable, that Byrne's objections to this are answerable, and that van Fraassen's arguments only hold water if one accepts what he termed his 'empirical stance', according to which 'there is (and can be) absolutely no reason why metaphysicians or theologians *ought* to adopt the empirical stance' (1.20). The second essay addresses Kevin Hector's *Theology without Metaphysics*, namely the claim that theology that takes on metaphysics is guilty of 'idolatry', with Rea arguing that there are good reasons to believe that this is not the case. In 'Authority and Truth', Rea discusses various concepts of authority and how they may or may not apply to the discipline of theology. In particular, he insightfully notes that, when a theologian makes the claim that 'the Bible is authoritative', the questions in dire need of answering are 'Authoritative for what?' and 'Authoritative for whom?' Theologians often neglect these questions when they refer to the Bible's authority. This essay, in my opinion, is one of the stronger essays in the work at hand, and one that merits the consideration of theologians in both the analytic and non-analytic traditions.

The three essays in Part II of volume 1 contribute to the discussions surrounding the divine attributes. However, these do not approach the subject in the way that many would expect them to, namely discussing particular divine attributes, such as aseity, necessity, simplicity, eternity, the omni-attributes, etc. Rather, Rea provides a sort of meta-discussion on the divine attributes as a topic in theology in 'Divine Attributes as a Topic in Analytic Theology'. In particular, he points out that those in the analytic philosophy of religion tradition, many of whom have taken up discussions on the divine attributes, have failed to enter into dialogue with the works of the major twentieth-century theologians who likewise have engaged in such discussions, such as Karl Barth, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Robert Jenson. The fifth essay, 'Gender as a Divine Attribute', is perhaps Rea's most provocative in volume 1. In particular, he raises the question of 'whether the traditional pattern of characterizing God in predominantly masculine terms is *theologically mandatory*' (1.98; italics original). If referring to God in predominantly masculine terms is *not* theologically mandatory, then it follows that so doing is optional. Rea concludes his argument in this essay by claiming that 'God is most accurately characterized as masculine only if God is masculine but not equally feminine' (1.111). He further states, 'Thus, I conclude that it is not the case that God is most accurately characterized as masculine' (1.111). No doubt, such claims will draw the attention of many conservatives in Christian theology.

Rea's essays in Part III of volume 1 take up the doctrine of the Trinity. All of the essays here, which have been previously published, contain some of Rea's most interesting insights, in my opinion, in Christian philosophical theology. In particular, his essays 'Polytheism and Christian Belief' and 'Material Constitution and the Trinity' (with Jeffrey Brower) are of interest. The latter presents his and Brower's now well-known material-constitution model of the Trinity, which is still highly discussed in philosophical and theological conversation on the doctrine. The former puts forth the provocative argument that social Trinitarianism reduces to a kind of polytheism and thus is incompatible

with orthodox Christian teaching. He compares social-Trinity models to the kind of polytheism we see in Egyptian Amun-Re theology, claiming that if the latter is a kind of polytheism – and it clearly is – then so is the former. It is worth noting that this essay was originally published in 2006, and it is not listed among those that have received any updates in this volume. Many developments in social Trinitarianism have occurred since this time, particularly in the works of the late Keith Yandell, William Hasker, and others. I would be interested to see if Rea would consider these social-Trinity models as susceptible to the arguments presented in this essay.

Part I of volume 2 contains three essays on the topics of the Incarnation, the doctrine of sin, and the atonement. He considers the metaphysics of original sin, probing questions concerning the notions of original guilt and Jonathan Edwards's theory of original sin. Of particular note in this essay are Rea's arguments against the original-guilt versions of the doctrine. In 'Hylomorphism and the Incarnation', Rea advances a hylomorphic model of the incarnate Christ. This model has many similarities to his material-constitution theory of the Trinity discussed in volume 1 in that it (1) brings the metaphysical insights from hylomorphism to bear on the doctrine at hand and (2) emphasizes the strategy of providing numerical sameness without identity to offer a coherent model. As with the material-constitution model of the Trinity, if one has good reasons for rejecting hylomorphism, then one probably won't find Rea's model of the Incarnation all that persuasive. Nonetheless, it is a robust model that merits thoughtful consideration.

The essays in Part II of volume 2 focus on the problems of evil and divine hiddenness and worship. Rea's essays in favour of sceptical theism are republished here and always merit a fresh consideration. Rea's work on divine hiddenness offers creative and intriguing solutions to the alleged problem bearing the same name. These essays also contain postscripts addressing responses to their previously published versions, one of which came from Schellenberg himself. The essay 'Protest, Worship, and the Deformation of Prayer' is the only new essay to appear in volume 2, and it concerns the inclusion of appropriate space in liturgy for protest. The book of *Psalms*, which includes a great number of protests, seems to warrant such considerations, though 'impious protest' and the 'deformation of prayer' seem to be in tension with the principle that God everywhere and always deserves worship – from everyone. Rea offers interesting insights here, arguing that both impious protest and deformed prayer can be consistent with a worshipful disposition towards God.

In conclusion, Rea's *Essays in Analytic Theology* offers much to chew on, though many philosophers of religion and analytic theologians will already be familiar with the bulk of its contents. Having these essays brought together in a single place is a great convenience, and the two new essays, as well as the added postscripts, offer interesting contributions to the fields of philosophy of religion and philosophical theology that are worthy of thoughtful consideration.