Book Reviews

Panentheism:
The Other God of the Philosophers, From Plato to the Present
John W. Cooper. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.
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Pascal's warning against the God of the philosophers has taken on a new meaning in recent times. This admonition is typically directed, not against the God of bygone Enlightenment deism radicals, but now rather against classical theism, with all of its purportedly archaic trappings of divine transcendence, immutability, impassivity, and so forth. In contrast, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Jesus—i.e., the God of the Bible—is seen by many theologians today as best represented by panentheism. This God-stance claims greater explanatory clarity of divine-world relationality, and increased accord with the latest and best scientific thinking on the cosmos and evolution, among other benefits. Nonetheless, John W. Cooper takes issue with this ancient theological alternative. In his view, the deity of panentheism is the "other God of the philosophers"—not a closer depiction of the God of the Bible.

John W. Cooper is a professor of philosophical theology at Calvin Theological Seminary. His latest book, *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers, From Plato to the Present* has two intended aims: an historical survey of panentheism, and a critical and apologetic response. The first aim begins with a preliminary overview, situating panentheism in its various historical contexts. Cooper then elucidates some basic terms, such as the word "panentheism" itself and its various manifestations: personal/impersonal, voluntary/natural, classical/modern, etc.

The survey of the historical development of panentheism proceeds from Plato to neo-platonism (Plotinus, Proclus), to Christian neo-platonism (Pseudo-Dionysus, Eriugena, Böhme, etc.), and on into the Renaissance and Romanticism (Bruno, Spinoza, Edwards, Schleiermacher, etc.). The step into modernity is marked with a particularly helpful chapter on Schelling and Hegel, "the godfathers of modern panentheism," along with a chapter on the many nineteenth-century thinkers under their influence (Troeltsch, Coleridge, Emerson, James, Bergson, etc.). Cooper also offers a good overview of twentieth-century panentheistic thinkers, such as Heidegger, Berdyaev, Macquarrie, and Rahner, as well as brief descriptions of some non-Christian panentheistic thinkers: Buber, Iqbal, Radhakrishnan, Abe, and Starhawk. Another fine feature of this book is its devotion of whole chapters to

outstanding modern panentheistic thinkers and movements: Tillich, Teilhard de Chardin, process theology (Whitehead, Hartshorne, etc.), Moltmann, Pannenberg, liberation and ecological theologies, and theological cosmology.

Cooper's critical and apologetic response to panentheism rounds out the book. While rightly emphasizing the complexity of this multifaceted theological position, Cooper criticizes panentheism for (usually) being insufficiently trinitarian and biblical. And after discussing the various issues of God's simplicity, immutability, eternality, transcendence, etc., he concludes: "In my view, properly nuanced classical theism always does a better job than any kind of panentheism in representing the historic Christian faith" (337). Cooper may be right. But he downplays the problematic nature of the historic Christian faith *e re nata*, indicated by the fact that many leading theologians today endorse significant modifications to classical doctrine, such as emphasizing a relational rather than immutable and impassive view of divinity. According to Cooper: "In the twenty-first century, relational views of God are endorsed by a large majority of theologians along a broad spectrum from religious pluralism, on one end, to evangelical Christianity, on the other. These challenges to classical theism have been made for biblical, theological, and philosophical reasons" (15–16). Cooper responds with worthy points, but they are not sufficiently developed; the reply falls flat on a number of topics, particularly on the issues of evil, divine omniscience/foreknowledge, and the reality of religious diversity. This is likely a result of making a history of panentheism the prime task, with critique being secondary, as he readily states.

Throughout, Cooper's tone is admirable. Discussing the arguments of some critics of panentheism, he comments upon the nature of debate, reminding the reader of the value of fairness and civility in discourse: "The tone of some of these rejoinders is sometimes not as helpful as their arguments" (344). This bears repeating!

Cooper does a commendable job of offering a clearly-written survey of this (once?) alternative theological tradition, as well as offering some more specific highlights in the form of chapters on Teilhard de Chardin, Whitehead, Moltmann, etc. And all with admirable empathy/detachment, given his stated commitment to the mainline Reformed tradition. Where his study comes up short, however, is in the lack of effective response to the reasons why panentheism is now so popular in the first place. If one desires greater elucidation of some of those reasons given by contemporary panentheists, the volume *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God's Presence in a Scientific World* (eds. Clayton and Peacocke) is recommended. Otherwise, John W. Cooper's *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers* is a fine historical survey, recommended to all who desire an accessible overview of the subject, regardless of theological commitment.