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Preprint

Mats J. Hansson, *Understanding an Act of God: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis; Studia Doctrinae Christianae Upsaliensia, Vol. 33), Uppsala, Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1991; 158 pp., price not indicated, ISBN 91-554-2807-X.

This unrevised Swedish dissertation does not deserve much praise for the aesthetic quality of its style or composition. It does, however, make an interesting contribution to the discussion of divine agency in philosophical theology. The question to which Hansson tries to find an answer is: given the extent to which occurrences and events in the world can be explained by science, is there any room for particular divine actions? In an analysis which draws upon the contemporary philosophy of (human) action (introduced in chapters 1-3), H. distinguishes between interventionist and non-interventionist accounts of divine agency. On non-interventionist accounts, such as that of Bultmann and Maurice Wiles, God may be responsible for the existence of the world as a whole, but He does not make a causal contribution to any specific event occurring in the world. Insofar as these accounts admit the identification of any specific events as particular divine acts, this is not because God has made a specific causal contribution to the occurrence of these events, but because they seem to be in line with God's will for the world. The problem with these accounts is that they are unable to secure even a minimal causal efficacy (ch. 5-6). But are interventionist accounts more acceptable? H. rejects the appeal which is sometimes made to the indeterminism in nature which is attested to by contemporary science; this indeterminism occurs only at a micro-cosmic level and not at the macro-cosmic level of observable objects, so that it would only account for God's agency at a micro-cosmic level. Therefore H. looks for a more acceptable form of interventionism, which he finds by emphasizing the conditional character of laws of nature. These allow us to predict what is going to happen: when circumstances $x_1 - x_n$ occur, y will happen. Among the conditions included are negative conditions (events that if they occurred would prevent the occurrence of y), and among these negative conditions is the absence of (human) intervention, which might prevent the occurrence of y . H. suggests, then, that since human intervention is compatible with the law-ordered regularity of nature, there is no reason to suppose that divine intervention is not (ch. 7). He completes his project by developing a way to distinguish between divine acts and other events (special divine acts must [1] be exceptions from regular behaviour, [2] concentrate on an individual person, group of persons or situation and [3] resist reduplication) (ch. 8), and by arguing in a rather superficial way that if God is an agent, He must exist in time (ch. 9). Summarizing: an interesting thesis, especially in the critique of non-interventionism (ch. 5-6), the development of H.'s own interventionist proposal (ch. 7) and his discussion of the distinction between divine acts and other events (ch. 8).

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[490 words]