Religious Studies **37**, 109–122 Printed in the United Kingdom © 2001 Cambridge University Press

Book reviews

Matthew C. Bagger *Religious Experience, Justification, and History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Pp. ix + 238. £37.50 (Hbk). ISBN 0 521 62255 7.

This is a difficult book to review. Applying the principle of charity, I arrive at a reading of the text, which nevertheless has the consequence that the text often omits what it needs, but supplies what is superfluous. I will give a brief surface description of the contents of the book, then outline my rational reconstruction of the best line of argument which I can extract from the text, and finally make some criticisms of what I take to be Bagger's defence of this argument.

After an introductory overview (chapter 1), Bagger's chapter 2 discusses William James's views on experience, as found in *The Principles of Psychology* and *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. He broadly endorses the former, praising especially the way in which James rejects any idea of a given in experience. He also endorses a pragmatist, context-relative account of explanation which he finds expressed in James and developed by van Fraassen. Chapter 3 then uses this concept of explanation to explicate justification: a justified belief is one for which someone has offered explanatory reasons. Rival views are criticized in the next two chapters: chapter 4 argues against Forman's defence of the possibility of a pure consciousness, unaffected by background beliefs, while chapter 5 criticizes Alston's account of religious experience, with its denial that religious experience need encapsulate any explanations at all. A long chapter 6, taking up a quarter of the whole book, then gives a detailed social and psychological analysis of St Teresa's religious experiences. A final chapter argues that, although supernatural explanations were rationally acceptable in earlier ages (e.g. to St Teresa and her contemporaries), they are incompatible with 'our' modern epistemic values, and hence that religious experience yields only a poor defence of theism. Just as Hume tried to show that supernatural explanations of putative miracles are always incredible, so Bagger tries to show that supernatural explanations of putative religious experiences are likewise incredible.

From the foregoing, I extract the following line of argument: (A) We can distinguish within all perception between a phenomenological and an objective description of the experience. (Bagger prefers the terminology of 'phenomenological' and 'causal' experience, 123–124). Let us call these inner and outer

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412500245526 Published online by Cambridge University Press

experiences for short, remembering that the distinction is not between kinds of experiences but between kinds of description of experiences (so that a given experience is either merely inner, or both inner and outer). (B) For all perception, the objective description of experience is answerable to the best explanation of what is described by the phenomenological description. (C) In the case of religious experience, the invoked explanation is a supernatural one. (D) Supernatural explanations are never the best. So (E) No claim that a religious experience falls under an objective description is justified. So (F) Religious experience provides a very poor defence of theism.

This sets out a very interesting and very substantive line of thought. If it is cogent, it would undermine recent attempts by such authors as Swinburne, Alston, and Gellman to defend theism by an appeal to religious experience. How far does Bagger succeed in supporting such an argument? Minimally, his argument requires support in at least four areas. He needs: (1) an account of perception/experience, to support his assertion that encapsulated within experiential reports there is an implicit explanatory claim; (2) an account of what an inference to the best explanation (IBE) is, or perhaps, more modestly, an account of what a best explanation is, since he is fairly uncommitted on the issue of whether any real *inference* need be involved (5, 47); (3) an account of the natural/supernatural distinction, since he tells us that the natural is in principle acceptable and the supernatural unacceptable; (4) some argument for saying that no supernatural explanation is acceptable. Some of this supporting material Bagger attempts to supply and some he does not. Let us take them in turn.

(1) What is Bagger's account of experience/perception? Bagger's account of experience is largely developed in chapter 2 from his study of James. This discussion has some interesting reflections on James's ideas, but it is unclear why Bagger casts his discussion in this historical form. It is true that his final position has some similarities to James's own (although on a number of issues it is uncertain how far Bagger is endorsing the views he attributes to James), but the similarities are not so striking as to justify the protracted discussion of James.

The view that emerges is that all experience is conceptualized, in the sense that any kind of awareness of it is awareness of it as having this or that character (125). Possibly Bagger also believes that experience is propositional in nature, i.e. that experiential reports have the form 'S perceives that something is the case'. No experience, whether inner or outer, is either immediate or infallible, in the traditional foundationalist sense, since all experience is mediated by language, previous knowledge, prior experience, expectations, interests, and values etc. Bagger here invokes Sellars and Gombrich as modern precursors of broadly the theory he accepts.

In the outline above, I presented Bagger as claiming that it is outer experience which provides an explanation of inner experience: we explain the event of, e.g., Fred's having an auditory experience as of God speaking to him by saying that God

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really is speaking to him. More generally, Bagger's thought is that claims about religious (outer) experience are justified to the extent that they provide the best explanation of a person's (inner) experience. And these claims about outer experience in turn entail the existence of God. This is clearly how experience, explanation, and existence are meant to combine in at least some of the authors (e.g. Swinburne and Gellman) whom Bagger is criticizing. In other words, inner experience is the *explanandum*, and outer experience is the *explanans*. But Bagger's own text regularly goes against this view. He explicitly says that he will use the term 'experience' only in the phenomenological sense (96, 124), and he combines this with an insistence that experience *in that sense* includes inferences to the best explanation (see, e.g., p. 58 and a score of other places). I suspect that Bagger has confused the two claims: (a) that inner experience has certain preconditions, e.g. conceptual preconditions; and (b) that inner experience involves IBEs.

He takes (a) from his reading of Sellars and Gombrich, and then wrongly thinks that one of the preconditions of inner experience is the acceptance of an IBE. It is a slight confirmation of this diagnosis that Bagger is strangely reticent about *what* is explained by the hypothesis that, e.g. Fred has an inner experience. He speaks sometimes of the experience as explaining a 'stimulus', and once as explaining 'an event presented to consciousness' (203). But the latter sounds as if it is itself an inner experience, rather than something explained by a report of an inner experience. The consequence is that there is a confusion running through the whole text about what Bagger takes to be the *explanans* and the *explanandum*. His words require one interpretation; his line of argument requires another.

Bagger also errs in not distinguishing between the different kinds of presupposition that Sellars and Gombrich have in mind. Expectations and concepts, previous knowledge and values, relate to experiences both inner and outer in different ways that are glossed over in Bagger's account. If Fred expects to see a car when he looks in his garage, that may increase the probability that he will have a car-like inner experience, and that he will actually see a car (if there is one to be seen). But it is clearly not a logical precondition either of his having that inner experience or of his seeing the car that he have that expectation (or any other expectation, for that matter). What we perceive can come as a complete surprise to us. By contrast, if concepts have a role to play in experience, it is surely as logical preconditions. Here the point would be that Fred cannot see that there is a car unless he has the concept of a car, or perhaps that Fred cannot see a car unless he has some more general concepts (space, time, substance and causality, would do as an initial list). More careful and more detailed thought would be needed to decide whether values, interests, and the other factors which Bagger mentions as mediating our knowledge of our experiences, affect our experiences; and if so, which values, etc. affect which experiences, and in what ways.

(2) The account of IBE: suppose we accept the distinction between inner and outer experience, and also accept that a claim that someone has had an outer

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experience is justified if it provides the best explanation of their inner experience. How then are we to understand the concept of explanation, and of best explanation? Bagger addresses the first question but not the second. His answer broadly endorses van Fraassen's pragmatic account, and shows how it can be extended to deal with problems that Salmon has raised for it. He stresses the historical relativity of what counts as the best explanation of an event, asserting that this is suppressed in modern discussions of religious experience. He is surprisingly silent on what makes an explanation the best, and does not even refer to the fullest current treatment of this topic, namely Peter Lipton's *Inference to the Best Explanation*. The omission is all the more damaging since his thesis is not that an appeal to the supernatural cannot supply *any* explanations of religious inner experiences, but that in the twenty-first century it cannot supply the best. Without any account of what makes an explanation the best, this thesis looks exposed.

(3) What is the supernatural/natural distinction? Given Bagger's claim that supernatural explanations are unacceptable simply because they are supernatural, he needs some way of identifying such explanations. What, then, does Bagger mean by 'supernatural'? Unfortunately, he seems to accept the common but surely mistaken assumption that the distinction is clear. His most detailed explanation comes in his Introduction, which tells us that the supernatural is 'a transcendent order of reality (and causation) distinct from the mundane order presupposed alike by the natural scientist and the rest of us in our quotidian affairs' (15). But this definition will not work. If we take 'mundane' and 'quotidian' in a relaxed sense, then believers who take God to be an omnipresent, daily reality may well insist that he *is* presupposed in their mundane and daily affairs. He is the reality who gives meaning to their lives, who provides daily support and comfort, etc. If, however, we take these two terms in a more restricted sense, it seems that black holes and quantum mechanics will count as supernatural (not to mention virtually any recherché topic of any academic discipline), since they are not presupposed either by the natural scientist or by the rest of us in our daily affairs.

Nor could Bagger solve this problem by simply defining 'supernatural' as 'invoking God', for two reasons. First, this would exclude the possibility of non-divine supernatural entities (the evil, angels, etc). Secondly and more importantly, he uses as an objection to God-invoking explanations the fact that they are supernatural, and this move would be precluded if 'supernatural' just meant 'invoking God'.

(4) Why are supernatural explanations *per se* unacceptable? Given that we have been given no proper understanding of what a supernatural explanation is, our hopes cannot be high that Bagger will succeed in pinpointing some feature of all supernatural explanations in virtue of which they are unacceptable. When we come to his unhappily short discussion of this crucial thesis, (in the final eighteen pages of the book), we find nothing to justify a wholesale rejection of supernatural

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explanation. Instead, there is a medley of logically heterogenous points. Sometimes, Bagger offers an over-simple is/ought move: from the fact that supernatural explanations do not cohere with modern epistemic values, he infers that they are deficient (210, 217). Sometimes he says that we cannot know of any event that it is in principle inexplicable by naturalistic means (211) – which (apart from presupposing that we have an adequate understanding of 'naturalistic') may be true but does not imply that a supernatural explanation could not be the best we have available at any given time. Sometimes, he relies on an *ad hominem* argument: supernatural explanations violate the theist's own epistemic commitments (217, 225). But this point presupposes that the present-day theist is committed to the values which Bagger has selected as 'modern', and there is no reason that the theist need have any such commitment. Sometimes, the 'argument' against supernaturalism is simply question-begging. For example: 'Our naturalism constitutes grounds for rejecting epistemological theories which permit supernatural explanation' (217).

So, Bagger gives no good grounds for his philosophical claim that supernatural explanations as a class can never figure among IBEs. I doubt if he is even right in his sociological-cum-historical claim that supernatural explanations are incompatible with contemporary epistemic values. It is obvious that hundreds of millions of theists do believe that God currently and repeatedly intervenes in the ordinary course of nature. (An orthodox Roman Catholic, for example, surely believes that God transubstantiates the bread and wine for mass on a regular and global scale.) Confronted by such empirical counter-evidence to his thesis, Bagger responds that such believers are being 'intolerably inconsistent' (225). But what is the 'inconsistency' supposed to be? Bagger has not even been able to show that supernatural explanations as a class are flawed, let alone that they are inconsistent with the other inferential patterns that modern believers accept.

Overall, then, the book promises much more than it delivers. Apart from the specific weaknesses noted above, the book does not advance the current debate. That divine intervention is not the best explanation of any experience is a thesis that has already been ably defended by Michael Martin in his *Atheism*, and Martin in fact goes beyond Bagger in giving detailed *grounds* for saying that supernatural explanations are flawed. Nor is the text helped by some poor editing decisions. A random selection of examples: chapter 3 utilizes a contrast between methodism and particularism, neither term being properly explained, and neither appearing in the index; chapter 4 is headed 'Perennialism revisited' – but there is no explanation of what perennialism is, and the word is not even used in the chapter, or anywhere else in the book, or even included in the index (the concept is used by some authors whom Bagger is discussing); and, as already implied, the scrappiness of the index is a disgrace to an academic publisher with the standing of Cambridge University Press. All this is a pity. Bagger has an interesting thesis to defend, and he has some interesting ideas. What he really needed was a

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412500245526 Published online by Cambridge University Press

much more directive editor and much more critical readers of the manuscript version.

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Paul Helm *Faith with Reason*. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000). Pp. xvi+185. £25.00. ISBN 0 19 823845 2.

Paul Helm's latest book is yet another welcome contribution to one of the liveliest debates in contemporary philosophy of religion. The volume collects revised versions of his 1996 Stanton Lectures in Cambridge, together with two other papers. The book as a whole has many virtues. The style is simple, lucid and well-ordered. The arguments are persuasive, the criticisms of other views perceptive and fair. Helm's more properly theological opinions, which, of course, remain implicit rather than explicit throughout the philosophical discussion, seem to be very sensible and balanced.

The contemporary philosophers who set the agenda for Helm need no introduction: Alvin Plantinga and his version of reformed epistemology, Anthony Kenny's comments on foundationalism, Basil Mitchell on the informal assessment of evidence, D. Z. Phillips on faith, and Richard Swinburne on faith and reason. Helm's own understanding of religious faith differs in various respects and to various degrees from all the views he discusses. He argues that religious faith involves both doxastic elements – propositional content which can be assessed for truth – and a fiducial element which consists in an act of trust. Faith involves assent to propositions, as that God exists, or God has revealed Himself in Jesus; but the trust aspect of faith is not blind. It, too, involves beliefs – that God is trustworthy, that some things (for instance salvation, or divine forgiveness, or eternal life) are worth desiring, and that God is able to deliver what one desires or needs. In all these cases, there is evidence to be assessed, and proper epistemic standards to be identified and observed. Trusting, however is an action, and justifiable actions must rest on reasonable beliefs. But the standards for rationality in action need not be, and in Helm's view are not, the same as they are for rationality in believing. Moreover, whereas faith in so far as it involves beliefs is non-voluntary, faith in so far as it is an act of trusting is voluntary, and the relationships between the two are complex.

The resulting position is nuanced, giving full weight to all the facets of Christian tradition. (Helm sets out to discuss the philosophical issues raised by just one major religion; I suppose that he would think that similar arguments would broadly fit the other major world religions as well.) He rightly rejects purely expressivist accounts of religious belief. More controversially, he is willing to

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defend at least the possibility of some version of a foundationalist account of religious belief, more or less along Plantinga's lines, against Kenny's criticisms; but he himself is more inclined to adopt a coherentist view. He does not think that all the beliefs which a religious believer would have are equally central; nor does he think that they can be insulated from beliefs about other, secular, matters. He argues that not all believers – not even all Christian believers – will agree about which beliefs are more central than others; and also that logically more fundamental beliefs (for instance, that God exists) might or might not be epistemically prior. He emphasizes the importance of the fact that the web of religious beliefs is only part of a much wider web. This fact, he thinks, at least defends religious beliefs from the full force of the objection that a coherent set of beliefs can still be false. But he accepts that there is no knockdown proof of the truth of any religious belief. Basil Mitchell, Helm suggests, cannot make good his claim that one's rational judgement on evidence which is in principle available will suffice to justify religious belief; Mitchell's notion of 'judgement' here is too obscure to be acceptable. But Mitchell's acceptance of the fact that some beliefs are person-relative might furnish him with an argument to account for differences in religious allegiance, as distinct from religious belief. Helm himself, though, holds that coming to hold true religious beliefs might to some extent depend upon one's moral character.

The second half of the book is an extended discussion of the trust which is involved in religious faith. Helm distinguishes between 'thin' beliefs and 'thick beliefs' in terms of their content; thin beliefs are, roughly, the conclusions of natural theology, as distinct from the 'thick' beliefs which characterize the content of any of the great religions. He further distinguishes between thin believing, in which there is no entrusting of oneself, and thick believing, in which there is. He argues that thin beliefs can never give rise to more than thin believing; and it is thick believing which is to be identified with religious faith. The first of these two claims rests on the assumption that there is no particular reason to suppose that the God of the philosophers has revealed Himself, or made a covenant, or made any promises to human beings; and it is these 'thick' beliefs which are required for the entrusting which is essential to religious faith. Moreover, the trust which characterizes religious faith is univocal with trust as it occurs in other contexts, whether personal or (as in trusting to the reliability of one's equipment) impersonal.

Interestingly, Helm is of the opinion that religious faith is inherently unstable, in that it tends to degenerate either into thin belief, or into a purely fiducial attitude more accurately described as hope rather than faith. Deism reflects the first of these declines. Kant exemplifies the second of these tendencies, in that the 'thick' beliefs in God as ultimate rewarder are beyond the scope of rational inquiry; and his contemporary descendant is Bultmann. More surprisingly, Helm also suggests that Swinburne's emphasis on the meritoriousness of religious faith, combined

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with his view that belief-formation is non-voluntary, lead to the conclusion that religious faith must be incompatible with rational conviction.

The book concludes with an examination of the relationships between faith and virtue, and a discussion of the grounds on which one might believe oneself to be a religious believer.

This book will commend itself to many different kinds of readers. Students will find it easily accessible, refreshingly free of jargon and unnecessary technicalities, well focused on the key issues. Professional philosophers in the field will find in it original arguments, and a freshness of approach to some well-worn issues. At least in my own view, it is also very largely convincing. It avoids any temptation to oversimplify religious faith, or to suggest that it is *sui generis* in a way which makes it immune from philosophical assessment only at the cost of emasculating it entirely. I am sympathetic to this book's rationalism, while entirely agreeing that faith not merely embraces the exercise of reason in both its theoretical and its practical modes, but is above all an act of self-commitment and trust. I thoroughly recommend it.

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Mark Wynn *God and Goodness: A Natural Theological Perspective.* (Routledge Studies in the Philosophy of Religion). (London/New York: Routledge, 1999). Pp. xi+228. £50.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0 415 19915 8.

This excellent small book provides the best defence of the design argument that is presently available. Though it seems to me that the author overstates the importance of the design argument when he claims that 'there is good reason to suppose that the demise of theistic belief from a sociological point of view reflects a general sense that the design argument has failed to make its case' (195), a credible restatement of it can still have an important place within natural theology.

Mark Wynn aims to give such a restatement by arguing that it is not the evaluatively neutral aspects of the world that require design, but its value and goodness. He claims that 'the world exists because it is good that it should exist'. Since it is impossible to prove this thesis conclusively, he tries to show that it 'is rationally permissible for some, and not rationally obligatory for all' (1). The elements of goodness in the world on which he particularly concentrates are the world's beauty (ch. 1), and its openness to the emergence of life, sentience and concept use (ch. 2). He then turns towards the principal objection to this line of argument, i.e. 'that the world seems to be productive not only of values but of disvalues' (71). With regard to these disvalues, such as evil and suffering, Wynn argues that God is not obliged to create the best (ch. 3). All that is needed is that the world God

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creates could be the object of rational choice by its inhabitants when placed in an original position (in the sense in which Rawls has introduced the term) in which not merely the social system can be chosen, but the general character of our world. Given the opportunity to inhabit only one world, any choice but a choice for the best world would be irrational; given the opportunity to inhabit several worlds successively, however, we might have reason to choose various types of world, and thus acquire a richer overall experience. And this is the situation we are in, according to traditional theism, which assumes minimally two lives: before and after death (80–81). Moreover, Wynn argues, in a world without evil many of us could not exist, because our identity is formed by nurture as well as by nature, and evil often is part of nurture. That is to say, without evil and suffering many of us would not be who we are. And would it be rational to object to a world without people like us (86–92)? This will not suffice as a full answer to the problem of evil, Wynn admits, but does the transcendence of God not give us independent reason to assume that we are incapable of fully comprehending the ways of God (92–96)?

In brief, Wynn gives a type of greater-good defence (which he dubs 'integral whole approach') which he consequently applies to natural evil (ch. 4). There, he argues that, when natural phenomena are considered in their ecosystemic context, nature appears to be neither wasteful, nor cruel, nor blind. Moreover, he argues that it is unsurprising that we often fail to grasp the value of the natural world, because we lack the necessary familiarity with relevant ecological theory. In ch. 5, Wynn complements the evidential approach of the design argument with two moral arguments for believing in God. He argues, firstly, that the trust relationship that we ideally have with our parents gives us a moral reason to subscribe to their religious views. Subscribing to these views is likely to deepen our relationship with our parents; rejecting them, on the other hand, would imply that the way our parents make sense of their lives is fundamentally mistaken. This argument works in favour of theism only if one is brought up a theist and has a valuable relationship with one's parents. For other people, Wynn gives a different argument. He offers the following analogy: if one receives a message that purports to be from one's beloved wife, this uncertain provenance nevertheless gives us some reason to believe the message. This universe may be read as a message from its creator; does the analogy with the message from one's spouse not show that this alone gives us some reason to accept the message?

(Personally, I found this part of the book one of the least convincing parts. What is supposed in the human example – the existence of a loving marriage relationship – cannot, on the penalty of circularity, be assumed in the religious example – a relation of loving fellowship with God. It is only when one enjoys such a relationship that the possible provenance of a message from God counts as an argument for accepting it; but then, accepting the message as coming from God cannot count as an argument for belief in God's existence.)

In ch. 6, Wynn argues that the design argument is compatible both with the

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classical view of God as simple and immutable and with contemporary views 'of God as an individual person, who is changing (and therefore temporal), and related to things in the world not only as their cause but also in various respects as their effect' (143). What is religiously important is that God 'discloses the nature of existence, in a causally effective way, and offers a radiantly effective synthesis of the goodness evident in created things' (167). In the final chapter Wynn argues that God should not be seen as merely 'a radiant synthesis of the world's perfections', but as 'the necessary complement of those perfections' (188). The goodness of the world is not separable from that of God, nor is the goodness of God separable from that of the world (183–184).

Though the book aims at a specialist audience, it is very accessible. It makes important contributions to the discussion of the design argument, the problem of evil, religious epistemology, and the doctrine of God. That is not to say that it is in all respects convincing. One problem is that where Wynn draws on scientific literature, he mostly draws on authors with an explicit theological agenda that is congenial to his own (e.g. H. Rolston); his case would be much stronger if he had used the writings of scientists without a religious agenda. And secondly, it is far from clear that all of the features of the world that Wynn tries to explain by means of divine design really require explanation. To give an example, in his argument from fine-tuning (ch. 2), he claims that it is very unlikely that a world with potentiality for life-as-we-know-it would come into existence; it is much more likely that another type of world would have come into existence. And consequently, he invokes design to explain the unlikely existence of the actual world. The problem is that the division of types of worlds into 'this type of world' and 'other types of worlds' is rather arbitrary; there is a wealth of conceivable other types of worlds, and the chances for each of these were tiny. Whatever type of world would have emerged, the chance that precisely that type of world emerged would have been very small indeed; so that the fact that the present world emerged in spite of a very small prior probability, does not require explanation at all, but is just what could be expected.

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Francis J. Ambrosio (ed.) *The Question of Christian Philosophy Today*. (New York, Fordham University Press, 1999). Pp. xxvi + 366. £27.95 (Hbk), £13.95 (Pbk). ISBN 0 8232 1982 8.

This collection of essays comes from a conference held at Georgetown University, in which participants from very different backgrounds discussed the relationship of Christianity to philosophy. Most of the papers are followed by a resume of the subsequent question and answer session; a further paper is included

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412500245526 Published online by Cambridge University Press

by a contributor who was not present at the original gathering; and the collection is followed by a 'round-table discussion' in which most of the participants sum up their impressions of the conference as a whole.

There is no unanimity of view about what 'The question of Christian philosophy today' actually is. Several very different questions are addressed by the various contributors. Are philosophical beliefs epistemologically prior to theological beliefs, or the other way round? Does Christianity offer insights not otherwise available which a philosopher should take into account in formulating an integrated overall account of what is the case? Can a Christian believer conduct philosophical inquiry with proper impartiality and intellectual integrity? Is Christian philosophy simply philosophy as conducted by Christians? Behind these questions, obviously enough, lurk others, more fundamental, concerning the nature and point of philosophy, the nature and point of theology, and the relationships between the activities of doing philosophy and theology to one's life in general. All these issues are in play in this volume, though it is not always entirely clear which of them is being considered at any given moment.

The contributors come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams are distinguished analytic philosophers who both come from the reformed tradition in theology; most of the other contributors are Catholics. Several authors share an interest in contemporary French philosophy, including William Richardson, Adriaan Peperzak, Louis Dupré, Jean-Luc Marion, Jean Ladrière, and John D. Caputo; Amy Hollywood is interested in feminism from the perspective of contemporary French deconstructionism, while David Tracy and Patrick Heelan SJ share an interest in method and hermeneutics. If there is any overall conclusion to be drawn from the collection as a whole, it would be that most of the participants see no reason why Christians should find any incompatibility between being believers and being practising philosophers, and indeed are inclined to think that for Christians there is no very sharp line to be drawn between theology and philosophy.

The very variety of backgrounds and styles and presuppositions could have been a source of great mutual enrichment, and an almost interdisciplinary stimulus. Unfortunately, though some of the participants in their concluding remarks say how much they had enjoyed it, and how important it was that such a meeting had even taken place, it seems to me that it was an opportunity which was largely missed. The reason for this is that many of the contributors seem to have made little attempt to write or speak in a language which would be intelligible to interested participants from a different background who were willing to make a reasonable effort. Despite my early upbringing in scholastic philosophy and my subsequent analytical training, I confess to finding some of the papers all but unintelligible, and some others so jargon-ridden as to convey their points only in a very general and imprecise way. I imagine many other readers would be even more at sea.

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But praise where praise is due. The two Adamses contribute characteristically lucid, fresh, and constructive papers. Marilyn McCord Adams has an accurate understanding of just where the key issues lie. One such issue in contemporary epistemology is whether foundationalism is defensible. She is clear that it is not, and that, as a consequence, the kind of rational foundationalism for an autonomous philosophy once advocated by van Steenberghen is untenable. Rather, philosophy uses coherence, not indeed as a definition of what truth consists in, but as one of the important characteristics of truth. The Christian philosopher is willing to accept elements from Christian belief on an equal footing with any other beliefs, all of which together require to be integrated into one coherent system. In the process of integrating them, Christian and secular beliefs will interact and modify one another. It is not in the end very important where, or even whether, one draws a line between philosophy and theology. She makes some interesting comments on her experience as a Christian brought up in the analytic tradition of philosophy, and in her concluding remarks gives a neat account of her soteriology. She is always well worth reading.

Robert Adams's paper on original sin is one of the best treatments of the topic which I have read. He compares and contrasts Catholic and Protestant positions at the time of Trent, Aquinas, Niebuhr, Kierkegaard, and, in particular, Kant. His account is typically precise, illuminating, and balanced. Is it an example of Christian philosophy or of theology? My own response would instinctively be to say that it was theology done by someone who is expert in philosophy; and would that theology were always such. Adams himself makes two important remarks: 'At the same time it is clear that, on pain of schizophrenia, a theory of original sin will be part of a more comprehensive psychological theory and will draw on materials of psychological theorising that are not specifically Christian.' Again, Kant's treatment of original sin,

> **…demonstrates the depth of his engagement with Christian theology, and provides grounds for classifying him as a Christian philosopher, if not an orthodox one. Nonetheless, Kant proposes the possibility of a theory of original sin that makes no essential appeal to religious authority. This possibility is important to the apologetic role of the concept of original sin exemplified in the thought of Richard Niebuhr.**

If I read these two texts aright, Adams wishes to insist that Christian theology should not be 'schizophrenic', in the sense of remaining unintegrated with a sound philosophical view; and it is important for an effective Christian apologetics that it should not be based on an appeal to the authority of Christian revelation. He is surely right on both counts; and at that point, as perhaps Marilyn McCord Adams would also agree, it really does not much matter whether one calls the product theology or Christian philosophy. On a different topic, however, such as Trinity or Redemption, the distinction is sharper, since it is harder, or even

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impossible, to see quite how the topic would even arise without the appeal to revelation.

From a quite different tradition, Jean Ladrière offers an existentialist reading of the issues involved. He carefully considers various senses in which 'philosophy' can be understood. It can be a search for wisdom, or an attempt 'to see reality not simply as it appears, but also as it is constituted'. But, in more modern times, it has also become an effort,

> ... to bring out the conditions of possibility of science and, more generally, of the different kinds of encounter we can have with reality. The reflection is no longer upon the external world, or even reality as such, as it is upon experience as such – that is to say, the field of openness thanks to which we have access to the world, to reality, to being, where encounter is occurring, prior to any interpretation or reconstruction, and from which the life of meaning emerges.

I quote that passage as an instance of a successful effort to speak across the traditions. In theological terms, Ladrière is careful to point out that the work of reason in fact is inspired by the grace of God, and that therefore the practice of philosophy is simply one part of a vast undertaking of which theology, the moral life, and our self-understanding are all valuable aspects.

Patrick Heelan interestingly and controversially claims that the methods of science and of theology are in fact parallel, while taking what I believe to be an anti-realist view of both. And John D. Caputo is able to laugh at as well as comment upon some of the more quirky utterances of postmodern philosophers. Sadly, however, several of the other papers are altogether lacking in clarity and in the ability to transcend the particular styles and preoccupations of particular philosophical traditions. I offer a few sample passages.

Heidegger's question, we are approvingly told, is this:

> Whence comes the ontotheological structure of metaphysics in the first place? How does it emerge out of Being in the temporality of its self-disclosure, itself emerging from a still more original Event (*Ereignis*), the Event that appropriates Being to Time and Time to Being through what has been disclosed to us as the epochal history of ontotheology? How can Christian philosophy survive all that?

> Hermeneutics, by its concentration on text (or even on action as text) provides philosophical clarification of how essential form is for rendering manifestation. Form is not indispensable but crucial for understanding the manifested essence. Moreover, precisely the interest in the in-form-ing of text by such strategies of form as composition, genre, and style (Ricoeur) opens to exactly what a theology or revelation needs; an understanding of the text disclosing in and through form (*Dar-stellung)* a *possible* mode of being in the world.

> God arrives on the scene only when human beings confuse the sacred with reason, with that which governs the world of transcendent beings. Through this process, another transcendence is posited and the realm of objectifying transcendence re-described as immanence. The desire for immanence, for the return to a state of continuity and fluidity, is now hypostasized in that other-worldly, ultrarational, and instrumental transcendence that religion has become in Western society.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412500245526 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> **The soul, then, that secures man's immortality, comes out of the *hommosexual* [sic] and the asexual (so the *a* of *la* is placed under erasure/sacrificed in order to give the *a* to *l'âme*). Thus, it follows that the God of this male economy is in the image of man. By separating the *objet a*, which is supported by the image of like to like, from the Other, the unknowable source and locus of signification and of the paternal metaphor, this identification is no longer possible.**

Those who find such sentences illuminating, or even intelligible, will find in several of the papers in the volume much to think about. For myself, I must confess to being quite unable to determine what it would take for any of these assertions to be true or false, or for any of these arguments to be reasonable or valid, seriously though I tried. It does not appear to me that their several authors made any effort to communicate with anyone except their like-minded colleagues.

Overall, then, a very mixed bag, and a sadly missed opportunity.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412500245526 Published online by Cambridge University Press