Religious Studies **41**, 107–124 © 2005 Cambridge University Press
Printed in the United Kingdom

Book reviews

Religious Studies **41** (2005) DOI: 10.1017/S003441250421753X

Anthony Kenny *The Unknown God*. (London: Continuum, 2004). Pp. 222. £14.99 (Hbk). ISBN 0 8264 7303 2.

This is a collection of twelve lectures given during the last fifteen years, six of which were previously published. Chapter 1 on 'The ineffable Godhead' gives a succinct presentation of the unifying theme of these lectures, namely, that 'it is quite impossible to speak about God; that God is not something to be captured by human language' (11); 'we cannot speak of [God] literally' (16). I take it that Kenny intends his non-literalism thesis to be a revisionary account of 'God'-talk, judging by his remark that his book '*encourages* one to explore the *possibility* of understanding religious language' non-literally (my italics, 4). At any rate, he had better advance his thesis as revisionary, for there can be no doubt that the vast majority of religious persons throughout the ages have intended their talk about God to be taken literally and, moreover, realistically, as making true claims about an objectively existent deity. Since Kenny is charging this mass of humanity with suffering from a massive delusion, speaking nonsense without being aware that they are, there is a great onus placed upon him to give ample support to his non-literalism thesis.

There are two key questions that must be raised about Kenny's non-literalism thesis. Exactly what is it? And what reasons are there for accepting it? It will be seen that Kenny's response to both questions fails to meet the severe onus that he has placed upon himself, given that he is charging humanity with being deluded. Although God is completely ineffable, we can speak of God *poetically* and *metaphorically*. We should interpret 'religious discourse in a poetic rather than a scientific mode' (3); 'religious language resembles philosophy and the kind of poetry which endeavours to express the literally inexpressible' (17). This likening of religious discourse to poetry is no help, since poetry is a style of writing and does not address the content, or lack thereof, of what is expressed and, in particular, whether it should be interpreted literally. One can make factual claims in poetry.

Kenny's claim that we should 'understand religious language metaphorically' is also no help (4; see also 16). For a metaphor has some literal content. If I say

that Jones is a lion, although I do not mean that he is literally a lion, it does mean that he literally has some of the distinctive traits of lions, most notably, courage. Furthermore, I must be able to refer to Jones, and this can be accomplished only by an explicit or implicit covering sortal term, such as manhood. Thus, Kenny contradicts himself when he says that God can be spoken about metaphorically although He is ineffable. He seems to realize this when he concludes that 'when we talk in the language of the divine metaphor, we do not really know what the metaphors are about' (45).

Another way that Kenny inconsistently tries to explain his ineffability thesis is by an endorsement of Wittgenstein's position on the mystical in his *Tractatus*, according to which the mystical shows itself even though we cannot say anything about it, which is the basis of his famous remark that whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent. 'In the twentieth century no man surpassed Wittgenstein in the devotion of sharp intelligence to the demarcation of the boundary between sense and nonsense. Wittgenstein finished the masterpiece of his youth with the words ''Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen'' ' (24). This is a clear-cut case of misplaced hero worship; for Wittgenstein not only failed to demarcate what can be said from what can only be shown, but also contradicted himself when he said that the mystical shows itself although nothing can be said about it.

In the first place, in the ordinary sense of say and show, there is no dichotomy between them, since what can be shown also can be said or described. For example, I can both show you some lace from Queen Anne's wedding dress and also describe it. Since 'say' and 'show' are being used in an eccentric sense, some explanation of their meaning is required. But neither Wittgenstein nor his legions of disciples have come anywhere close to supplying this needed explanation. (See 202, 209, and 212 where Kenny invokes this distinction without further ado.) Furthermore, Wittgenstein's claim that the mystical shows itself although it cannot be spoken about is inconsistent, for we would not be able to determine that it was experientially given unless we possessed some understanding of what the mystical is. Mystics, in spite of their protestations of ineffability, manage to describe their experiences quite well, even for the straight community of non-mystics, at least to the extent that non-mystics would know if some day they were to have an experience meeting this description. Of course, mystical descriptions cannot fully 'capture', to use Kenny's qualification of his ineffability thesis (11), what they describe, but this is true of language in general, since there is not a qualitative isomorphism between symbols and what is symbolized.

Surprisingly, Kenny never tries to find a way of giving some descriptive content to our concept of God by appeal to what is phenomenologically revealed in religious experiences, especially apparent direct non-sensory perceptions of God's presence, such as figure so prominently in the writings of recent defenders of their cognitivity, in particular Alston, Wainwright, Gellman, Swinburne, Guting,

Plantinga, and Yandell. Kenny dogmatically asserts 'we have no experience of God' (40), thereby totally ignoring the work of these men. Who is the targeted audience of this book?

The most disturbing part of Wittgenstein's saying–showing dichotomy is his complete failure to give an adequate criterion for what can be said. What can be said is what can be expressed by atomic propositions and truth-functions thereof. The problem is not that Wittgenstein was unable to produce any examples of an atomic proposition, but that the very concept of an atomic proposition is an impossible one. On the one hand, an atomic proposition is claimed to be informative (in fact, the only thing that is), but on the other hand, no atomic proposition entails any other atomic proposition or its negation. For this reason '*a* is red' and '*a* is two feet from *b*' fail to be atomic, since the former entails '*a* is not blue' and the latter that '*a* is not three feet from *b*'. Obviously, if '*a* is red' is atomic, so is '*a* is blue', and thus neither is an atomic proposition. The same holds for sentences that contain predicates expressing values for the physical parameters of different scientific theories. But to be informative, a sentence must have a predicate that excludes other things; the more it excludes the more informative it is. But the predicate of an atomic proposition, whether monadic or relational, excludes nothing.

Kenny's defence of his non-literalism thesis fares no better than does his account of what it is. Much of the book is given to the trashing of theistic arguments. But, even if successful, this would not support non-literalism, only a literalist type of agnosticism. What Kenny does in support of his thesis is to mount a variety of atheological arguments, in which a contradiction is deduced from the theist's very conception of God. It is argued on the basis of Wittgenstein's claim that 'an inner process … needs an outer criterion', that the concept of God as an immaterial mind is meaningless. This atheological argument is based on a highly dubious conception of a criterion, which probably wasn't Wittgenstein's: '[a]ccording to [Wittgenstein] the physical expression of a mental process is a criterion for that process; that is to say, it is part of the concept of a mental process of a particular kind that it should have a characteristic manifestation' (49).

Most people interpret Wittgenstein's concept of a criterion as requiring only that it is an a priori truth that for a mental state or process there is outward behaviour that constitutes evidence for its occurrence, which does not require, as does Kenny's version, that every such state actually is manifested in some outward behaviour. But neither version is acceptable in general. We can ascribe mental states to God on the basis of what is revealed in apparent of-God experiences, including those that fall within the panoply of Plantinga's extended Aquinas/Calvin model of basic warrant, as well as by various worldly manifestations. To do so depends on global considerations that make use of the theist's theory about God and His relations to the world and its creatures.

Another one of Kenny's atheological arguments is that God must be intelligent, but 'the notions of time and change enter into our very concept of intelligence' (80). And since God is timelessly eternal, a contradiction results. Even if Kenny is right that intelligence requires time and change (and this is hotly disputed by Stump and Kretzman, as well as by Paul Helm), it would leave untouched a God that is omni-temporally eternal. The view of God as enduring throughout a time without beginning or end, and not having even the possibility of beginning or ceasing to be, is not only the Biblical view, but also that of a wide array of philosophers, though not of any of the great scholastic theists. In his introduction Kenny writes: 'There is no such thing … as the God of scholastic or rationalist philosophy; but of course that is not the only possible conception of God' (3). Kenny's failure here, as well as everywhere else in the book, to consider a non-scholastic type of deity is an expression of his scholasticism or bust attitude.

Another place at which this narrow-minded approach comes to the fore is in his atheological argument, based on God's foreknowing what will result from His actualizing possible free persons and the created persons acting freely. But in virtue of having such middle knowledge, God exercises a freedom-cancelling control over created persons so that they are not free, thus resulting again in a contradiction. Kenny completely ignores the highly influential attempts of Plantinga and R. M. Adams to dissolve this contradiction. Adams holds that the free-will subjunctive conditionals predicting what would result from the actualizing of possible free persons lack a truth-value, and thus there is nothing to be known in advance, not even by an omniscient being, of what would result from such actualizations. Adams's God is taking a risk in His creation of free persons, and Kenny objects that 'a designer who takes risks of this kind would be less … than the God of traditional Western theism'. That he ends the discussion with this remark is another expression of his scholasticism or bust attitude.

Plantinga, who ascribes middle knowledge to God, must restrict God's sovereignty by precluding Him from determining the truth-values of the free-will subjunctive conditionals, to which Kenny, no doubt, would object that this is too radical a departure from scholastic orthodoxy. No doubt he would give the same response to Swinburne's way out of the contradiction, that allows these propositions to have contingent truth-values but precludes God's being able to know them in advance, as being too radical a departure from strict omniscience. I wonder what Kenny would say about restrictions on God's omnipotence to what it is logically consistent for Him to bring about. A similar move can be made with respect to God's omniscience. Since, supposedly, God's possession of middle knowledge precludes His creating free persons, and it is necessary that God can create free persons, it is reasonable to restrict His omniscience so that He is excused from having to have middle knowledge. What is most unsatisfying about Kenny's book is its failure to consider rival views in the extant literature. This ensures that his book will not be taken seriously by his fellow philosophers of

religion, whose reaction (rightly) should be, 'Why should I bother with your stuff if you don't bother with mine?'

Probably the most dubious claim that Kenny makes in support of his non-literalist thesis is 'that the word ''God'' does not belong in a language-game' (16). 'To say that we cannot speak literally of God is to say that the word ''God'' does not belong in a language-game. Literal truth is truth within a language-game' (35). Not only does this falsely suggest that all language-games involve the making of statements that are true or false, it flies in the face of Wittgenstein's text, at least as interpreted by Malcolm, Phillips, Herbst, Hudson, and Hare. (And, again, Kenny makes no attempt to respond to opposing views in the literature.) Kenny overlooks the fact, as the above mentioned defenders of the cognitivity of mystical experience make manifest, that within each of the great extant religions there is a rich mystical tradition consisting in an established doxastic practice or language-game for making existential claims based upon an experiential input of apparent direct non-sensory perceptions of God, subject to defeat by over-riders consisting in failed tests.

There is a lot in the book that is interesting, but most of it has little, if any, connection with the author's non-literalist thesis and thereof I have remained silent.

RICHARD M. GALE
University of Pittsburgh, Professor Emeritus
University of Tennessee

Religious Studies **41** (2005) **DOI: 10.1017/S0034412504227536**

Bede Rundle *Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002). Pp. xii + 204. £30.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0 19 927050 3.

To ask why there is something suggests that there could have been nothing, and hence that there must be some explanation of why there is nevertheless something. The traditional answer has appealed to the fact that God freely chose to create the universe. He could have chosen differently, and had He chosen differently, the universe as we know it would have been radically different, or there might have been no universe at all. A rival answer comes from science, according to which a fully developed cosmological theory will tell us not just why the universe has developed as it has, but also why there exists a universe to develop in the first place.

Rundle argues that both of these ways of thinking are mistaken, and that philosophy yields a distinctive third form of response. His approach is the typically philosophical one of detecting confusions in the initial question. Consequently,

his own view is more elusive. Just as Kant in the 'Transcendental Dialectic' distinguishes between innocent and vicious readings of the dialectical claims, Rundle detects a pervasive ambiguity in our thinking about the existence of the universe. He wants to say that in a sense, there might have been nothing, and in a sense, that could not be the case. In a sense, there has to be a universe, and in a sense, there does not. In a sense, the universe did begin and in a sense, it did not. Clarity about the issue requires us to distinguish the relevant senses of these apparently conflicting claims, and we will then find that the questions which we initially wished to raise have simply evaporated. In a further extension of his argument, Rundle concludes by arguing that, although we might initially think that the universe could have been radically different (that it might, for example, have consisted simply of minds), in fact it has to take a material or physical form.

Rundle, however, is not opposed equally to the pretensions of theology and of science. The greater part of his book is a critique of theism, not just on the ground that it tries and fails to answer the 'Why anything?' question, but more widely because no arguments in favour of it are plausible, and further because there are compelling objections to it. Accordingly, the opening five chapters criticize the arguments from miracles, from religious experience, from design, and from fine-tuning, and the ontological and cosmological arguments; and endorse the so-called logical problem of evil. Two related thoughts underlie this critique: a general questioning of the meaningfulness of claims about God, and then a detailed application of this scepticism to the specific pro-theist arguments.

The defence of the first of these thoughts leans heavily on verificationism. Rundle seeks to distance himself from the classical positivism of e.g. *Language, Truth and Logic* by claiming first that theological concepts suffer from lack of definition rather than a lack of verification conditions, and secondly that sentences using such concepts are, *contra* positivism, at least partly intelligible. But he also insists that sentences about God involve 'forms of incoherence close to, or actually involving contradiction' (4). Clearly, then, his concession that theological claims are partially intelligible is not one which will comfort the orthodox theist. Theistic explanations are not left in better shape by Rundle's apparently more nuanced treatment than by the original positivist charge of meaninglessness.

In spite of Rundle's eagerness to be post-positivist in pursuing this line of thought, his argument here is seriously incomplete. Firstly, no explanation is given of what definition is, nor of why it is a precondition of meaningfulness. On the one hand, many terms which we properly use we probably could not define – for example, terms for sensory qualities. On the other hand, there are dozens of discussions by both theists and atheists which do offer definitions of 'God'. To exclude them as inadequate, Rundle needs to say much more about their alleged deficiencies. Secondly, although he follows many authors in invoking the charge of 'incoherence', this concept is too vague to do any serious work.

In the hands of different writers, it covers a range of quite disparate weaknesses which need to be distinguished, and it must be argued case by case that they infect theistic claims. (This is especially true since theists have spent a good deal of time arguing that the charge of incoherence is ill-founded – see for example, Swinburne's *The Coherence of Theism*.) Rundle seems to use 'incoherent' to cover sentences which are self-contradictory (itself not a clear concept), those which lack empirical falsification conditions, and those which have a false presupposition. These are very different kinds of failings in statements, and their presence needs to be shown by quite different kinds of argument.

What, then, of the reasons for saying that theism is false – or, if falsity and incoherence cannot coexist, that theism is not true? Rundle endorses the so-called logical version of the problem of evil. 'It is hard to see', he says 'how anyone could regard the pain and misery in this world as consistent with the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing and omnibenevolent deity' (10). Unhappily, the text does not address the lengthy and subtle responses to this version of the problem, developed in recent decades by e.g. Plantinga and others. Nor is there any hint that this line of argument is widely agreed to be a failure. The problem is not, of course, that Rundle rejects a prevailing consensus (I believe myself that the consensus is mistaken). It is that he provides no grounds for thinking that the consensus is wrong.

What about his more specific criticisms? I will focus on Rundle's denial that any sense attaches to the idea that God can produce changes in the world, or even create it in the first place, since this idea is central to orthodox theism. Rundle's discussion starts with causation in general. He argues that the central element in causation is not Humean constant conjunction, nor rationalist necessary connection, but agency. Paradigms of causation are cases of intentional action, like pushing a wheelbarrow or cutting a piece of cloth. In such cases, he says that we have, not cause C producing effect E, but rather an agent C acting upon on object O to produce an effect E. There is no unobservable 'necessary connection' between cause and effect. We simply see the cloth dividing because I cut it, the wheelbarrow moving because I am pushing it. Given this core of cases, he implies that we can generalize the notion of acting and hence of causation to cases where the action (and hence the causal nexus) is not observable, and indeed where there is no intentional agent at all.

If this is our primary conception of causation, the denial naturally follows that God could produce any changes in the universe, or produce the universe itself. For God is essentially non-spatial, non-temporal, and non-physical, and is therefore triply debarred from causal interaction with anything. This denial is then given a semantic twist in the conclusion that '*we have no idea what it means* to speak of God intervening in the affairs of the world' (10, italics added)

Although this account of causation is interesting, Rundle's defence of it is unpersuasive. He does not explain how the extrapolation is made from intentional

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412504247539 Published online by Cambridge University Press

action to cases of causation involving no agents at all; nor why, if the extrapolation is possible, we must regard the intentional cases as primary. If I can just see you causing the barrow to move by pushing it, why can't I just see, for example, a boulder causing the barrow to move by rolling against it? Again, too little attention is paid to prima facie counter-examples to the thesis – for example, to cases of mental causation, or action at a distance, as perhaps in magnetic or gravitational phenomena. Nor is any attention paid to writers who have sought to solve the problems which Rundle raises about how a non-temporal God could have intentions whose existence plays an explanatory role in relation to the world – for example, Paul Helm in *Eternal God*. It is also unclear that Rundle can escape a necessitarian conception of causality. 'What would God have to do', he asks (37) 'to ensure that atoms, say, behave in the way they do? Simply create them to be as they in fact are'. It appears to follow from this that atoms having the nature that they do entails their falling under the laws which cover their behaviour.

The theist, then, might well think that Rundle's hostility to theism in general, or to God's explanatory role in particular, poses no serious problems. But suppose, for the sake of argument, that God has been excluded as a possible explanation. What alternative answer does Rundle think that philosophy can provide to the initial question of why there is something?

Consider first the supposition that there might have been nothing. Many authors have thought it obvious that there could have been nothing. Rundle, however, partly inspired by his quasi-verificationism, thinks the suggestion senseless. He has a variety of very brief arguments for this claim. One is that statements of the form 'Nothing is …' are really statements about everything, not about nothing. ('Nothing is immortal' really means 'Everything is mortal'.) Again, if the universe comes into existence, 'it can only be consequent upon a state of there being nothing' (117), and the beginning of the universe cannot be 'consequent upon' anything. Further, the quantificational interpretation of existential claims always presupposes that there is some domain, some reality, within which the claims are being made. Again, 'there might have been nothing' is not a truth about the way things might have been – hence presumably, it is not a truth at all. Finally, and perhaps most importantly of all, we cannot make sense of a coming to be of X without a pre-existing domain into which the X comes to be; and a state of nothing cannot be such a pre-existing domain (and perhaps Rundle also means that there cannot be a state which is correctly described as 'nothing').

One can well feel sympathy with Rundle's belief here that there is something deeply puzzling about the possibility that there might have been nothing. He thinks that there is an especial difficulty in imagining the nonexistence of space. He says that when we think that we are imagining there being nothing at all, what we are probably imagining is a space with no occupants. But one might well think that the nonexistence of time is more puzzling still. After all, one's mental life

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412504247539 Published online by Cambridge University Press

is apparently non-spatial, but none of one's mental life is even apparently non-temporal. (This connects with the fact that time is the form of Kantian inner sense and hence of outer sense too, whereas space is the form of outer sense only.) However, several of his reasons look resistible. They attach implausible conditions and interpretations to claims in this area – for example that a coming-to-be presupposes a pre-existing domain within which the coming-to-be occurs.

At all events, it is clear that Rundle is right to warn us that empty space or eventless time (if such were possible) would not constitute the nonexistence of everything. But thence to conclude that the hypothesis is senseless is a step too far; and it leads him to put forward claims which, on their natural reading, are simply contradictory. 'The universe did not come into existence, nor will it cease to exist' (122) he says; and yet he also agrees with current cosmological theory that the universe has existed for only a finite past time. Rundle suggests that 'talk about the universe as coming into existence is to be *replaced by* talk of its finite duration' (123, italics added), where the rationale for this replacement is supplied by the earlier claim that a coming into existence presupposes a pre-existing framework within which it occurs. But the natural way of thinking of this is that it is *because* the universe came into existence that it has now existed for only a finite time; and in saying this, we need not be committed to thinking that the universe came into existence within an already existing spatio-temporal framework.

Rundle's answer, then, to our initial question is that there is something because there has to be something. It is not that 'the universe exists' is a logical truth but rather that the nonexistence of the universe is inconceivable – a meaningless pseudo-hypothesis. The universe always has existed, although it has existed for only a finite time. It did not come into existence, and hence we do not face the question, '*why* did it come into existence?'. So Rundle's earlier discussion, which argued that God was not a possible explanation for the universe, does not leave us with an explanatory gap. There is no need for science to try to explain what the existence of God could not explain. There is simply nothing that requires explanation.

Having thus argued that there has to be something, Rundle tries in the final part of his book to show that not only does there have to be something, the something in question has to be physical. This conclusion is defended negatively, by trying to show that putatively non-physical candidates (Rundle considers abstract object and minds) presuppose a material world. Although this sounds like a substantive claim, its content is lessened because Rundle does not say what he takes matter to be. On a narrow construal, the claim is arguably false, since modern cosmological theory tells us that, in the very earliest times in the universe, matter as we know it did not exist. For example, there were no atoms in the early stages of the universe's history. On a wide construal of the term 'matter', anything which physics investigates can be called material. The claim that there has to be

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412504247539 Published online by Cambridge University Press

a material world then becomes the more formal idea that if anything exists, it has to be capable of being investigated by enquirers utilizing an appearance–reality distinction. This is an interesting and plausible thesis but an adequate defence of it would take us into territory which Rundle does not explore.

Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing is elegantly written. It rightly reminds us that in thinking about questions of ultimate explanation, it is often hard to be sure that we are making sense, and that we must constantly beware of mistaken pictures and false assumptions. But it also suffers from ignoring the attempted solutions to these problems which have been propounded by theists, and the dissolution of metaphysical puzzles which it proposes is implausible. This reader, at least, was left convinced that there are some deep puzzles about the universe which do not evaporate in the face of such truths as that there are no times before the beginning of time, that we cannot ask where space came into existence, and that 'nothing' does not describe an ethereal kind of reality.

NICHOLAS EVERITT
University of East Anglia

Religious Studies **41** (2005) **DOI: 10.1017/S0034412504237532**

Jerome I. Gellman *Abraham! Abraham! Kierkegaard and the Hasidim on the Binding of Isaac*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003). Pp. vii + 125. £40.00 (Hbk); £16.99 (Pbk). ISBN 0 754 61678 9 (Hbk); 0 754 61679 7 (Pbk).

Ten years on from his *The Fear, The Trembling and the Fire*, Jerome Gellman revisits the binding of Isaac, or the *akedah* as it is known in Hebrew, in this collection of essays that combines reworked chapters from *The Fear* with a number of subsequently published articles. The thematic parallels between the Hasidim and Kierkegaard that were the focus of the earlier book reappear with some significant changes of emphasis, culminating in an attempt to counter the tendency amongst Jewish and non-Jewish thinkers alike to portray the *akedah* as the paradigm of the faith experience. In the newer material Gellman argues that instead the *akedah* is a call 'to overcome paradigmatic thinking altogether' (9).

The broad parallels drawn in the introduction identify Kierkegaard and the Hasidim as exemplars of a nineteenth-century turn to subjectivity, with their interpretations of the *akedah* in particular taken to illustrate how radical this turn was. Nonetheless, in contrast to *The Fear*, the Hasidim of the title are now a more exclusive group – two Hasidic masters in fact, whose thought 'reverberates with the existential depth of Kierkegaard's writings' (7) – Rabbi Nachman of Breslav

and Mordecai Joseph Leiner of Izbica (the Izbicer). Gellman tempers the comparisons of the earlier work by showing that the early Hasidim are far less Kierkegaardian, barely acknowledging any sense of existential torment for Abraham during the *akedah*. Indeed, to feel the emotional conflict would have equated to failure of the test. The trial of the *akedah* was whether Abraham would prove himself a true servant of God by eradicating all paternal feelings for Isaac in favour of absolute dedication to God, thereby achieving *bitul hayesh* or self-nullification. As Gellman points out, for the Hasidim the inwardness is that of absolute devotion, not Kierkegaardian anguish.

In a sense, it is this ambivalent relationship between the Hasidim and Kierkegaard that is at once both the strength and weakness of the book. The study of Hasidism is burgeoning in the contemporary academy, but Hasidic thought is paid scant attention by philosophers, with most scholarship following Gershom Scholem and focusing on its mystical forbears. But using the particular example of the *akedah*, Gellman has succeeded in bringing to light some radical and thought-provoking themes in the ideas of two Hasidic masters that raise serious philosophical questions about the nature of religious faith and practice. Precisely for that reason I was left craving rather more analysis of these issues in place of what seems at times, to this non-scholar of Kierkegaard, problematic parallels that might turn out therefore to be tangential to what is most interesting about the Hasidic concepts. One example of this is the central theme that carries over from *The Fear* – the supposed analogy between Kierkegaard's teleological suspension of the ethical (TSE) and the Izbicer's concept of 'sinning at God's behest' (SG). Based upon the verse at Psalms 119, 'When it was time to act for God, they violated your Torah', the idea that at times a standing law must be transgressed for the greater good of the Jewish legal system of *halakhah* has been used as a juridical principle since rabbinic times. However, the Izbicer's innovation is to extend this to individuals in their own private worship. This theme in the Izbicer's thought, which can be understood against the general background of the Hasidic concern that dry routinized worship was replacing genuine devotion to God, dictated that particular individuals at particular times had to be ready to hear the divine voice, even if that voice appeared to demand setting aside the law. Gellman takes this idea of sacred sin as indicating, like TSE, a willingness to transgress for the sake of God and act in a way that is 'beyond the ethical', beyond any teleological rationale, purely because it is the will of God.

Gellman has argued that, for Kierkegaard, the *akedah* is not about the contradiction between general moral rules and a specific divine command, but is rather a parable about the need to transcend the ethical, or more specifically Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*, as a mode of self-definition in favour of authentic selfhood in which one's decisions are taken in pure subjectivity as an atomic individual. TSE designates Abraham's transcending all conventional modes of self-definition,

symbolized here by the father–son relationship, and choosing to act 'in unfettered individuality, before God' (38). SG, according to Gellman, bears a striking similarity to this understanding of TSE as a need to 'justify the action apart from, and independently of, the shared network of social structures which determine one's place with others in a common ethical framework'. Thus, SG 'involves acting, or … the *readiness* to act, in a way that violates the ''universal'' system of obligations and prohibitions that constitutes the covenantal community of the Jewish people' (66). But it seems to me that this comparison ignores some significant complications.

Gellman says that in this system 'the universal coincides with the religious' (66), and whilst at one level this system is a public communal structure, the Izbicer would surely understand it as a divinely ordained system. As Gellman himself writes, it is one's preparation 'to transgress *the command of God*, if God should so wish' (67, emphasis added). Unlike TSE therefore, SG cannot straightforwardly be identified as an act of rebellion against a conventional 'universal' system, for the Izbicer both begins and ends in the sphere of religion when speaking of SG. Thus, the question arises whether, from a Kierkegaardian perspective, what we have here is a clash between the ethical or universal and the absurd, or a clash between the absurd and the absurd, which would not therefore be TSE. The underlying problem here seems to be the equivocation between a Kierkegaardian existentialist understanding of religious faith and a Hasidic existentialist understanding that is nonetheless still mediated by a set of public (halakhic) norms. Ultimately, by identifying the religious system with the universal for the purposes of SG, Gellman is able to push through the analogy with TSE, but in so doing he sacrifices what appears to be an essential element of the Izbicer's understanding of that religious system.

Applied to the *akedah*, we therefore end up with the following dilemma: either Abraham is starting out within the religious sphere even prior to the specific command to sacrifice Isaac, in which case we have an example of SG, but not TSE, or he is not starting out in the religious sphere prior to the command to sacrifice Isaac, in which case it is not an example of SG. Whilst there might be ways of pushing the analogy through, it seems to me, at the very least, that one cannot gloss over this difference from TSE.

None of this detracts from the fact that the chapters on Kierkegaard and the Izbicer throw up a number of interesting ideas, but the parallels between the two are at best far more nuanced and, regardless of the possible analogies, many of the concepts under discussion seem to me worthy of further analysis free of the constraints of the particular comparative arguments. There is also much of interest in the newer material, where a certain polemical intent is often evident. In a chapter devoted to feminist critiques of the andocentric approach to the *akedah* in which atomic selfhood is made paradigmatic for all humankind, Gellman uses traditional midrashic material on Sarah to argue for the more

modern conclusion that both the male and female voice are necessary for the religious personality and that the memory of *akedah* ought therefore to be the memory of both Abraham and Sarah.

It is, however, in the first chapter that stands alone in its treatment of Reb Nachman, that we find a particularly intriguing reading of one of Reb Nachman's parables, which is treated as an oblique commentary on the *akedah*. Here, the *akedah* is taken to symbolize Abraham's recognition of the comic nature of all divine service, his realization that we are comic fools whose actions simply 'proclaim God's infinity and that our desire to serve God can never be fulfilled' (17). Indeed Gellman extends this idea to its farthest limits in writing that ultimately even with revelation 'what we *call* revelation … represents our deepest desire to have God communicate with us. If we believe God has really communicated with us, however, we transgress the proper understanding of God's picture as an empty portrait' (18). Gellman's interpretation here, that appears to speak of embracing the meaninglessness of worship with a knowing sense of irony, is a good example of his unearthing Hasidic ideas whose radicalism, from the perspective of Jewish thought, has been obscured over time with the movement's assimilation to the mainstream of Judaism.

This Jewish radicalism also informs the final chapter in which Gellman turns to the debate between the contemporary Jewish thinkers Yeshayahu Leibowitz and David Hartman over which of the Biblical 'Abrahams' truly represents Jewish spirituality. Is it the assertive Abraham who argues over the fate of Sodom, asserting his right to autonomous moral judgement and the dignity of humanity, or the submissive Abraham of the *akedah*? Gellman argues that the contemporary significance of the *akedah* is not to be found in either. The point of the *akedah* is that it breaks paradigmatic thinking altogether. Having previously, at Sodom, thought it inconceivable that God would act against morality, Abraham now accepts it and 'attentively listens to what God might say' (113). The juxtaposition of the two texts represents resistance to the idea that one's deepest selfhood can be identified in certitude with a single paradigm: 'Contemporary spirituality exists when biblical episodes are possibilities, not paradigms.' (116). Though Gellman is quick to limit the potentially antinomian consequences of this for the halakhic system, one cannot help but notice the swipe taken here at current trends in elements of Orthodox Judaism as well as a more general critique of the certitude of fundamentalists of all persuasions.

Paul Ricoeur has presented Kierkegaard as a non-philosopher who provided philosophy with material for reflection. The characterization of Kierkegaard can be questioned, but not the fact that he provides much material for reflection. Much the same could be said of this book. Whether or not Gellman is right about the Kierkegaardian parallels, in this highly accessible and often fascinating read he has certainly provided much material for reflection that will be enjoyed by theologians, students of Judaism, and philosophers alike. The latter group in

particular might only regret that the issues have not been subjected to further analysis in their own right.

DANIEL RYNHOLD
King's College London

Religious Studies **41** (2005) DOI: 10.1017/S0034412504247539

John Haldane (ed.) *Mind, Metaphysics, and Value in the Thomistic and Analytical Traditions*. (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002). Pp. xi + 225. £34.50; $45.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0 268 03467 2.

In his introduction to this collection of essays, all but one of which are new, John Haldane comments that 'one of the merits of studying the history of philosophy … is that it encourages the realization of just how parochial and prejudiced one's assumptions and ways of thinking may be' (ix). A number of these essays can be read in this spirit, as attempts to show how contemporary analytical philosophy, in particular, may be brought to rethink some of its assumptions through exposure to the methods and concerns of medieval philosophy, and especially the writings of Aquinas. For instance, in his own essay, Haldane argues that 'reductive physicalism is untenable and non-reductive physicalism is in something of a mess' (67), and that certain Aristotelian-Thomistic proposals offer a more promising way forward – for example, the idea of a non-physical relation of formal identity between mind and world (68). Similarly, Richard Cross argues that Aquinas's version of substance dualism is a useful addition to the standard analytical repertoire of solutions to the mind–body problem. Other essays which can be read as Thomistically-informed contributions to current analytical debates are those of: Jonathan Jacobs (who also appeals to the notion of formal causation, to give an account of the fit of concepts to world), Stefaan Cuypers (who defends a Thomistic version of agent causation), Gerard Hughes (who argues for a recovery of the Aristotelian-Thomistic understanding of potentiality, and a correlative correction of logicizing accounts of possibility), and Gyula Klima – who argues that 'the Aristotelian position that things have essences implies the modern claim that things have essential predicates in the modern sense, thereby providing the required underpinning for the modern claim' (189).

Other contributions have more obviously an exegetical or historical character. In this category may be included the essays of Fergus Kerr, who sets out Aquinas's case against the idea that 'our own minds are accessible to us by some kind of direct inward perception' (4); David Braine, who argues for Aquinas's philosophical originality, taking his treatment of the relationship of the active and

potential intellects as an example; David Oderberg, who expounds Thomistic accounts of individuation; Christopher Hughes, who considers Aquinas's responses to two arguments which purport to establish the incompatibility of divine omniscience and the contingency of the future; and Martin Stone, who argues that 'Thomas's relation to ethical naturalism … is ambiguous' (207). Finally, there is Christopher Martin's broadly Thomistic account of the relationship between voluntary action and non-voluntary causation, which may usefully be read in conjunction with Stone's treatment of some related themes.

All of the essays in this collection are of a very high standard, and they exhibit the combination of historical and textual sensitivity and rigour of argument that one would expect of analytically trained students of medieval philosophy. The authors all have broad sympathy with the methods of analytical philosophy, and I think most would concur with David Oderberg's judgement that analytical philosophy is 'the School's only legitimate heir' (125). At the same time, their contribution to a volume such as this shows that they have some reservations about the analytical approach, and think that it can be in some way completed by, or set in new directions by, a greater familiarity with the concerns of the medievals. Oderberg himself seems to think that the role of analytical philosophy is mostly to enable a clear, contemporary formulation of the position of the medievals, commenting that: 'Nothing in philosophy approaches, in precision, refinement, and fecundity, the philosophy of the School' (125). Similarly, Haldane remarks that analytical philosopher and Thomist each have 'something to learn from the other: one, the benefits of analytical acuity, logical rigour, and dialectical power; the other, the merits of a genuinely non-reductive and non-egocentric metaphysics' (73). This formulation, like Oderberg's, suggests that the task of analytical philosophy is in part to supply a set of expository and clarificatory tools, and that of the medieval texts to contribute a range of substantive philosophical themes which invite further exploration.

I take it that most of the authors in this volume believe that the question of God, and associated metaphysical questions, constitutes one particularly important theme which is prominent in medieval philosophy, and ought to receive – through engagement with the medievals – closer attention in contemporary analytical writing. In fact, only a few of the essays in this volume address questions in philosophical theology at all directly. However, the idea that the 'naturalistic-cum-scientific turn' in analytical philosophy needs qualification (Haldane, 58), or that our understanding of the human person may hinge on the notion of substantial form, understood as a '(non-physical) property bearer' (Cross, 50), or that we need a causal notion of possibility of the kind that might prove fruitful for formulations of the cosmological argument, or that action is irreducible to non-voluntary causality; all of these ideas, together with others in this volume, point the way towards a re-engagement with the concerns of theistic metaphysics. The general shape of such a metaphysics is clear enough already,

both in the work of the medievals and in the writings of their modern analytical expositors, but the authors of this volume are surely right to suppose that there is still much to be done, and this volume stands as a testament to some more promising lines of enquiry.

There is one proposal in the text which points in a rather different direction, both because it shows some sympathy with a contemporary non-analytic style of philosophy, and because it seems to acknowledge the possibility of another, more practically or experientially informed kind of theistic metaphysics. Haldane quotes with approval Merleau-Ponty's observation that:

> Our bodily experience of movement is not a particular case of [intellectual or conceptual] knowledge; it provides us with a way of access to the world and the object … which has to be recognised as original and perhaps as primary … . [To know how to type] is knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort. (57, bracketed phrases in Haldane)

And Haldane expresses enthusiasm for 'the possibility of incorporating Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and Wittgenstein's ''grammatical'' insights within a broadly Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics' (59).

It would be good to hear more about how such an enterprise might be carried through. Following the example of the passage Haldane quotes, we might wonder, for example, about the possibility that saintly experience and practice embodies a kind of understanding which is not simply 'a particular case of intellectual or conceptual knowledge' – and which is therefore not obviously equivalent to the kind of understanding that is available in Thomistic metaphysics. And in turn, we might wonder about how the content of a Thomistic metaphysic is to be related to this other kind of understanding. Being clearer about that connection might provide another way for Thomists to engage contemporary opinion – in this case it would be a matter of showing how the Thomistic perspective meshes with ordinary religious life and commitment, so addressing religiously motivated concerns about the adequacy of the approach, rather than (as in this volume) philosophically motivated concerns.

But setting aside this sort of question, we might ask about the success or otherwise of the essays in this volume which seek to show the importance of Thomistic philosophy for contemporary analytical debate. Let me offer some brief comment on three recurring themes in this volume – Thomistic accounts of the mind–body relation, agent causation, and the conformity of concept to world.

Richard Cross argues that Thomas's dualism of mind and body has a better response to the problem of interaction than Platonic dualism. For example, commenting on the possibility of body-to-soul linkage on Aquinas's account, Cross observes: 'Being that in virtue of which a human body has the essential properties which it has is itself a property of the soul. And this is tantamount to a second claim: that the human soul in some sense includes (some of) of the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412504247539 Published online by Cambridge University Press

human body's essential properties as parts' (48). Hence 'the causal influence of the human body on the human soul can be explained by the soul's being causally affected by one of its own properties' (48). I am not sure how far this proposal makes for a more intelligible account of the action of body on soul than is available on alternative versions of dualism. If we allow that the soul includes some of the body's properties as parts, then perhaps we can explain easily enough the action of the body on the soul and vice versa; but the soul's having some of the body's properties as parts flows, on this approach, from the fact that the soul is 'that in virtue of which' the human body has its essential properties. And we want to know how this latter relationship of soul and body is possible. It is not clear to me that this relationship is illuminated by the thought that the soul includes some of the body's properties as parts – isn't it rather the case that we can only understand what it is for the soul to include some of the body's properties if we already have some account of what it is for the soul to be that in virtue of which the body has its essential properties? At any rate, as Cross acknowledges, this account seems to need further development, if it is to establish that a Thomistic perspective on these questions deserves closer attention in contemporary analytical discussion.

In his paper, Stefaan Cuypers defends a version of agent causation, but in keeping with his Thomistic presuppositions, he still concludes that God determines the will. Some readers will wonder whether this version of agent causation marks much of an advance over standard analytical treatments of human agency in terms of event causation. Cuypers emphasizes that 'God does not violently coerce the will. On the contrary, God determines the will according to *its own nature*' (106, Cuypers's emphasis). But analytical compatibilists can also allow, of course, that when free, the will is determined 'according to its own nature'. This is evidently another large issue for Thomists who are concerned to engage the contemporary philosophical scene, not least because many contemporary philosophical friends of theism are also sympathetic to libertarianism.

Lastly, Jonathan Jacobs comes to the defence of Thomas's appeal to 'forms', writing that: '[f]orms are not occult entities inaccessible to empirical investigation and the methods of science' (112), for we can understand what it is to have the concept of 'dog', and to reliably discriminate dogs, in these terms: 'To have this ability is for my mind to be informed in some determinate way, *by what dogs are* … . Concepts can be concepts of what they purport to apply to because mind and object are alike in form' (112, Jacobs's emphasis). This does indeed seem to remove some of the mysteriousness of the idea that appeal to forms may help to explain the fit of concepts to world, but it might also seem to be just a reformulation of what it is (on a realist view) for concepts to conform to the world. Again, this kind of issue has larger relevance for the reception of Thomism in current debate, given the feeling in some quarters that Thomists tend a little to solve problems by terminological fiat.

Notwithstanding these matters, this is a fine collection, which nicely displays the affinity of Thomistic and analytical ways of thinking, and points thereby to the potential fruitfulness of further exchange between the two schools.

MARK WYNN
University of Exeter

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412504247539 Published online by Cambridge University Press