

Book notes

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Erica Appelros *God in the Act of Reference*. Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Theology and Biblical Studies. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001). Pp. vii + 220. £40.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0 7546 0544 2.

Erica Appelros's book is yet another contribution to the study of realism and religious language. Coming down in favour of an approach to the problem of theological discourse which is unashamedly anti-realist, she argues that the rejection of the claim that God exists independently of human mind, thereby reducing God to a mere human construct, does not mean that God is no longer an appropriate object of religious worship. Arguing from concrete examples of language use in childhood games to other occasions of linguistic convention, she suggests that what human beings consider to be 'real' depends upon their capacities to relate to their 'surroundings'. Such surroundings consist not only of physical things and characteristics but also other constructions of human imagination and language. Having outlined her 'theory' of religious language, Appelros proceeds to apply it to a whole host of problems in philosophical theology and debates concerning the existence of God. To those already familiar with the realism debate in contemporary philosophy of religion it is difficult to detect anything in Appelros's tome that might be said to advance the discussion beyond its present parameters. That said, the book does survey a wide range of literature and attempts to put before the reader a concise summary of the salient issues that attend its chosen topic. The book is well produced by Ashgate although its exorbitant price will ensure that it is bought only by libraries.

[M.W.F.S.]

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Brian J. Shanley OP *The Thomist Tradition*. Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy of Religion. (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002). Pp. xiii + 238. £60.00 (Hbk). ISBN 1 4020 0078 2.

This is the second volume in Kluwer's ambitious new series, 'Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy of Religion'. Shanley's work provides a treatment of the central topics of contemporary philosophical theology and religious epistemology from a Thomist point of view. Beginning with an overview of Thomism in the twentieth century, the succeeding chapters discuss the relationship between religious claims and other statements of truth, religious language (especially the problems of analogy), theology and science, suffering and evil, religion and morality, human nature and destiny, the concept of God, and religious pluralism. The author's aim is to provide

the reader with an comprehensive survey of the spectrum of Thomist positions, beginning with Thomas himself and then moving through his most important recent interpreters. By means of cross-referencing related topics, the book most helpfully situates particular problems in the philosophy of religion within the larger context of Thomist thought. Detailed bibliographical references direct the reader to a vast array of primary and secondary sources. Shanley's knowledge of twentieth-century Thomism is exemplary, and he displays a calm familiarity with an imposing body of texts in several languages. As it stands, this book is a very fine introduction to the many different varieties of Thomist thought that presently find expression in English, French, Italian, and German philosophy. *The Thomist Tradition* will prove itself to be welcome resource for those who wish to know more about contemporary Thomist thought.

[M.W.F.S.]

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James Beilby (ed.) *Naturalism Defeated? Essays on Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism*. (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2002). Pp. x + 283. £13.50 (Pbk). ISBN 0 8014 8763 3.

Having putatively cuffed the twin huns of the 'evidentialist objection' and natural theology in present-day philosophy of religion, the more recent work of Alvin Plantinga has concerned itself with an evolutionary argument against naturalism. Plantinga's new onslaught is aimed at metaphysical naturalism or roughly the view that no supernatural beings exist. Naturalism is typically conjoined with evolution as an explanation of the existence and diversity of life. Plantinga's argument is that one who holds the truth of both naturalism and evolution is irrational in doing so. More specifically, his claim is that because the probability that unguided evolution would have produced reliable cognitive faculties is either low or instructable, one who holds both naturalism and evolution acquires a 'defeater' for every belief he holds, including the beliefs associated with naturalism and evolution. James Beilby's collection is concerned with the truth or otherwise of this argument and assembles a varied cast of characters who discuss Plantinga's suggestive hypothesis in some detail. In the course of their discussion they broach many themes that are germane to the study of cognitive science and the epistemology of explanation. Among the contributors are philosophers both sympathetic and unsympathetic to the conservative theism advanced by Plantinga. They include: William Alston, Michael Bergmann, Evan Fales, Jerry Fodor, Trenton Merricks, Timothy O'Connor, Richard Otte, William Ramsey, Ernest Sosa, W. J. Talbott, and James van Cleve. The collection concludes with a very full response by Plantinga to the contributors' essays. Beilby's volume raises numerous issues that are important for the future study of the philosophy of religion, and it is to be expected that it will be widely read and will elicit much comment.

[M.W.F.S.]

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G. R. Evans *Law and Theology in the Middle Ages*. (London: Routledge, 2002). Pp. viii + 258. £17.99 (Pbk). ISBN 0 415 25327 6.

A quite prolific author, Gillian Evans examines in her new book the tension between ecclesiastical and secular authority in medieval Europe by focusing upon the relationship

between legal and theological responses to concepts such as justice, mercy, fairness, and sin. Divided into six parts and twenty-four chapters, the book considers such subjects as the justice of God, the tensions between canon lawyers and theologians, the teaching of law and theology, and the medieval idea of equity. Writing in a characteristically clear and unpretentious style, Evans manages to convey the seriousness with which medieval thinkers thought about the law, and how they directed their understanding of such a human institution to more rarified thoughts about God and eternity. As such, Evans's book is an excellent introduction to this most fascinating of topics and will provide simple instruction to students who come to this complicated subject for the first time. The volume presupposes no knowledge of Latin and provides lucid and elegant translations of the primary sources. Of particular interest is Evans's discussion of the medieval doctrine of equity. This concept, construed out of a reading of Roman law, Aristotelian philosophy, and Christian theology, helps to present medieval thinkers as sane and balanced judges who were fully aware of the shortcomings of legal procedure and any hard-hearted application of rules and statutes to the problems of human life. Evans's book is a genuine contribution to the history of ideas which helps to make accessible one of the more attractive aspects of medieval civilization. It is highly recommended.

[M.W.F.S.]