

Book reviews

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John Leslie *Infinite Minds* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 2001). Pp. x + 234.
£27.50 (Hbk), £14.99 (Pbk). ISBN 0 19 924892 3 (Hbk), 0 19 924893 1 (Pbk).

Due to his laborious efforts, there are two strands of contemporary philosophical literature with which John Leslie is closely identified. The first concerns cosmic fine-tuning, the design argument, and the anthropic principle; the second, the so-called ‘Doomsday Argument’ to the effect that we have good grounds for expecting the human race soon to perish. In this book – just released in paperback – Leslie concentrates on ideas he first began pursuing over thirty years ago, most notably in *Value and Existence*. According to Leslie, the best explanation (an explanation he thinks is only a bit more likely than not to be true) for the existence and nature of the world is that it is *good* that there exists a world with that nature. Indeed, *every* good world – every world worth thinking about – exists, insofar as some infinite divine mind has a complete complex of eternal thoughts that are that world. Leslie thinks that his pantheistic explanation has better resources than theism does for addressing a variety of problems for religious belief, including the problem of evil, the nature of immortality, and divine passibility. Furthermore, it is more in tune with two ideas that feature in contemporary physics: the holism of quantum mechanics and the four-dimensionalism that Einstein thought the theory of relativity suggested about the nature of time.

The package Leslie offers is, as he recognizes, quite alien to most contemporary analytic philosophers of an empiricist bent – philosophers who think the question: ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’ is misguided, or even a pseudo-question. Nozick, who made that question the title of chapter 2 of *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), cautioned ‘the question cuts so deep ... that any approach that stands a chance of yielding an answer will look extremely weird’ (116). Leslie’s answer to that question involves so many departures from conventional philosophical wisdom that it lacks a natural expository starting point. To present his theory, he says (4), ‘one has to paint a huge picture at speed, conscious that every brushstroke can earn raised eyebrows, incredulous stares, or worse. One has to do this because the

elements in the picture make sense only when seen as a whole'. This fact, combined with the rich complexity of his arguments, makes it impossible to do justice to *Infinite Minds* in a short review. The best I can do is briefly to characterize key elements of Leslie's package, while reminding the reader that this is no substitute for a careful reading of the book.

The first element is *pantheism*. Every item in the world, from stars to selves, is simply part of a divine mind, the thinking of which constitutes all of reality. That is, the contents of the divine mind are not representations of some independent reality composed of particular substances; rather, stars and selves *just are* bundles of divine thoughts. This metaphysic is a natural result of combining the view that concrete objects are just bundles of properties (no underlying substances allowed!) with the view that divine representations of concrete objects, unlike our representations, contain every feature of the items represented. What marks off some part of a divine mind as a person, a star, or a tree is the particular unity possessed by that bundle of thoughts. Support for pantheism comes from the intuitions that only conscious states can have the necessary sort of unity (structural unity will not do) and that only unities are candidate bearers of intrinsic value. Divine minds provide just this sort of unity.

Leslie's *Platonism* tells us why there must exist something intrinsically valuable. Here, Platonism refers to the view that there are creative ethical requirements – that is, necessary truths about how things should be, the truth of which is responsible for the existence of those things. Contrary to the standard view of Platonic objects, according to which they are merely impotent *abstracta*, creative ethical requirements can bring about certain states of affairs, although there is no mechanism or causal story behind this bringing about. An important advantage of this creation account is that it eliminates theism's middleman. According to theists, a divine act of will creates the world, with God's perfect goodness regulating this will. Leslie suggests that goodness itself does the creating. How it does so is no more mysterious than how God does so.

The most novel element of Leslie's theory is his extension of *infinetism* – the view that possession of an attribute to an unlimited degree is less arbitrary metaphysically than possession of that attribute to a limited degree. Although, in Leslie's case, infinetism is a consequence of Platonism (you cannot have too much of a good thing!), as a general matter infinetism suggests there is a metaphysical bias toward reality's possessing whatever attributes it possesses to an infinite degree. The infinetist intuitions of Leslie lead him to a consequence that would startle even Spinoza. Since a divine mind is of tremendous value, and since it would be a good thing if as much value as possible existed, reality is not limited to just one divine mind. Rather, there are infinitely many divine minds, infinitely many bundles of thoughts about things worth thinking about. These infinitely numerous infinite minds all think separate entire realities, meaning that there are infinitely many worlds. This does not mean, however, that every possibility

whatsoever is actually thought by some divine mind or other. Only the possibilities worth thinking about are actually thought.

The 'worth-thinking-about' qualifier is extremely important. For one thing, it helps resolve the problem of evil. The existence of a state of affairs can be ethically required without that state of affairs being the best possible, so it is no complaint against the goodness of that which is responsible for the existence of things that things are not as good as they might be. Still, even if our world is overall worth thinking about, is a grisly beheading also worth thinking about? Yes, Leslie would say, if the beheading is part of a reality that possesses causal unity. If not for the need for causal unity, a world might be peppered with miraculous disruptions for the sake of preventing evil. Leslie thinks that, because of this need for causal unity, there can be much evil in a world that is nonetheless worth thinking about.

Furthermore, if causal unity contributes to a world's being worth thinking about, this can help resolve the problem for induction that one might have thought Leslie's theory generates. If there are infinitely many divine minds, there will be many divine minds thinking of worlds that are just like ours up till now, but which then subsequently go haywire. If so, why not think we are in one of those worlds? But if we did think that we were in such a world, how could we trust induction? Leslie responds that experiences in lawless, haywire worlds are among the many experiences not worth having. 'The matters which God contemplates in detail are those which are worth contemplating in detail', he tells us (37). 'Worlds in which the laws of physics suddenly break down are not.' Since such worlds are not worth thinking about, no divine mind contemplates them, they do not exist, and so we do not need to worry that we are in one of them.

It is not so obvious to me that haywire experiences are not worth having (perhaps I need to try LSD). Even if Leslie is right that massively disordered experiences are not worth having, though, what about worlds in which there are occasional 'blips' – short term, local violations of the laws of nature? In such worlds, cars never turn into pints of Guinness and Timothy Leary never becomes Pope. But there are less extreme deviations from perfect causal orderliness; in blip worlds, the deviations are far more subtle. A jet engine fails to start even though its parts are in perfect repair – thus thwarting a hijacker. A patch of sidewalk briefly turns slippery even though it is dry and clean – causing the man running away with a stolen briefcase to slip. Experiences of these blips would be anomalous, but we humans are quite good at disregarding the occasional anomaly. A life would still be worth thinking about, I suggest, even if it included a short bout of uncaused haywire experience. Granting this, it seems we should distrust induction and disbelieve statements of natural law, since, with respect to worlds worth thinking about that are just like this one up till now, there will be far more worlds with some blip just over the experiential horizon than worlds in which nature proceeds uniformly.

It should also be noted that Leslie's picture leaves no room for genuine contingency in the world. Creative ethical requirements are synthetic necessities, Leslie says. Since the infinite divine minds issue directly from the creative ethical requirements, and all of the particular aspects of a world are simply regions of eternal thought in the corresponding divine mind, nothing in any of the existing worlds could be any different. This will obviously be an unwelcome consequence for those who believe in libertarian free will. Like Spinoza, however, Leslie is a compatibilist. It is a mistake, he thinks, to take his system as implying that there is no room or need for moral effort. 'That the divine mind cannot be improved upon, and that our universe is just part of it, says nothing outside that mind could be imagined as able to do anything to improve it. We, however, are supposedly *not* outside it', he says (139). 'We are inside it, and our good or bad actions can make our region of it better or worse than it would otherwise be.'

All in all, Leslie's pantheism is as provocative a metaphysical picture as one can find nowadays. Theists not trained in philosophy will almost surely reject it, finding abhorrent the idea that we are parts of the divine mind. We are imperfect and limited. To make us part of God is to diminish the supreme being. The right approach – the traditional approach – is to separate us from God, created from creator. This will require substances – concrete objects – wholly distinct from God, though of course dependent on God for their coming to be and continuing to be. Yet this commitment to the existence of concrete objects other than God supports an argument for atheism. This atheological cosmological argument moves from the existence of concrete objects other than God to the *nonexistence* of God. If God is the greatest conceivable concrete being, then, quite plausibly, a possible world consisting of God alone – of no concrete objects but God – is the best possible world (or is tied for the best). After all, how could there be anything better than a world containing just the greatest possible being?

It is a short step from this idea to the idea that, if God does exist, no other concrete beings do – or, at least, to the idea that if God does exist, there is no reason at all for Him to create any other concrete beings. Yet clearly there are other concrete beings, right? 'No', says the pantheist. Thus, we can think of Leslie as offering theists a way to block the atheological cosmological argument. If they do not want his help, I advise them to come up with a better solution. If they cannot, I recommend they read *Infinite Minds* with great care; pantheism may be the only way to retain belief in a divine reality.

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Andrew Moore *Realism and Christian Faith: God, Grammar, and Meaning*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Pp. xi + 269. £47.50 (Hbk), £17.95 (Pbk). ISBN 0521811090 (Hbk), 0521524156 (Pbk).

According to Andrew Moore, realism includes three theses: that there is an external reality (the metaphysical claim), that we can know it (the epistemological claim), and that we can make true statements about it (the semantic claim). Since Immanuel Kant's deconstruction of traditional metaphysics, these theses have been sharply contested, not least in theology. In *Realism and Christian Faith* Moore first critiques two main responses to the resulting problematic which he terms 'theological realism' and 'non-realism' and then develops his own alternative 'Christological realism'.

After setting out the debate over realism in chapter 1, Moore summarizes and critiques theological realism (chapters 2 and 3). This view attempts to ground our relation to divine reality via a twofold procedure. First, it prescindes the particular Christian doctrines of Incarnation and Trinity for a generic 'philosophical' theism. Then it grounds theological knowledge through an analogy with scientific knowledge (if we can believe in the unobservable theoretical entities of science then we can believe in God). Moore critically engages with a number of scholars here, including Janet Soskice, Wentzel van Huyssteen, and Arthur Peacocke. He argues that this philosophical theism results in an idolatrous picture of God, and that the analogy between theological and scientific knowledge breaks down due to the significant differences of disciplines. As such, the attempt to ground the threefold realist claim through theological realism fails.

In chapter 4 Moore turns to engage critically the theological non-realism of D. Z. Phillips and George Lindbeck. Like Moore, Phillips emphasizes the idolatrous consequences of abstract realist approaches to doctrine. However, Phillips's focus on generic forms of life ultimately neglects the grammar of God and thus loses the realist normativity of Christian practices. The most notable casualty is the realist claim: 'As his work stands, Phillips never manages to make clear that Christian practices intend anything other than themselves or their practitioners' (91). Lindbeck has been a common target of realists for his holistic/communal approach to reference and meaning, and his claim that reference is limited to first-order utterances (to the exclusion of second-order theology). While Moore moderates these charges, he admits that Lindbeck's marginalization of second-order discourse is problematic. Moreover, Lindbeck also fails to build on uniquely Christian beliefs as his general theory of religion is shorn of specific Christian particularities (101). On the contrary, Moore contends that we only have reality under a certain description – the particular narrative rooted in

the Christ-event – and that thus any attempt to find a neutral space to attain a general theory of religion is futile.

Over against both theological realism and non-realism, Moore lays the foundations in chapter 5 for his own Christological realism. In so doing, he seeks to unite the realist sentiments of theological realists with the sensitivity to the grammar of faith among Wittgensteinians. The basis of Moore's argument is the claim that God is the grammar of our faith in that he (Barthian-style) regulates our practices and enables our language to be effective: 'Ultimately, it is God who engages the running-gear and grants idling tongues to become vehicles of praise' (111). God enables this to occur within the context of Christian community: 'where obedient practice is accompanied by recital of story, belief is warranted that God will make these actions meaningful to those who participate in them, that He will be their intended grammar' (120). Philosophy operates as a divine gift to enable the articulation of this process but God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ maintains epistemological and ontological priority over every other explanation of reality and our relation to it (129).

Based on this strongly Christologically-centered framework, Moore begins, in chapter 6, to establish this grammar by discussing realism in light of Christ's work on the cross. The possibility of representation is established as soon as we realize that Christ is the *eikon* of God. However, representation is not guaranteed for fallen creatures, but is only firmly re-established as we are incorporated into Christ. In chapter 7 Moore fills out the epistemological and ontological bases of our knowing God in Christ by turning to the broader context of the doctrine of God. The concept of covenant as shaping Christian narrative understanding is developed here and serves as the focal point for the discussion in chapter 8 on speech-acts. Moore argues that the root speech-act for us is God's promise in the covenant as He reveals His name, but with the teleological meaning coming in Christ both as speaker and hearer of the promise.

In the final chapter Moore consolidates his argument. He claims that metaphysical realism is committed to the existence of 'one complete and true description of the world'. In contrast, Moore believes that we only have reality under a certain description. But while this may lead to relativism, it is a relativism of all truth to Christ: God has relativized our conceptual schemes to Himself in the narrative revelation of Christ. It is on this basis alone that we can speak meaningfully of and know God.

Realism and Christian Faith is an ambitious work which engages with a wide range of sources in order to develop a uniquely Christian alternative to theological realist and non-realist approaches to doctrine. Along the way Moore makes some fascinating points. For instance, when he comments on the Incarnation as the locus of representation/correspondence, he interprets the Crucifixion as a condemnation of non-realist reductions of Christian doctrine, for here we find 'the nadir of the tendency throughout Israel's history for religious practices to be

pursued as though they were self-sustaining and autonomous' (145). Moreover, Moore's treatment of Phillips and Lindbeck is admirably restrained and reflects a charity and balance often lacking among other realist critiques. Finally, in my view, his uncompromising commitment to think through all matters metaphysical, epistemological, and semantic in light of the particularities of Christian doctrine is an eminently worthwhile project: Trinity and Incarnation are not simply theological paradoxes to be 'solved' or set aside behind the veil of mystery; they are essential heuristic keys to unlocking the deepest mysteries of reality.

While I concur enthusiastically with these points, closer analysis of the argument in *Realism and Christian Faith* reflects important weaknesses and raises significant questions. I will focus first on Moore's critical treatment of theological realism and then turn to assess his own theory of Christological realism.

As noted above, Moore's critique of theological realism is based on the worry of idolatry and the dissimilarities between scientific and theological theorizing. While I am sceptical that Moore has undermined the validity of the latter parallel, I will focus here on the success of his charge of idolatry. Moore is committed to the Barthian thesis that Christians should reject 'monotheism', and so quotes with approval Walter Kasper's denunciation of the 'heresy of theism' as 'ultimately a form of idolatry' (33). I have never thought much of this thesis. The last time I checked, monotheism still meant 'belief that there is only one God', surely an unassailable doctrine for Christians. Apparently not for Moore, who argues that we should adopt a 'biblical henotheism' (31, n. 28). I suspect that Moore takes this position due to his overriding fear of idolatry: if theological reflection apart from specific Judeo-Christian revelation is inherently prone to idolatry, and the doctrine of monotheism is likely derived, at least in part, from overtly philosophical influences (e.g. Philo), then monotheists are prone to idolatrous thinking about God. Hence, better to be on the safe side and embrace henotheism which clearly has a strong biblical ground.

This reasoning shifts the spotlight onto the claim that thinking about God apart from uniquely Christian doctrine is prone to idolatry. Unfortunately, I can only begin to deal with this contentious thesis here. This thesis is hampered by the problem that, apart from viewing philosophy as 'gift', Moore does not adequately explain how philosophical reasoning properly informs theology. In particular, Moore does not explain why a description of God proffered by philosophical theology is not at least *partially* correct; why this all or nothing stance (e.g. faithfulness or idolatry)? On the contrary, by utilizing Thomas Morris's argument from possible-worlds modality, we can establish (with certain stipulations) that the deity of perfect-being theology – e.g. the individual who exemplifies the maximal set of compossible great-making properties – *is* the Judeo-Christian God. Morris argues that if the God of PBT is *possibly exemplified* (that is, if He exists in at least one possible world), then He exists in *all* possible worlds

(*necessary existence* being a great-making property). It thus follows that He exists in the *actual* world. In light of that fact, surely the most reasonable conclusion is that the God of PBT is Yahweh. One would *think* this should not be a stretch for Moore since he refers to the Christian God as *ens realissimum*. Where then is the idol?

Another problem arises because Moore's critique of theological realism is tendentious and thus in danger of erecting a straw man. This will become evident if we consider his primary characterization of (philosophical) theism:

Its characteristic features tend to be defined by a concern to articulate in conceptual terms these core beliefs [of the Western religious tradition] and to defend them against the charge that the beliefs in question are irrational, not justified, or lacking in warrant. The defence of theism that most appeals to theological realists is that which holds that belief in a God is justified by the explanatory power of that belief. (28)

According to this definition, theological realism includes a metaphysical thesis about who God is and an epistemological thesis about how God is known. No doubt there are some who would be aptly described by this definition. The problem arises however, when one considers the large number of Christians who are concerned with developing a philosophical conception of deity and yet who *reject* these deontological/internalistic epistemic requirements. (One thinks here of Alvin Plantinga, William Lane Craig, William Alston, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and many others.) One suspects that had Moore considered the work on theological realism undertaken by these philosophers his bold claims would appear significantly weaker.

I find Moore's own position interesting, but frustratingly lacking in details (and isn't that where the devil is found?). The problems begin with Moore's epistemology, which he calls 'dialectical fideism'. Here too his neglect of the philosophers mentioned above is especially conspicuous. Plantinga, in particular, has clarified the crucial issues around the internalist/externalist debate to which Moore seems oblivious. One is thus left wondering how Moore's fideism relates to epistemological externalism. Moreover, Moore's view of noetic structure is cloudy at best, though he does seem to reject any epistemic foundation when he argues that God gives us knowledge as a gift of faith *apart from a priori reasoning* (134). Here other problems arise, for not only is this rejection of aprioricity not supported, but it also depends on a false dichotomy that God does not (cannot?) work through a priori reasoning. But isn't this precisely what occurred when Anselm, following the programme of faith seeking understanding, arrived at his ontological argument through a priori reasoning?

Moore's treatment of realism and non-realism also reveals key points where he has not sufficiently engaged the literature. For instance, he follows Hilary Putnam in saddling metaphysical realism (the view that there is a reality independent of our descriptions of it) with the claim that there is one complete and true description of reality (see chapter 9). No mention is made of the widespread

criticism of Putnam in the literature on just this point. The fact is that whether or not there is one single description of reality is irrelevant to metaphysical realism: that view is simply concerned with asserting that a reality exists apart from human conceptualization. (Here a nuance is required for, as William Alston has shown, one may be a metaphysical realist while still being an anti-realist with respect to some dimensions of reality such as mereological wholes.)

The rest of Moore's argument is hampered by a failure adequately to develop and defend his theoretical assertions and relate them to the wider debates on meaning, reference, and truth. Two points should suffice to illustrate the frustrating limits of the discussion. To begin with, while Moore follows the standard procedure of equating meaning with propositions (200), he goes on to claim that there are three components to meaning: semantic, teleological, and narrative. He then argues that we only grasp *part* of the meaning (semantic) in our utterances; we will not know the full narrative and teleological meaning of our statements until the end. For instance, when the bridegroom says 'Till death do us part' he only apprehends *part* of his meaning and will not *fully* know what he meant until his death. Taken without careful qualification, this is a bold and, I would submit, highly counter-intuitive claim. Why think, for instance, that I do not (and cannot) fully know what I am asserting when I say 'Jasper drove Jamie home', or 'It is cloudy today'? Moreover, how should we understand this ignorance? Does this mean that I do not fully grasp the proposition I utter, or perhaps that there is a nexus of three propositions, only one of which I grasp? Or what? If we accept the first possibility, then this sounds similar to Putnam and Tyler Burge's mind externalism (which Moore does not discuss), but insofar as it does, it is vulnerable to the sceptical implications of that thesis (we do not know what we say).

I am not saying that Moore's thesis is false, but simply that he has not begun to mount a convincing defence of it. For a second example, we can consider Moore's claim that the church finds reference and meaning through Christ while those 'ungraced' are (somehow) threatened with non-meaning. What is lacking is an explanation of how this particular claim explains mundane (and pagan!) cases of reference, meaning, and truth. For instance, if the cat is on the mat and Bertrand Russell says 'The cat is on the mat', does he succeed in making a true statement? If so, then how? Specifically, how does this successful case of reference relate to Christ? These are fundamental questions, and the fact that Moore has not begun to deal with them suggests that there is much work to be done before his argument offers a genuine alternative within the heated debates over realism.

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Joshua L. Golding *Rationality and Religious Theism*. (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003). Pp. vii + 134. £45.00 (Hbk), £15.99 (Pbk). ISBN 0 7546 1567 7 (Hbk), 0 7546 1568 5 (Pbk).

The core contention of this book is that it is rational to be a religious theist. Many philosophers and theologians have focused on the issue of the rationality of theistic *belief*, but Golding makes clear that by the term ‘religious theist’, he means a person who follows a whole religious way of life, which includes not only beliefs or cognitive faculties but also actions.

In order to qualify as a religious theist, according to Golding, one must, in addition to having certain beliefs about God, pursue a good relationship with God by following a religious way of life, i.e. one must engage in those actions that one believes increase the possibility that one will attain a good relationship with God. Deploying a strategy broadly similar to Pascal’s Wager – yet, as Golding demonstrates, sufficiently different from Pascal’s Wager to avoid several standard objections to it – Golding then argues that it is rationally defensible to be a religious theist, even if the evidence for God’s existence is minimal, on condition that one’s conceptions of God, the good relationship with God, and the religious way can be articulated in a fashion that is internally coherent, and on condition that the good relationship with God can plausibly be conceived as supremely valuable. The essence of the argument for the rationality of being a religious theist, in Golding’s sense, is that ‘it makes sense for someone to pursue what he conceives to be an uncertain but very great value, even at the risk of losing a certain but lesser value’ (81).

However, as Golding acknowledges, this argument is only partial, since arguably there is no such thing as a ‘religious theist’ per se. There are, rather, adherents of particular theistic religions. A full defence of the rationality of religious theism must focus on a particular version of religious theism. Thus, in the last of the book’s four chapters, Golding applies the argument of the book thus far to the case of Judaism, concluding that it is rationally defensible to be a religious Jew. The book’s combination of sophisticated philosophical argumentation and reference to major themes in the Jewish tradition make it of interest to both analytic philosophers of religion and to Jewish studies specialists. Throughout, the book is lucid, carefully argued and rigorous.

However, quibbles are possible at certain points. For example, Golding says that one condition of counting as a religious theist is that one conceives of the good relationship with God as superior to any other kind of good that one may attain. This seems to set the bar too high. Golding claims that ‘[i]f he thinks that having a good relationship with God is just as good, or of the same order of

goodness as, for example, having money, we would be entitled to say that his status as a 'religious theist' is in question' (21). But what about deeming a good relationship with God as of the same order of goodness as a loving relationship with, say, one's spouse or children? Golding risks reading all but the most saintly individuals out of the community of religious theists.

More importantly, Golding's overall project seems open to criticism, given his definition of the 'religious theist' as, centrally, a person who pursues a good relationship with God based on mutual love and respect. This definition is particularly suspect in the case of the major example that Golding utilizes, that of Judaism. The notion of 'pursuing a good relationship with God', while clearly far from objectionable, sounds rather anachronistic in the context of an ancient religious tradition and would, I believe, strike many, if not most, actual religious Jews as somewhat wide of the mark when intended as a description of Judaism's central religious objective, whether at the individual or the communal level.

Golding attempts to integrate this key component of his characterization of the religious theist into a Jewish framework by enlisting the concept of *devekut* or 'cleaving' to God, urging that *devekut* is what the religious Jew centrally pursues. But this significantly misrepresents Jewish religious tradition. The root *d-b-k*, when referring to the human relationship with God, appears in five places in the Pentateuch, all in Deuteronomy. As Norman Lamm has shown in a recent study, four of these five occurrences are expressed as or imply commandments, and emphasise obedience to God (Deuteronomy 10.20, 13.5, 11.22, and 30.20). In rabbinic literature, the idea of cleaving to God is usually interpreted in either moral terms (*devekut* means cleaving not to God Himself but to His ways – e.g. as He consoles mourners and clothes the naked, so must we) or in social terms (*devekut* involves the pursuit of intimacy not with God but with those who fear God: thus, one should economically support the Torah scholar, endeavour to marry into his family, etc). The notion of *devekut* as a relationship with God that constitutes a major goal of Jewish spiritual life is of relatively recent vintage, arising in the thought of the Hasidic movement in the eighteenth century (though with some medieval antecedents). Moreover, even within Hasidic thought, *devekut* usually denotes an ecstatic state of communion with God, rather than Golding's 'good relationship' based on mutual love and respect.

Golding's definition of the religious theist as someone who pursues a good relationship with God by following the religious way leads to further difficulties. As he acknowledges (20), this definition seems to exclude a person who engages in what he believes to be certain divinely commanded activities because he thinks that it is his duty to do so. Golding responds that such a person does indeed count as a religious theist, because he is after all striving for a certain kind of 'good relationship with God' – this person's conception of the 'good' or 'right' relationship with God is one in which he fulfils his divinely mandated duty. But this move is unsatisfactory: if Golding's definition of the good relationship with

God is so broad, the question then arises of why the language of ‘relationship’ is necessary here at all, and whether alternative terminology would not better capture what it is that is central to being a religious theist.

Golding draws the natural corollary of his definition of the religious theist for the Jewish context by claiming that the religious Jew pursues the good relationship with God by following the Torah and its commandments. Yet in many traditional Jewish sources – and Golding claims (96) to base his arguments about the Jewish tradition on these sources – a Jew ideally keeps the Torah or fulfils the *mitzvot* (divine commandments) not in order to achieve a good relationship with God, but out of obedience to God’s commands; in Maimonides’ formulation, the Jew should strive to be someone who ‘does what is true because it is true’. Golding notices (116) the objection that, on his view, a Jew who seeks to fulfil the commandments of the Torah strictly out of a desire to obey God’s commands would fail to qualify as a religious Jew. His main response is that a Jew who denied that he pursues a good relationship with God would be denying what the Torah teaches regarding the purpose of keeping the commandments. Yet, as indicated above, it is highly questionable whether this is indeed what the Torah teaches about the purpose of keeping the commandments.

Returning briefly to Maimonides, a fuller characterization of his view concerning observing the Torah is that doing so out of obedience to God’s commands just *is* love of God, the most sublime form of relationship with the divine of which the human being is capable. Golding’s more simplistic model, on which Judaism’s ‘religious end’ is *deveikut* and keeping the Torah is merely the ‘means’ to this end (110) is inconsistent with this influential position of Maimonides.

All of this notwithstanding, the problems arising from Golding’s undue emphasis on the notion of the good relationship with God do not necessarily render his whole argument in the book invalid. Though one would have to rework quite a lot of the details of the argument at certain points, it seems to me that it might be possible, at least in principle, to substitute something less controversial for the ‘good relationship with God’ without vitiating Golding’s overall project of demonstrating the rational defensibility of religious theism. Despite the reservations outlined above, Golding has presented in this stimulating book what is on the whole a nuanced, well-argued, and persuasive defence of the rationality of religious, and in particular Jewish, theistic commitment.

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T. W. Bartel (ed.) *Comparative Theology: Essays for Keith Ward*. (London: SPCK, 2003). Pp. xvi + 208. £19.99 (Pbk). ISBN 0 281 05474 6.

This is a collection of seventeen essays by well-known theologians and philosophers of religion, produced as a tribute to Keith Ward on his retirement from the Regius Chair of Divinity and canonry of Christ Church at Oxford University. The culmination of his life of scholarship is said to be the four volumes of his 'comparative theology', defined by Ward in the fifth and final part of the book as 'comparative, because it compares and contrasts ... various religious beliefs about revelation, God, human nature, and the right way to live', and 'theological, because it is concerned with issues of rationality and truth' (195). Each of the first four parts of the collection is devoted to the main theme of a volume of Ward's tetralogy. Thus, we find contributions from William J. Abraham, Peter Byrne, John Hick, Gavin D'Costa, and Mark Wynn in Part 1, 'Revelation'; from David Brown, Henk Vroom, Vincent Brummer, T. W. Bartel, Paul Helm, John Polkinghorne, and Robert Cummings Neville in Part 2, 'Creation'; from Richard Swinburne, Vernon White, and Richard Harries in Part 3, 'Human nature'; and from Paul Avis and Ursula King in Part 4, 'Community'.

Since all four of Ward's volumes are described as 'comparative theology', it is not surprising that questions about Ward's method of enquiry form a major theme of essays in more than one part of the collection. For example, Polkinghorne points out that the four scholars whose views are discussed in *Religion and Creation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) may not be typical of their traditions, and several authors (Abraham, Byrne, and D'Costa) suggest that Ward glosses over important differences between faith traditions. The same authors also argue that Ward is unfairly critical of those in the Reformed and/or Roman Catholic Christian traditions. And questions are raised about the legitimacy of the Christian standpoint from which Ward interprets the faith of others. Abraham, Byrne, and Hick all object that Ward fails to demonstrate the truth of his own view, although Abraham asks for a compelling case in favour of Christian belief in the Incarnation, while Byrne and Hick apparently regard Ward's alleged failure as indicating an unacceptable lack of neutrality.

In defence of Ward, D'Costa argues that neither Byrne nor Hick adopt the neutral approach which they recommend; they both belong to the tradition of 'liberal modernity' which assumes that there is a neutral starting point from which, with the aid of reason, one can establish truth. But, D'Costa points out, 'there is no confessionally neutral place from which to carry out the task of making sense of the diversity of religions ... Reason, practice and beliefs are always part of some existing, even if not unitary, tradition-bound way of relating

to the world' (35). This is supported by Polkinghorne, who thinks that Ward's approach is 'just right', and is

... suspicious of alternative approaches that claim to be able to stand on some common neutral ground beyond any specific tradition. Too often the latter strategy seems to lead to a 'lowest common denominator' account of religious belief so bland that, in fact, no adherent of a world faith tradition would find it even half-adequate as a description of their own position. (117)

Secondly, D'Costa argues, the claim that the truth of religious beliefs must be founded upon reason is a questionable assumption of modern liberal foundationalism. This is not to say that the believer has no use for reason; she can use it to deepen her understanding of her faith, to show that the arguments of an alternative tradition are incoherent within that tradition, or to argue that her own view provides a better response to the difficulties arising from another tradition within the terms of that tradition. But she is not obliged to show that her tradition is right and another wrong in terms which are acceptable to all parties. At this point, D'Costa suggests, 'one must accept that there might be genuinely irreconcilable and differing starting points, authorities, texts, rules of exegesis, philosophical assumptions, and so on that shape each tradition, such that convergence of beliefs might be very difficult, if not impossible' (36).

D'Costa's second point is, to some extent, supported (although not explicitly so) by Wynn's essay on the relationship between religious belief and the emotions. Taking as his starting point Ward's claim that religious commitment is neither an irrational leap of blind faith nor a compelling inference but a matter of vision and response, Wynn examines three philosophical discussions of the nature of the emotions and says that these can be applied to religious belief in various ways:

We may think of feelings as offering a pre-conceptual appreciation of the world's significance, which may then be elaborated in credal terms ... or as a way of grasping an intentional content (of a value-laden, action-guiding kind) that cannot be grasped in purely verbal terms ... or as a way of moving beyond what is given in sensory or discursive terms, so that our attention is fixed on some as yet unrealized consummation. (53–54).

Wynn argues that, whichever of these views we take, it is clear that emotions are not 'mere add-ons in any developed account of the religious life' (54).

A middle way between Byrne and Hick on the one hand and D'Costa on the other is offered in the essay by Vroom. According to Vroom, neither Byrne nor Hick offers adequate support for the pluralist view that the religions offer different (if, as Byrne suggests, metaphorical) descriptions of the same divine reality. Vroom also rejects the view, apparently similar to that of D'Costa, that 'every tradition is specific and particular, and therefore ideas of a divine being, emptiness, etc. are particular to different groups, and thus contextually specific' (68). Vroom argues that the beliefs of different traditions can be compared, but that we

cannot simply postulate that all ideas of transcendence refer to the same 'thing'; we must give reasons for thinking that some of them refer to 'the same reality'. This view is supported by Polkinghorne, who says that it is difficult to regard all religions as culturally conditioned perspectives on the same reality because the cognitive clashes between them are severe. We must consider not only the obvious points of disagreement – about the status of Jesus or the Qu'ran, for example – but also issues such as the nature of the human person: 'Is the individual human being of persistent and unique significance in the sight of God (as the Abrahamic faiths all affirm), or recycled through incarnation, or ultimately an illusion from which to seek release?' (117).

Vroom suggests that, when comparing 'ideas of transcendence', it is helpful to distinguish between different categories of divine attributes. Ward makes a distinction between attributes of the divine in itself and attributes of the divine in relation to the world, but Vroom notes that it is difficult to categorize the divine attributes in this way because some of them seem to belong in both categories; for example, although God must have power, knowledge and wisdom in Himself in order to bring the world into existence, He also has them in relation to the world because 'power, knowledge and wisdom do not make sense without a relation to something other than oneself' (73).

Building on Ward's suggestion, Vroom distinguishes six functions of the divine and proposes that we should compare ideas of transcendence in relation to them. Vroom suggests that there would be a strong case for identifying the referents of any two ideas of transcendence which shared all six of these functions. However, not all ideas of transcendence share these six functions (in fact, Vroom's subsequent argument implies that none of them do). Vroom therefore suggests that we can distinguish between three different categories of transcendence – cosmic (the transcendent is one with the world, but does not create it), acosmic (the transcendent has no relation to the world), and theist. Although these are all possible interpretations of transcendence, they exclude each other. There is therefore room for debate about which category gives the genuine description of transcendence. Thus, Vroom concludes, in doing comparative theology we must not make sweeping judgements, claiming either that all religions refer to the same reality or that religions cannot be compared because they can be fully understood only from 'within'; we must compare the phenomena carefully and provide arguments for our conclusions.

While, strictly speaking, the other contributors to this volume have not written on the theme of comparative theology (as is claimed on the back cover), Brown, at least, is clearly *practising* Ward's recommended methodology. He considers a range of alternatives to creation (emanation, pantheism, panentheism, monism), suggesting that some of these are more subtle than is often assumed and that, although they differ from characteristically Christian options, they are sometimes closer than an initial look would suggest.

If ‘comparative theology’ encompasses not only comparisons between different religions but also between different interpretations of the same religion, or between different points of view, any of which may be common to more than one religion, this includes the remaining contributions to the volume – although, in each case, the contribution is prompted by a view expressed by Ward in one of his published writings. Thus, in Part 2 (‘Creation’), Brummer argues, against Ward, that it is possible to say that all talk of God can be metaphorical without implying a non-realist model of God. God must be described in metaphorical terms because His being and existence are unlike any example of being and existence in our human world, but His real existence is a presupposition for those committed to the religious form of life. Bartel presents an interesting case *contra* Ward in favour of compatibilism – the view that causal determinism is compatible with human freedom or moral responsibility. Helm asks whether the universe is in every detail as God intends it to be, and considers two versions of the view that it is – the infralapsarian view that Creation precedes the Fall and redemption in the divine mind, and the supralapsarian view that redemption precedes Creation and the Fall – that Creation and the Fall are for the sake of redemption. And Neville argues that any account of God’s being and relation to the world must be sufficiently vague to tolerate anything which science might plausibly believe to be true. For this reason, it is difficult to make specific claims about God’s being and nature and therefore, when this is attempted – as when we say that God is personal, for example – such claims must often be understood in an analogical sense.

In Part 3 (‘Human nature’), Swinburne considers the different attitudes of western and eastern religions to embodiment. He argues that, in this life we need a body which is prone to wrongdoing in order to have choices between good and evil, and that those in heaven need bodies in order to interact with each other. White compares different views of uniqueness and argues that Jesus could be regarded as unique, not just in the sense in which we are all unique, but also in the sense that he is ‘a universal paradigm of the value of all particularity’ (150). And Harries offers a summary of the history of the tradition regarding the moral status of the early embryo. He observes that, although abortion of an unformed foetus was always regarded as a grave sin, ‘for nearly 1,500 years, until 1869, the western tradition drew a distinction in the seriousness of the wrong depending on whether the foetus was formed or unformed’ (160). He suggests that the distinction carried by this tradition remains valid, and that it must be taken into account when considering the significant potential good that research on embryos could lead to.

In Part 4 (‘Community’), Avis considers whether a bishop can be a theological explorer, or whether he must be just an exponent and defender of received tradition. Avis agrees with Ward that a comprehensive church should permit or even encourage a plurality of interpretative traditions, and offers guidelines on how to

apply this in practice. These guidelines are intended for bishops and, to a lesser extent, clergy, but many of them could be applied by anyone wishing to make academic theology accessible to believers not trained in the discipline – as Ward has done throughout his career. Finally, King notes Ward's claim in *God, Chance and Necessity* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1996) that religion shows the heart of God, but says that little of this heart comes across in this book. Thus, her essay focuses on Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's interest in the power of love to bring humanity closer together, and the further development of this power which is necessary for the future wellbeing of the human community. Following Teilhard de Chardin, she argues that the Christian insight that God is love 'must be fully fathomed by modern theologians ... so that it assumes a place of importance equal to that of reflections on God's mind and intelligence' (187).

This book will be of interest to both theologians and philosophers of religion. Some contributions would be accessible to undergraduates – including Brummer on metaphor, Bartel on compatibilism, Swinburne on embodiment, and Harries on the moral status of the early embryo – but others assume a greater level of theological and/or philosophical knowledge and expertise.

Although discussions of the methodology of comparative theology make a welcome contribution to the debate, the book adds little to the practice of comparative theology; the editor admits that it would have been 'satisfying to have had at least one essay from a representative of a non-Christian religion, or at least more discussion of living non-Christian religions' (xiv). Comparative theology in which the comparisons made are largely between different interpretations of Christianity is, perhaps, not much different from the theology which has been practised for nearly 2,000 years.

Nevertheless, this book does highlight Ward's comparative theology as a significant achievement. Polkinghorne suggests that 'the proper understanding of the relationships of the world faiths is a major issue on the theological agenda for the twenty-first century, and probably for the third millennium' (116). On the final page of the volume, Ward says that 'there develops in most traditions the idea of one being or state of supreme value The religious life is one of seeking to apprehend the supreme value and let it be manifest in human life, in face of a constant tendency to egoism and hatred' (198). Whether or not it is possible, with due attention to detail, to argue that all religions – or some of them – successfully refer to the same being or state of supreme value, we may have much to learn from carrying forward Ward's project by participating in the debate.

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A. S. McGrade (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy*.
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Pp. xviii + 405. £45.00
(Hbk); £17.99 (Pbk). ISBN 0521806039 (Hbk); 051000637 (Pbk).

Cambridge Companions appear to be designed as high-level introductory books to their various subjects. The volume on medieval philosophy admirably satisfies this brief. While not always easy, the essays are written in generally non-technical language, and the authors are allowed space to develop broad coverage of the topics assigned to them. The range is wide, from Augustine (very briefly touched on in various essays) to twentieth-century retrievals of medieval thought (ably covered in short compass by John Haldane). Particularly welcome are two extended essays on medieval Islamic and Jewish philosophy (Thérèse-Anne Druart and Idit Dobbs-Weinstein respectively), showing in each case both the internal interest of the material and something of its impact on, and interaction with, the Christian West. The essays in the *Companion* are topic-based (as is customary for this series), and on the whole can be included under the sorts of areas that one would expect to find in a work on medieval philosophy – that is to say, logic, metaphysics, natural philosophy, psychology, and ethics, with some understandable overlaps. One interesting lack is any attempt to justify this division of the subject into these rather modern-sounding areas. There certainly are medieval ‘divisions of the sciences’, and it would be interesting to be shown how these relate to the topics chosen here. But perhaps that would take the work too much in the direction of a graduate or advanced textbook.

For much of the second half of the twentieth century, medieval philosophy was of interest in largely two circles: one consisting of what we might label ‘philologists’ in the old sense – text-based historians of ideas – and the other consisting of analytic philosophers focused on philosophy of religion and/or logic, interested in mining the medieval texts for materials useful for their own philosophical tasks. The *Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, edited by Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg, and now some twenty years old, provided the technical and historical background for this second group of people – a far more detailed and demanding book than the one here under review (the earlier book not aimed, like this one, at the relative neophyte). In recent years, interest in medieval thought has expanded: we now have sometimes to encounter the travesty that has been nicely labelled by one recent commentator ‘Aquinas postmodernus’, and there are well-known theologians who plunder the Middle Ages in their construction of imaginative grand narratives of the decline of Christendom into modernity.

The current fashion in these sorts of circles is to deny that there is any philosophy in the Middle Ages in any sense independent of the queen of sciences, theology. Part of the editor's introduction here provides a spirited refutation of this bizarre and anachronistic thesis. McGrade outlines carefully the ways in which theology and the 'philosophical disciplines' interact, showing that the anti-philosophical view of Tertullian was the exception, not the rule (and he might have mentioned that 'Tertullian's conception of a dividing line between religion and philosophy' was not even a conception that Tertullian maintained for more than polemical purposes – witness his extraordinary appropriation and approbation of Stoic conceptions of the soul in his work of the same name). It is perhaps not to be expected that those thinkers whom McGrade is targeting here will read and understand his admirable introduction; but at least the beginner will be saved from elementary misunderstandings. McGrade balances very nicely, on the one hand, the need to show how very familiar some parts of medieval philosophy are, with, on the other, the requirement not to shirk the evident 'otherness' of various aspects of it. This otherness is revealed in the subject of the second chapter of the book, on two central but somewhat unfamiliar medieval topics – eternity and hierarchy – divided between John Marenbon (eternity) and David Luscombe (hierarchy). These two historians, in their different ways, convey very effectively something of the spirit of medieval thought. The chapter is an imaginative inclusion, and much to be welcomed.

Two other chapters – the fourth and fifth, on Islamic and Jewish philosophy – also stand somewhat outside the general structure of the book. Perhaps because of the necessarily compressed nature of the treatments, these two very useful chapters read more like very short histories of some of the salient thinkers in these traditions, without giving much of a sense of the philosophical detail and sophistication of these traditions: the chapters are almost like summaries of much larger books. Usefully, one of the other contributors (Stephen Menn on metaphysics, of which more below) provides a powerful engagement with Avicenna, integrating Avicenna into his overall discussion of Western thinkers. It would have been nice to have had elsewhere more of a sense of the *community* of these various philosophical traditions, divided by religion but sometimes by not much else.

The remaining chapters fall into a well-established pattern of philosophical topics of the kind that one would expect to find in a book of this nature. Chapter 1, by Stephen Marrone, provides what is a *sine qua non* for an introductory handbook, contextualizing medieval philosophy against historical and social backgrounds going right back to late antiquity. The cumulative effect of this excellent essay is to show, among other things, how very ahistorical is any attempt to exclude philosophy from the Christian West. Language and logic are the subject of chapter 3, a contribution by E. J. Ashworth. Medieval philosophers were interested in rules of inference as well as in semantic and syntactic issues.

Ashworth deals in an illuminating way with medieval semantic theory (particularly the notion of signification, showing helpfully how it differs from modern theories of meaning, and the theory of supposition). She is less interesting in her perhaps overly brief treatment of inference and paradox. But it may be the subject matter that is at fault here. As Ashworth points out, ‘there was never any suggestion that the study of logic is the study of formal systems Since there are no systems, no system-relative definition of formality is possible, and so a formal inference is one that can be justified only as obviously truth-preserving’ (78). For all its technical sophistication, then, medieval logic remains at a far lower theoretical and formal level than modern. The result of this, presumably, is that a discussion of medieval inference theories would amount to little more than a discussion of particular cases (hence the prevalence of medieval treatises on obligations and sophismata, providing treatments of particular inferences and paradoxes). Perhaps there is little scope here for an interesting and varied treatment of the topic.

To my mind the most interesting chapter of the *Companion* is chapter 6, ‘Metaphysics: God and being’, by Stephen P. Menn. Menn’s virtuosic treatment of Augustine is well-known, and he here provides no less of a tour de force in brief compass on a range of topics related to metaphysics and the proof for God’s existence. Of all chapters, this would prove the most challenging for the book’s intended readership – but no matter, not least because other topics in medieval metaphysics (universals, for example, and the theory of matter and form, are treated clearly enough elsewhere), and the general issue of the proof of God’s existence, should be sufficiently familiar from other sources. Particularly impressive is Menn’s treatment of a range of issues surrounding the important question of the relation between essence and existence, and a range of associated modal topics. There is some overlap here with Ashworth’s chapter, and likewise of both of these with Gyula Klima’s useful treatment of the question of universals (chapter 8), one of the key areas of medieval philosophical debate. Klima hints that the metaphysical issues are closely connected with the semantic ones. But the division of topics means that there is no forum for a discussion of the precise link between the two areas – exactly which metaphysical theories entail, or are entailed by, which semantic theories, and which presuppose which. This is not a topic on which, it seems to me, there is a very obvious or straightforward consensus, and I would have welcomed the authors’ views on the issue.

Solid treatments of natural philosophy (Edith Dudley Sylla: chapter 7) and human nature (Robert Pasnau: chapter 9) are provided by these magisterial writers on their respective topics. Sylla, in particular, picks up on a theme that McGrade treats at length in the introduction, namely the interface between philosophy and theology in the period. Sylla shows how some of the most interesting and valuable medieval scientific innovations and insights arose in theological discussions (she highlights transubstantiation and ‘the physics of angels’

as two particularly fruitful areas), and she is fully aware of the importance of the theological context of the whole medieval enterprise. As she rightly points out, it is impossible to reduce the question of the theological context of philosophy in the Middle Ages to a simple disjunction: either ‘inherently theological’ or ‘completely dissociated from theological concerns’:

Theology did have a significant influence on medieval philosophy, but this did not prevent natural philosophy from being scientific or from being good philosophy. In some cases the influence was scientifically beneficial. And sometimes the influence ran in the other direction. Masters teaching in theology faculties frequently called upon natural philosophy to help resolve theological issues. (188).

Three chapters on moral and political topics complete the main core of the book, following on from some of the issues in action theory covered by Pasnau in his chapter. Bonnie Kent on the moral life (chapter 10) focuses on virtue rather than natural law, a treatment of which is found briefly in chapter 12, on political theory (Annabel Brett). It is of course fashionable – if wholly misguided – to emphasize a disjunction between law and virtue in medieval ethics, as though thinkers did not believe (or were mistaken in thinking) that the various parts of their ethical system fitted together into a coherent whole. But whichever of law or virtue is taken as the guiding principle, medieval ethical theories cannot be divorced from teleology and the goal of human happiness. James McEvoy provides a wide-ranging discussion of this, dealing with the beatific goal of human existence and related eschatological topics. The contributions of both Kent and Brett show how much practical common sense can be found in medieval ethical and political theories – particularly Scotus’s theories of the separability of the virtues and of the necessity of consent in the constitution of political authority (an important innovation for other reasons too).

Two final chapters deal respectively with the later intellectual inheritance of medieval thought (P. J. Fitzpatrick and John Haldane), and with the transmission of medieval philosophical texts (Thomas Williams). Fitzpatrick’s brief covers the Renaissance and seventeenth century. His learned treatment of the topic is stimulating and provocative, but suffers from too much emphasis on the place of Aquinas, and too little explicit acknowledgement of the historical importance of other scholastic writers. The very tendency that Fitzpatrick so dislikes in Baroque scholasticism – its capacity for reifying forms, so nicely parodied by Molière – was integral to philosophy in the high Middle Ages too, whether or not Aquinas was guilty. And Fitzpatrick needs to do more than picking out a few absurd mistakes to show that the tendency is philosophically malign. Much interesting twentieth-century metaphysics reifies properties in analogous if more sophisticated ways. And greater acknowledgement of the importance of thinkers other than Aquinas would help explain too the medieval background to the later Rationalist tradition. Thomas Williams deals sensibly with a disparate range of materials connected with the way in which the medieval texts have reached us, and the various

problems a student is likely to encounter (even providing a page or so on words liable to be mistranslated by the beginner). The work ends with historical tables and timelines and an extensive bibliography – close on 700 items, and this just for an introductory work – testimony to the tremendous interest taken, in recent times, in this seemingly obscure topic. Overall, then, an excellent introduction, commendably fulfilling its requirements.

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