

Book notes

EDITED BY MARTIN STONE

Tommi Lehtonen *Punishment, Atonement and Merit in Modern Philosophy of Religion*. (Schriften der Luther–Agricola Gesellschaft, 44). (Helsinki: Luther–Agricola Society, 1999). Pp. 292. £15.00 Pbk.

Lehtonen's study seeks to examine what he refers to as 'the moral-judicial' assumptions that underlie studies of world religions by recent English-speaking philosophers of religion. The main subjects covered in his book range from the doctrine of hell, reconciliation and the doctrine of *karma*. Lehtonen argues that with regard to these topics, many studies by philosophers of religion in the so-called 'analytic tradition' are informed by an understanding of concepts like punishment, atonement and merit. He argues these concerns have conspired to prevent English-speaking philosophers from fully understanding the complexities of non-Western ideas such as *karma*. Lehtonen juxtaposes the work of 'analytic philosophers of religion' with that of writers such as René Girard, whose writings he believes provides a better model for assessing the claims of non-Western religious traditions than English-speaking philosophy. That said, Lehtonen does believe that English-speaking philosophy of religion can liberate itself from its parochial attitudes and embrace a more much inclusive analysis of theological beliefs that stand outside the religious history of the West. The final chapter of the book is directed to providing arguments in support of this thesis. While by no means an easy book to read – Lehtonen's command of the English language is often shaky, a feature that often complicates and obscures the force his argument – the thesis of this book will no doubt attract attention among those interested in comparative philosophy of religion. The book is well produced and contains full bibliographical information and appendices.

[M. W. F. S.]

Hermann Düringer *Universale Vernunft und Partikularer Glaube. Eine theologische Auswertung des Werke von Jürgen Habermas*. (Studies in Philosophical Theology, 19). (Leuven: Peeters, 1999). Pp. xi + 366. BEF 1400 Pbk.

The subject of Düringer's book on 'universal reason and particular faith' is a theological evaluation (*theologische Auswertung*) of the work of the postwar German philosopher and social theorist, Jürgen Habermas. Rarely associated with either theology or philosophy of religion, Habermas is one of the main philosophical figures in postwar Germany. A staunch defender of democratic values, and an ardent critic of the intellectual legacies of both Heidegger and Nazism, Habermas has achieved international recognition in the fields of the social science and philosophy. His work has recently attracted a good deal of attention from English-speaking philosophers. The aim of the book is to show the relevance to theology of Habermas's philosophy.

For Düringer, the appeal of Habermas's system is to be found in its unequivocal affirmation of the importance of universal reason. It is this feature, the author argues, which is of profound importance to contemporary theology and philosophy of religion. This thesis is discussed in Part II of the book by means of a survey of contemporary German theologians such as Wolfgang Pauly, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Trutz Rendtorff, Henning Luther, Jens-Glebe Möller and Micha Brumlik. While many of these names will be unknown to students of the philosophy of religion, Düringer is adept at bringing out the main features of these theologians' treatment of universal reason in the context of their advocacy of a model of particular faith. One of the more interesting aspects of this discussion is the manner in which Düringer shows that many contemporary theologians are ill at ease with the notion of reason. He argues that such theologians would benefit from taking seriously Habermas's proposal that reason can be shown to have a genuine role in public discourse and moral argument. The book is well researched and evinces a wide understanding of Habermas's philosophy and its intellectual milieu.

[M. W. F. S.]

Peter Frick *Divine Providence in Philo of Alexandria*. (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism, 77). (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999). Pp. xiii + 220. DM 85 Hbk.

Frick's timely and significant study commences with an examination of the theocentric structure of Philo's thought. Of particular relevance to him is the passage in *De Opificio Mundo*, 171–172 where Philo associates the idea of providence with his concept of God and account of creation. This for Frick is of the utmost importance, for any examination of the concept of providence in Philo must begin with an analysis of the formal aspects of Philo's concept of God's transcendence, and Philo's subsequent conceptualization of the idea of providence in the light of this formal account. The first part of Frick's book concerns itself with a commentary on the following puzzle: how can Philo hold that God is provident in nature when God cannot be apprehended in his essence? For Frick an eventual answer to this question – an answer which is sketched by recourse to some dense exegesis – is to be found in Philo's argument that providence in cosmological matters is responsible for the design, administration and continuous existence of the created universe. Two further issues are also considered in the book. These are astral fatalism and theodicy. Philo rejects the assumption implied in astral fatalism that the stars are transcendent deities and thus have causal powers over human subjects. He further rejects such fatalism because it renders the notion of moral responsibility derogatory. On questions of theodicy, Frick shows that Philo begins from the Platonic assumption that God is not the cause of evil in any way whatsoever. Rather, Philo argues, the existence of moral evil exonerates God and his providence as the cause of evil and anchors the blame for such occurrences in the human person. Frick's intelligent and learned book provides a most engaging study of a major figure in the history of philosophy theology. Given the saliency and relevance of the topics it considers, it is to be hoped the contemporary philosophers of religion will have much to learn from its pages.

[M. W. F. S.]

Brian R. Clack *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Religion*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999). Pp. xii + 137. £14.95 Pbk.

The aim of Brian Clack's new book is to provide students with a guide around the complex maze that is 'Wittgenstein's philosophy of religion'. Whether or not Wittgenstein ever intended

to compose a 'philosophy of religion', as we presently understand that term, is irrelevant to the remit of Clack's study. For better or worse, Wittgenstein is now an 'item' on undergraduate philosophy of religion courses, and, given this fact, there exists a need for an accessible introduction to his diffuse and by no means unitary teaching on religion. Clack's book is divided into five parts. The first surveys Wittgenstein's life and writings; the second addresses the concept of the mystical and the third his later thoughts on religion; the fourth is 'Neo-Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion', while the last chapter surveys Wittgenstein's legacy, the philosophy of religion and theology. Clack writes well and clearly, and he makes every effort to make Wittgenstein's thought accessible to the beginning student in a series of tractable examples and helpful commentaries. The book makes extensive use of the original texts and also provides further guidance in secondary reading materials. It is clearly presented and attractively bound by Edinburgh University Press. Given the nature of Clack's enterprise, it is no surprise his book eschews more formal modes of argument and extensive discussions of some of the controversial passages in Wittgenstein's texts. For this reason, it will not best suit the needs of more advanced undergraduates. The book is clearly targeted at either the beginning student or the non-specialist reader. That said, Clack's book will most certainly assist those who require a clear and laboured guide to this most enigmatic and difficult of philosophers.

[M. W. F. S.]