Rel. Stud. **33**, pp. 227–337. Copyright © 1997 Cambridge University Press

REVIEWS

J. J. C. Smart and J. J. Haldane, *Atheism and Theism*. Pp. vi + 234. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.) £40.00 HB. £12.99 PB.

This volume in the Great Debates in Philosophy series edited by Ernest Sosa consists of a short introduction and an afterword written jointly by Smart and Haldane, a long essay by Smart defending atheism, a long essay by Haldane defending theism, each author's reply to the other, and an annotated bibliography. It is a valuable record of a high level intellectual encounter between two remarkable philosophers, yet it is curiously irrelevant to much of the current debate in the field of philosophy of religion.

In the Introduction the authors explicate the nature of philosophical questions – all of which, they dubiously claim, have the form 'How is it possible that…?' – and affirm that whether God exists is an important metaphysical question capable of rational evaluation. In their Afterword they affirm their commitment to metaphysical realism while distinguishing their views from the position of antirealists such as Hilary Putnam.

Although Smart in his essay on atheism calls atheism the denial of both theism and deism and also of 'the existence of ancient Roman and Greek gods and the like' (p. 8), he makes his main concern the theism of Christianity. Saying that one of his basic methodological principles is that an important guide to metaphysical truth is its plausibility in terms of total science and admitting that there may well be disagreements in judgements of plausibility, he maintains that atheism is a more plausible view in the light of our total scientific evidence than any religious alternative. In his wide-ranging defence of his position, Smart not only critically considers traditional arguments for God such as the Cosmological Argument, the Design Argument, the Argument from Miracles, the Argument from Religious Experience, and Pascal's Wager, but assesses, among other things, the import for the truth of Christianity of the Higher Criticism of the New Testament, the Anthropic Cosmological Principle, and the possible discovery of intelligent alien life forms in the Universe. He upholds the position that evil is logically incompatible with the existence of God, rejecting the Free Will Defence against this argument primarily on the grounds that it presupposes an implausible libertarian concept of free will which assumes uncaused events.

For his part, Haldane says he will defend Christianity of a 'largely "unreconstructed" sort' (p. 87). Asserting that he is a Roman Catholic who

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believes in all of the traditional doctrines of the Church and calling his position 'analytical Thomism' (p. 90), he maintains that his view is antagonistic to neither science, philosophy, nor historical scholarship. However, he rejects the position that science is the *sole* arbiter of the real, calling it a form of 'unwarranted reductionism' (p. 90). Arguing that Smart maintains that all talk of teleology in science is a conventional *façon de parler*, Haldane dismisses this view as reductionistic. Rejecting natural selection as a complete explanation, he distinguishes three places where it must be supplemented by teleological considerations: the step from non-living to living creatures, the step from basic 'life forms' to reproductive species, and the step from mindless to minded life. Haldane then argues that recent cosmological findings show that the universe cannot be explained by chance while maintaining, on the basis of sophisticated versions of St Thomas' Five Ways, that the Universe has a First Cause and that this – following St Thomas – is what we call God. Haldane also holds (contra Smart) that the existence of evil is not incompatible with the existence of God and defends the libertarian view of free will (against Smart) as not involving random events. Following St Thomas, he concludes that some truths of Christianity can be attained not by reason but only by well-attested general revelation.

In his reply to Haldane, Smart is sceptical that one can rule out the possibility of giving a non-teleological scientific account of the three steps mentioned above. According to him, it is enough if atheists can *sketch* a plausible account of, for example, the origin of life or the human mind – a detailed scientific account is not necessary – and he affirms that such sketches can be given. Smart also raises familiar objections to Haldane's Thomistic proofs of God. Regarding the problem of evil, he argues that God could have created a world with different laws – for example, ones in which human beings have a strong desire to do the morally right thing. In such a world humans would have free will and yet there would be less evil than there is in ours. He then concludes by expressing his scepticism about the Christian revelations which Haldane believes are necessary to supplement philosophical reasoning.

In his reply to Smart, Haldane argues for the methodological principle that an important guide to metaphysical truth is plausibility in the light of 'total understanding' (p. 195). Using this tool, he rejects Smart's naturalism, maintaining that teleological activities such as thinking, representing, and abstracting cannot be approached from a causal explanatory point of view but must be interpreted in terms of meaning and ultimately in terms of a meaningful view of nature. He also defends the libertarian position on free will in terms of the scholastic notion of being moved from within, the divine nature of Scripture, and the existence of angels.

Unfortunately, this volume neglects many important positions and ignores key authors in the contemporary philosophy of religion. Although Alvin

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Plantinga is cited in the bibliography his work is not discussed in the text; moreover, his writings on properly basic beliefs are not even included in the bibliography. Wittgensteinian Fideism is not discussed in the text either although philosophers such as D. Z. Phillips who hold this position are cited in the bibliography. Finally, despite the fact that the bibliography says that Richard Swinburne has produced the most thorough and powerful defence of Christian theism since the Middle Ages, his arguments are not examined by either author.

In addition to neglecting important positions and authors, Smart and Haldane fail to consider crucial arguments. For example, Smart does not consider arguments against theism that turn on either the meaninglessness or the incoherence of the concept of God. Haldane, in turn feels no need to defend his position against these charges. Yet the case can be made that the concept of God is either meaningless or incoherent.[1] Moreover, both Smart and Haldane consider only the deductive version of the argument from evil – not the inductive version – yet it is the inductive one that has occupied the attention of recent philosophers of religion.

These shortcomings lead me to recommend this volume for classroom use provided it is heavily supplemented by other texts. It should also be noted that those not trained in Thomistic thought may find Haldane's essay and reply obscure. Finally, the claim made by the authors in the Introduction about the nature of philosophical questions can only confuse students. Indeed, it is contradicted by the essays that follow. Smart and Haldane ask and answer many other questions than those with the form 'How is it possible that...?'

MICHAEL MARTIN
Boston University

Martin Matuštík and Merold Westphal, eds. *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*. Pp. xv+304. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana U.P., 1995).
David Gouwens. *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*. Pp. xv+248. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

These two books demonstrate something of the vibrancy of current Kierkegaard scholarship as it frees itself from narrow caricatures of his work. Kierkegaard is no longer automatically confined within the categories either of 'father-of-existentialism' irrationalism and individualism or of neo-orthodox Christian assertiveness. His texts are opened up to a multiplicity of new readings and questions.

In this context, Gouwens makes a pertinent point in his introduction, when he writes of the fate Kierkegaard's works have undergone at the hands of the

[1] See my *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* (Temple University Press, 1990).

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academic establishment – a fate Kierkegaard himself foresaw. The danger is now more than ever that 'Kierkegaard' becomes an empty signifier, a talisman invoked in the most divergent academic causes and inserted into a variety of grand philosophical or theological narratives.

Of the two books considered here, that of Gouwens is clearly best placed to attempt a more holistic and consistent interpretation of Kierkegaard's authorship. A collection of essays, however well founded, can easily foster a sense of the disparateness of academic interpretation. That said, however, Matuštík and Westphal have tried to turn this into a virtue by selecting essays which delineate some of the key sites of engagement between Kierkegaard and some of the other crucial thinkers and movements of modernity and postmodernity: Heidegger, Gadamer, Buber, Sartre, Wittgenstein, Kristeva, Derrida, Levinas, psychoanalysis, critical theory, feminism and communitarianism.

Such a huge range of topics inevitably affects the focus of the book, particularly as the categories of 'modernity' and 'postmodernity' are themselves so slippery. Matuštík and Westphal attempt to remedy this by claiming a common (if sometimes hidden) motivation behind the essays in a continuing critique of 'logocentrism' – taken to mean foundationalist or totalizing thinking which elevates Reason to a position of systematic supremacy. The editors also point out ways in which the essayists move beyond previous orthodoxies of Kierkegaard interpretation, not least in tracing the social and political implications of his thought.

Calvin Schrag's opening essay attempts to correlate Kierkegaard's well-known 'spheres of existence' schema with Weber's distinction of the three 'culture-spheres' of science, morality and art. Kierkegaard's thought is thus shown to have unanticipated social relevance, but also to make a contribution to current debates about the notion of modernity. Kierkegaard's advocacy of the paradoxical Christianity of 'Religiousness B' 'provides the measure against the recurring idolatric tendencies across the spectrum of culture-spheres' (p. 12) – a transcendence which is missed by theorists like Habermas.

Kierkegaard is often held up in this collection as a corrective to some twentieth-century excesses or distortions. Thus, Patricia Huntington argues that Heidegger's ontologizing of Kierkegaard 'depletes the latter's thought of its ethical import' (p. 44). C. Stephen Evans contrasts Kierkegaard's Christian therapy with Freud's fatalism and pessimism. Matuštík traces the way in which Kierkegaard evades modernity's political categories, whilst Westphal claims that Levinas's ethical philosophy lacks Kierkegaard's hope for an ultimate reconciliation of self and Other.

This is no simple hagiography of the Danish master, however. True, the essayists are by and large keen to dispel some images of Kierkegaard, and to stress his relevance to social ethics (Perkins, McBride, Evans, Matuštík) and

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as a partner in dialogue for feminist thinking (Berry, Lorraine). But there are notes of criticism too. Huntington points to Kierkegaard's failure to develop a critique of our inherited symbolic order – a failure in which he can be supplemented by a reading of Derrida. Alison Leigh Brown writes of Kierkegaard's evasion of feminine imagery for the divine and a need to resist his logic of sacrifice. Jürgen Habermas's contribution criticizes Michael Theunissen for his Kierkegaardian equation of transcendence with a God-relationship. Thus, in various ways, a critique of Kierkegaard's conservatism and other-worldliness is upheld.

The interest of the collection lies partly in its tensions – tensions between those who see Kierkegaard as in need of correction by the liberating insights of other lines of thought and practice, and those who see Kierkegaard as himself providing the resources for a critique of the fatalism and frivolity of some post/modern thinking. Perhaps a similar fate has already overtaken more contemporary philosophers – most notably Derrida. John Caputo's robust defence of Derrida's commitment to a thinking of ethical responsibility is conducted *via* an examination of the latter's reading of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. Apart from the fascinating correlations and tensions Caputo draws between the two figures, what is most striking is the unspoken connection between the history of claims and counter-claims, vilification and adoration which the work of each has inspired.

Of course, as a book, this collection cannot go into these tensions of interpretation in great depth. If it has a weakness, there is a tendency for Kierkegaardian themes to be painted with too broad a brush in individual essays. Kierkegaard can become less of a partner in dialogue than a representative of a certain 'line'. And several articles suffer in comprehensibility because they are too compressed (Habermas) or stylistically obscure (Brown).

That said, this remains a very challenging and exciting collection, which serves more to spark off a whole host of questions and trains of thought, rather than offering fully worked-out answers. As such, it not only does what such a collection should do, it may also even be true to a certain spirit of Kierkegaard.

As I noted earlier, Gouwens has more opportunity and inclination to interpret Kierkegaard's work as a coherent whole – a task which has its own pitfalls. The temptation to systematize and domesticate Kierkegaard's texts is great. It is to Gouwens's credit that he offers a nuanced and compelling reading which tries to do justice to the complexity of the authorship.

Whilst Gouwens is clearly unhappy with some recent treatments of Kierkegaard's writings in 'literary' terms – particularly those which are influenced by deconstruction – he is sensitive to the crucial role played by the literary form of the writings. For Gouwens, Kierkegaard's texts cannot be reduced to developments of a set of positions, be they philosophical or

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religious. They demand much more of an engagement on the part of the reader. They are aimed at upbuilding, at training the reader in ethical and religious capacities, and not in directly communicating objective doctrines.

At the same time, Gouwens wishes to resist the 'existentialist' stereotype of Kierkegaard, in which he is taken to advocate an anti-rational individualistic approach which makes faith and ethics subservient to the operation of a naked human will. This means that Kierkegaard cannot be portrayed as a subjectivist, someone who relativizes religious and ethical ideals.

Gouwens must therefore show that Kierkegaard treads the line between objectivism (reducing beliefs and values to directly knowable entities) and subjectivism (reducing beliefs and values to arbitrary creations of the will). To do this, he appeals to both ancient and modern ideas. On the one hand, Kierkegaard is seen as a proponent of a virtue-based ethic, for whom self-formation depends on long-term dispositions rather than discrete ruptures. On the other, he is seen as a kind of pre-Wittgenstein 'grammarian' of religious language and doctrine. In other words, Kierkegaard is concerned to clarify the nature and application of religious doctrines.

For Gouwens, then, Kierkegaard retains the referentiality of religious language to an extra-human (objective) God, whilst doing justice to the (subjective) passionate nature of faith. As he writes, interpreting Kierkegaard: 'Christ is the logical and actual basis of Christian existence; at the same time the passional virtues... are themselves the necessary subjective means for apprehending Christ' (p. 142). Along the way, Gouwens gives an account of Kierkegaard's diagnosis of modern reflective despair, his psychological analysis of the self, and his description of the Christian faith, built around the virtues of faith, hope and love. He argues that Kierkegaard gives a narrative account of the self and of Christian faith. The book ends with an examination of the role of witnessing in Kierkegaard, and Gouwens adds his voice to those who see Kierkegaard as a social ethicist.

Gouwens makes a strong case, and his argument is well-written and organized. But a suspicion remains that this is all rather too neat and tidy, despite the author's intentions. Gouwens, like others who emphasize a grammatical understanding of doctrine and a narrative account of Christianity, seems to seal off the overarching story of Christian faith from any external criticism or internal rupture. Gouwens wants to see Kierkegaard 'at the center of the Christian tradition rather than at its fringe' as an orthodox, catholic and biblical thinker (p. 22). This has the effect of neutralizing the questions Kierkegaard raises, directly and indirectly, about the nature of Christian doctrine and, crucially, about the kind of *authority* it can claim in the modern world. Gouwens seems to want things both ways: Kierkegaard is totally orthodox and yet innovative in his rhetorical presentation of orthodoxy. But can form and content really be divorced in this way?

In the end, where Gouwens's attempt to give a coherent account of

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Kierkegaard's thought perhaps fails is in not being attentive enough to the ruptures and tensions at the heart of Kierkegaard's texts. If the paradoxes of existence and grace are to be thought, can we really take refuge in the Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds, or in any notion of 'orthodoxy' at all?

Read together, these two books delineate some of the fault lines which will continue to fracture Kierkegaard scholarship. In their different ways, they witness to a desire to break through stereotypical thinking which can only be welcome. If they fall into other traps, that is at least partly due to the unending difficulties which Kierkegaard loved to create.

STEVEN SHAKESPEARE
Parish of St James,
Cambridge

Nicholas Wolterstorff. *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*. Cambridge Studies in Religion and Critical Thought. Pp. xxi + 248. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.) £40.00 HB. £14.95 PB.

An Essay concerning Human Understanding is not the most unreadable of the philosophical classics, but it is a long book, and one that few present-day readers find easy to read through from cover to cover. Two results of this can be observed: Locke's project as a whole is not always adequately grasped, and Book IV is apt to be neglected, its final chapters most of all. Nicholas Wolterstorff sees them, however, as one of the most original and influential parts of the *Essay*: the account of rational belief which they contain being not merely of very considerable philosophical interest in its own right, but also marking a turning point in European intellectual history.

Wolterstorff sees the Reformation as having produced a crisis in European culture. Descartes's philosophy was a response to this, as was Locke's, but between the two there is a great difference. Descartes was concerned almost exclusively with knowledge – *scientia*. Except where religious allegiance was concerned – and here his sincerity is debatable – he had little respect for the traditions in which he had been educated. There is no Cartesian theory of rational belief, because within his project no such theory is required. Locke's position was quite different. As Wolterstorff rightly remarks, he was not much bothered by scepticism, but he was much less optimistic than Descartes about what we could hope to achieve: knowledge may be possible, but the weakness of our faculties places severe limits on the amount we can hope to acquire. We have therefore no alternative but to live by our beliefs, and in our own interest it is advisable – indeed essential – that they should be rationally acquired; Locke's dislike of irrational religion is one of the constant features to his thought. An enquiry into how our beliefs could be regulated and governed by reason was therefore of central importance, not merely for philosophical enquiry but for our well-being in both this world and the next.

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John Locke and the Ethics of Belief is best approached as a piece of interpretation and rational reconstruction; though historians will undoubtedly be able to consult it with profit, it is not primarily a work of history. The treatment of the immediate social and intellectual context is sketchy, and not always accurate: to give only one example the Civil War in its religious aspects was hardly a conflict between the established Church of England and 'a variety of Protestant sects' (p. 7), but rather a conflict between rival parties within the church; the sects only became important later. It may also be useful to add that whatever the role of English affairs in moulding Locke's views on toleration, the *Epistola de Tolerantia* itself was addressed to a different audience, as both the time of writing – immediately after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes – and the language chosen bear witness. Here, as often, context is crucial to interpretation.

Wolterstorff describes his study as being based on 'a rather wide range of Locke's texts, not just the *Essay*' (p. xxi). This is true, up to a point. He certainly makes good use of other writings, notably the much-neglected *Conduct of the Understanding* (wrongly described as being published by Locke – it came out in 1706) but also the polemics with Stillingfleet, the *Reasonableness of Christianity* and its vindications, and the Letters on Toleration. All these were included in the collected editions of Locke's works; the very considerable body of material that was not is much less thoroughly exploited. There are a couple of quotations from de Beer's edition of the *Correspondence* – the well-known letters to Molyneux – and a few secondhand citations from the Locke MSS, but there is no attempt to explore the riches provided by either. The result is an entirely static account of Locke's thought. The texts on which Wolterstorff's account rests are described as 'late' (p. xxi), which is true as far as publication is concerned, but not always of composition. Quite significant parts of Book IV chs. 16 and 20 are already present in the very earliest draft of the *Essay*, dating from 1671 (Draft A, §§32–42), and other quite extensive passages from ch. 18 can be found in the 1676 journal notes on faith and reason (available in print since 1954 in von Leyden's edition of the *Essays on the Law of Nature*). Given that Wolterstorff is writing on the history of philosophy some of the space given to debates in present-day epistemology might have been allocated to matters such as these; merely to state that one intends paying little attention to matters of development does not discharge one's obligations when the object of study is itself changing over time.

Despite these weaknesses, Wolterstorff's book is a valuable contribution, not only to the relatively narrow area of Locke studies, but also to the history of philosophy generally. He brings out very clearly why the problems of rational belief were so important to Locke; he also gives a vivid and for the most part convincing portrait of Locke as a thinker, with his deep individualism, his detachment from tradition, and his intense concern with our need

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to meet the obligations placed upon us by our Creator. No-one who has read this book will ever pass over the last chapters of the *Essay* as a mere supplement, added after Locke had completed his main task, and capable of being neglected without severe loss to one's understanding of Locke's project as a whole.

J. R. Milton
King's College London

John Hare. *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits and God's Assistance*. Pp. 292. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1996.)

Religious ethicists have never been terribly kind to Kant. In his own day, Kant's critiques of traditional theology and of ethical 'heteronomy' earned him the epithet of 'world-destroyer' [*Weltzermalmender*]. More recently, thinkers influenced by Alasdair MacIntyre have tended to see in Kant's philosophical theology and ethics little more than a failed effort to graft Enlightenment-based rationalism onto traditional religious and ethical conceptions.

John Hare's study is a refreshing departure from this tradition of Kant-bashing. Guided by Kant's understanding of the 'moral gap' between our sense of moral requiredness and our ability to conform to morality's demands, Hare makes a compelling case that builds on Kantian presuppositions for the need to provide a religious supplement to our rational moral efforts. In the end, Hare argues for a more revelational solution to the problem than Kant would allow. But, despite these disagreements, Hare's entire discussion is a respectful, thoughtful conversation with Kant's ethics and philosophy of religion.

Hare's point of departure is development of what he calls the 'three-part structure of morality': the moral demand, our defective natural capacities, and an authoritative source of this demand. At the core of the first part of this structure is the idea that morality requires the impartial assessment of conduct and a willingness to frame principles of conduct in general and universal terms. Although clearly articulated by Kant, Hare finds this idea recapitulated in the leading modern ethical theories, including forms of utilitarianism and universalizationist views like that of R. M. Hare. The second part of the structure is our persistent inability to comply with this demand. The third part of the structure leads us to regard morality as the command of some other at least possible being who practises it. Taken together, these three conceptions, produce, in Hare's words, a 'constant and inevitable sense of [moral] failure'. The traditional doctrines of Christianity fit into this philosophically elucidated structure by making it possible for us to believe that (with God's assistance) we can live in a way pleasing to

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ourselves and the morally perfect being we conceive. Without the doctrines of God's moral governance of the world, of divine forgiveness, and atonement, Hare believes, we are left with a 'moral gap' created by the unrelenting moral demand and our own defective capacity to comply with it.

In the first of three major sections of *The Moral Gap* Hare explores this tripartite structure of morality. Although the problems he traces crop up in diverse modern ethical positions, Hare pays particular attention to their appearance in Kant's work, especially the conceptions of the categorical imperative, radical human evil, and the appeal to divine assistance developed by Kant in the *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. In the end, Hare cannot accept Kant's heavily rationalized and humanized conceptions of divine grace and atonement. He argues that Kant's position falls into incoherence because it refuses to give up the primary stress on moral self-renewal and because it regards our inward moral renewal and rededication as a sign of divine grace and acceptance while simultaneously affirming our radical tendency to moral self-deception and corruption. For Hare, the depth of the problem illuminated by Kant requires nothing less than the confidence offered by Christian faith that we are redeemed apart from and despite ourselves by God's initiative in Jesus Christ.

A second section of the book examines a series of modern ethical perspectives that seek to overcome the problem of the moral gap without resort to religious beliefs of any kind. These include feminist views that emphasize caring for particular persons over the seemingly more remote requirement of universalization; forms of contract theory (such as David Gauthier's) that reduce morality to long-term prudence; and views influenced by evolutionary theory that seek to assert the biological or cultural naturalness of individuals' moral compliance. Although Hare's criticisms of these views differ, a common theme is that these positions evade the problem by failing to perceive the intensity of the moral demand.

The third and final section of *The Moral Gap*, which justifies its inclusion in a series on Christian ethics, explores the ways in which the Christian tradition contributes to the discussion and closing of the moral gap. Much of the argument here is an effort to show that Kant's rationalist discomfort with the concept of transferred liability (a core of the Christian doctrine of atonement) is unwarranted because the sharing of moral liability is a common and justifiable feature of the moral life.

Hare's argument is not without its flaws. His employment of utilitarian moral theory to explain the moral gap is questionable, since utilitarianism is notorious for its tendency to overestimate the degree of our moral requiredness. In general, here and elsewhere Hare exhibits too little attention to key issues in ethical theory that, as Kant well knew, are the necessary foundation for this kind of moral theology. Hare is also too quick to declare the shipwreck of Kant's effort. He fails to appreciate how tenaciously and

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brilliantly Kant tried to preserve the rational side of our moral experience while remaining cognitively open to the possibility that each feature of this experience might also be seen as evidence of noumenal (religious) realities. This was true of his conception of freedom, of the ought to moral requiredness, and of the difficult inner rededication to morality that betokened divine assistance following a full encounter with our moral failure. Regarded as a kind of phenomenology of the moral and religious life, Kant's efforts in this area are worthy of more sustained attention than Hare gives them. On the other side of this problem, Hare also fails to pursue his own suggestions that other religious traditions than Christianity might offer conceptions adequate to address the moral gap. A development of Kant's perspective, I have long argued, points the way to a more universal, and less apologetic, apprehension of rational morality's religious requirements

Despite these critical observations, Hare's book is a very welcome addition to the slender body of literature seeking to understand the scope and limits of moral reason and willing to draw on Kant's groundbreaking efforts in this regard. As Hare points out, the disappearance of religious elements from post-Kantian rationalist moral philosophy has left us in a muddle. Many thinkers, including those criticized by Hare, have exploited this to reject rationalist theory itself. A better response, however, is to keep the theory and go back to Kant to retrace his path into the religious conceptions needed to render the moral life a coherent whole. Hare's book is an excellent step in this proper direction.

RONALD M. GREEN
Dartmouth College

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