The volume concludes with an 'afterword' by John Cottingham, the President of the British Society for the Philosophy of Religion at the time of the conference, where he notes the stimulus which may be provided to moral philosophy by various questions posed in the philosophy of religion. This volume makes a persuasive, engaging, and very varied case for the importance of this sort of exchange for both disciplines.

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James Kellenberger *Dying to Self and Detachment*. (Farnham: Ashgate 2013). Pp. 181. £50.00 (Hbk). ISBN 978 1 4094 4390 2.

Self-abnegation is not a virtue that looms large in contemporary moral philosophy. One of the most influential ethical theorists of our time, Bernard Williams, has suggested that the chosen projects of the individual agent are the only ultimate ground of the requirement to act in certain ways. And Christine Korsgaard, starting from very different premises from Williams, has argued something similar – that one's own self-conception is the source of normativity. These self-oriented conceptions of ethics that have become so dominant in our time could not be further removed from the ideal of dying to self as the goal of human life – an ideal with deep roots in our Judaeo-Christian culture, and also found in somewhat different form in non-theistic religious outlooks such as Buddhism. Kellenberger's exploration of the ethical significance of this ideal is therefore a welcome reminder of an influential conception of how humans should live that has not received the attention it deserves in contemporary moral philosophy.

The approach taken in the book is partly historical and partly conceptual-analytic. Kellenberger begins with the concept of humility, which he describes as a 'polythetic' concept (one not defined by necessary and sufficient conditions for its use, but covering a range of cases linked by a network of overlapping similarities). There are various ways of being humble, by no means all of them to be understood in religious terms; but Kellenberger argues that religious humility is special. In the religious case, humility is radically opposed to self-concern, so that taking pride in one's humble behaviour is ruled out – a requirement that Kellenberger suggests does not necessarily obtain in all secular contexts.

Detachment (at least in the strong sense that connotes not mere aloofness or emotional distance, but actively striving to subdue the will and separate

oneself from one's pleasures and desires) goes further than humility, and is, on Kellenberger's analysis, inextricably bound up with a religious outlook. He takes three examples from the Christian tradition, taken from the thirteenth, sixteenth, and twentieth centuries respectively, of people whose lives and writings reflect the goal of detachment: Meister Eckhart, St Teresa of Avila, and Simone Weil. In all three, Kellenberger plausibly argues, we find a convergence of various key aims – to be free from self-concern and preoccupation with worldly things; to be unmoved by the passions; and to be directed not towards rewards or consolations but towards union with God for its own sake. Kellenberger adds that many of these elements are also conspicuous in Buddhist, Hindu, and other traditions, though he perhaps overdoes the convergence between theistic and non-theistic approaches by using the term 'religious reality' as a portmanteau term for whatever it is that the practitioner of religious detachment aspires to attain.

Most of us can recognize that wilfulness, self-centredness, and lack of humility are obstacles to a good life, and this gives the ethic of detachment a significance that is far from being merely historical. Nevertheless, such an ethic may seem ill-suited to the conditions of modern living, which for most of us is characterized by anxious and busy involvement with our professional and personal commitments. In an interesting chapter on the 'stress' that has become an acknowledged feature of present-day existence, Kellenberger asks whether it is a necessary obstacle to detachment, and concludes that it is not. For a careful look at his chosen historical proponents of the detachment ethic, Eckhart, Teresa, and Weil, reveals that their lives (though they may not have described it in these terms) were subject to a significant degree of what we now call stress.

But this in turn raises the question of whether the overcoming of stress via detachment will not lead to the loss of much that is good, along with the bad. Is it not precisely our attachments that make human life worth living? Queen Elizabeth II, in a message read out at a service of remembrance in New York for the British citizens killed in the 9/11 terrorist attacks, said: 'nothing that can be said can begin to take away the anguish and the pain of these moments. Grief is the price we pay for love.' The life of attachment is, necessarily, a hostage to the perpetual possibility of grief and anguish; but, agonizing though that may be, it is not clear that our lives would be better were we to escape from it, if the price of escape is giving up love. These are momentous questions, which it would have been good to see tackled at greater length in this book. What Kellenberger does offer is a careful account of the way the various protagonists of detachment aim to find space for the committed pursuit of the good of others. Hence, although Eckhart, for example, warns against the passions and urges that we should be 'immoveable against joy and sorrow', he also says that we should rejoice in the good fortune of others and feel sorrow for their bad fortune; and if this is so, argues Kellenberger, 'we can have an emotional

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attachment to others' (p. 66). Perhaps that is right, though it seems to me that the 'emotional attachment' envisaged here will be pretty far removed from what most of us understand by that term. The kind of love involved, for the apostles of detachment, will be the kind of love that, in Simone Weil's memorable phrase in *Gravity and Grace*, 'consents to distance'. It is the pure love that has no thought of return. Such love, claims Kellenberger, is 'clearly a form of emotional attachment to the one loved' (p. 64). I am not so sure, but there is much food for thought here.

These important issues are blissfully far removed from what Roger Scruton has aptly called 'neurononsense' – the misguided attempt to 'empiricize' ethics by reducing it to a series of descriptions of how our brains work. But so attractive has this latter approach become to a lot of people that it is probably wise of Kellenberger to have included a chapter dealing with the results of scientific research on so-called 'chemical short-cuts' to detachment and other religious states. Citing the Pahnke experiments, which claimed to show that 'subjects who received the drug psilocybin experienced phenomena that were apparently indistinguishable from, if not identical with, certain categories defined by the typology of mystical consciousness' (p. 89), Kellenberger wisely notes that authentic religious experience implies not just a certain subjective phenomenology, but 'a new or changed state of being, evidenced in moral and spiritual change' (p. 91). His eventual conclusion is that 'external brain-state causing' techniques might perhaps facilitate the attainment of a detached life, just as effectively as meditation or contemplative prayer; but with the proviso that the resulting life, to qualify as a genuine life of detachment, would have to meet criteria quite other than neurophysiological and phenomenological ones, including manifesting humility and the 'abandonment of self-will' (p. 107). This proviso is clearly quite correct; but it seems to me questionable whether the initial concession to the possible validity of external brain-state causing techniques is not too generous. For it is clear that such techniques are purely instrumentally and only contingently related to moral and spiritual goals. And there is all the difference in the world between the kind of approach that seeks to modify our mental states quite mechanically, and the spiritual techniques that involve the whole person's embarking on the difficult path of moral realignment.

There is quite a bit more in *Dying to the Self and Detachment* than can be discussed in detail here, including a useful critique of Don Cupitt's attempt to articulate a theory of spirituality that dispenses with the beliefs of traditional theism. Kellenberger persuasively argues that at least as far as the traditional virtue of detachment goes, Cupitt's approach is too wedded to notions like autonomous choice and self-concern to support an authentically religious account of dying to the self. Kellenberger's writing, here as throughout the book, preserves a quiet, austere style, which in some ways reflects the

self-effacement that is the subject of his inquiry. It is one of a number of recent publications that show how much philosophical interest is to be had from looking at the domain of spirituality, and the book as a whole will be a valuable resource for anyone working or reflecting on a large range of issues in moral philosophy and the philosophy of religion.

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Wessel Stoker *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: The Spiritual in the Art of Kandinsky, Rothko, Warhol, and Kiefer*. (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2012). Pp. x+233. €50.00 (Pbk). ISBN 978 90 420 3544 7.

This is a welcome book in a key respect. It attempts to tackle the loose way in which the language of 'transcendence' is repeatedly deployed by many of those who try to discuss the spiritual concerns of contemporary art – and, for that matter, the art of a modern period stretching back at least to the Romantic era. Quite correctly, Wessel Stoker remarks on the laziness of many uses of the idea of the transcendent, and the consequent lack of analytical bite in interpretations of works of art which are thought to suggest a numinous realm, or a quality in material reality which points beyond the brutely given.

What we need, he argues, is a typology of transcendence. Not all transcendence is the same. To this end, he sets out in this book three distinct forms of *seeing* or *indicating more* in things that he derives from the artistic traditions of modern western Europe. They are immanent transcendence, radical transcendence, and radical immanence (which, for his purposes, does count as a type of transcendence).

Immanent transcendence finds an early manifestation in the works of Caspar David Friedrich, whose natural landscapes suggest religious depth; a power to disclose to the devoutly contemplative viewer the divine Spirit at work within them (rather like the *logos spermatikos* of the early Church Fathers). All things participate mystically and communicatively in their divine source.

Radical transcendence is introduced with the help of Barnett Newman's vast, overpowering, almost rebarbative canvasses. These both hint at but also deny to the viewer any participatory access to the noumenal realm. They do not mediate; they often seem precisely to negate the possibility of mediation. They keep us at a distance, and as a consequence have a certain tragic quality to them.