

considered in conflict with Catholic teaching. This is of particular note in the essays dealing with sexuality, as well as those dealing with politics. Several of these essays use language that may appear harsh to some, but it is probably language that is not uncommon or unfamiliar to the students in the classroom. It is also important to note that university professors regularly encounter students who are struggling with identity issues focused on their sexuality as well as their racial, ethnic, and political identity. This book may be helpful as a gateway for dialogue on some of these sensitive issues.

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*Divine Self, Human Self: The Philosophy of Being in Two Gītā Commentaries.*

By Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013. xx + 148 pages. \$29.95 (paper).

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Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, professor of comparative religion and philosophy at Lancaster University, is among the finest contemporary scholars of South Asian philosophy, having published several incisive studies that place the ancient nondualist teachings of Advaita Vedānta and its major rivals into constructive dialogue with modern Continental thought. In the present work, he shifts from phenomenology and epistemology to metaphysics, and from constructive philosophy to what he terms a “constructive Hindu theology” (ix). As a constructive theology, it is also comparative, taking as its focus major commentaries on the Hindu classic, the Bhagavad-Gītā, by the Advaita teacher Śaṅkara (ca. eighth century CE) and the later theistic Vedāntin Rāmānuja (ca. eleventh century CE). Unlike R. C. Zaehner and Arvind Sharma, whose comparable works preceded his, Ram-Prasad explicitly disavows any attempt to discern which of these commentators comes closest to some “original meaning” of their shared text. Indeed, he suggests that whereas the central concerns of the Gītā lie in the realm of “moral psychology,” both commentators treat it almost exclusively as a work of “metaphysics and theology” (78). The text and its central figure—Kṛṣṇa, charioteer to the epic hero Arjuna and living embodiment of the Lord—present different kinds of intractable problems for each interpreter, and therein lies the drama of Ram-Prasad’s study.

The structure of the book is simple, with a first chapter on Śaṅkara’s interpretation of the nature of the divine (*brahman*) in the Gītā, a second on Rāmānuja’s treatment of the same theme, and a third that compares their respective accounts of the relation between concrete, empirical “person” (*puruṣa*) and “core, metaphysical self” (*ātman*) as this bears on the relation

between human and divine. Ram-Prasad's thesis is also fairly simple. On the central, perennial question of "whether explanation should seek the limits of an understanding that encompasses God or whether God explains everything else" (xii), he argues that Śaṅkara illustrates the former approach, and Rāmānuja the latter. Stated differently, Śaṅkara situates his theology of Kṛṣṇa within a metaphysics of *brahman* as the sole, ontologically simple selfhood (*ātman*) of all conscious beings, whereas for Rāmānuja the metaphysics of *brahman* and *ātman* subserves a robust theology of the gracious Lord.

Ram-Prasad's real achievement in this work does not follow primarily from this assessment—which would occasion little disagreement—but in the rich tapestry he weaves to substantiate it. As in previous works, his expositions here are insightful, fresh, and provocative. His mildly idiosyncratic translations of such key Sanskrit terms as *avidyā* ("primal unwisdom") and *pramāṇa* ("epistemic authority") help interrupt conventional, received interpretations and encourage renewed focus on the particulars of each teacher's thought. Ram-Prasad does not merely generalize two systems of thought, but rather shows how they rise from specific exigencies of the Gītā text, and, where relevant, how the governing preoccupations of each teacher led them to diverge radically on the interpretation of key passages. Christian readers will appreciate the many fruitful comparisons Ram-Prasad makes to Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart, Nicholas of Cusa, Immanuel Kant, and Jean-Luc Marion, among others, to elucidate the distinctive theologies of Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja. Martin Heidegger's existentialist philosophy, and particularly his critique of ontotheology, lurks throughout.

Ram-Prasad intends this work as a contribution to "the global discipline of comparative theology" (xiii), and it is a very welcome addition. At the same time, like many works in this discipline, its constructive purpose risks disappearing from sight in the course of detailed comparison. Ram-Prasad engages the work of prior comparativists, with brief, appreciative treatments of Rudolf Otto and Francis Clooney and a similarly brief but more critical account of Richard De Smet, and he locates himself as affiliated, in different ways, with the traditions of both Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja. But it is not yet clear how Ram-Prasad's own theology emerges, transformed, out of and after this comparative study. Perhaps this will be the topic of a future work. In the meantime, *Divine Self, Human Self* will reward careful reading by advanced students of Hindu philosophy, Christian metaphysics, and hermeneutics. It merits inclusion in any major theological library.

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