

Book reviews

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Laura Rediehs *Quaker Epistemology*. (Leiden: Brill, 2019). Pp. vi + 92. €70.00 (Pbk). ISBN 9789004419001.

Laura Rediehs is Associate Professor of Philosophy at St Lawrence University with an interest in philosophy of science and the relationship between scientific and religious knowledge. In this mini-monograph, she aims to examine the nature of Quaker epistemology in its historical context – with particular reference to the general developments in Western philosophy and science from the seventeenth century to the present time – and to outline how the Quaker approach can contribute to current epistemological challenges. Rediehs’s basic argument is that a Quaker theory of knowledge is rooted in the concept of ‘Light Within’, and this leads to a ‘hermeneutical experientialism’ and ‘experiential empiricism’ where (spiritual) experiences, religious texts, and the natural world are carefully interpreted and synthesized. She proposes that this type of an epistemology is conducive for resolving some of the tensions in the current science and religion dialogue, as well as potentially overcoming the so-called incommensurability problem between competing paradigms.

This succinct and clearly articulated book can be divided into two main sections. The first focuses on the history of Quaker epistemology in which Rediehs starts by analysing the birth and early development of Quakerism in the seventeenth century (part 2). She discusses how the Quakers claimed that everyone had ‘the potential for direct divine inspiration . . . through a faculty they termed the “Light Within,” “Inward Light,” or “Light of Christ”’ in a philosophical environment of European rationalism and empiricism (13). This is followed by an exploration of how during the ensuing three centuries different strands of Quakerism went on to develop community discernment, biblical epistemology, and concepts of the natural world (part 3). Rediehs emphasizes how Quakers embraced many aspects of scientific empiricism, while simultaneously resisting the ‘naturalization of science’ (43). The Quaker and Cambridge astronomer Arthur Stanley Eddington is identified as an exemplar of this more idealist approach in the twentieth century.

The second section is more constructive, rather than historical, in its focus. Rediehs seeks to expand the concept of experience/empiricism by looking at emotional, moral, aesthetic, teleological, and relational ‘senses’, before briefly discussing religious and mystical experiences (part 4). She creatively argues that this Quaker ‘experiential empiricism’ can be seen as a version of Ian Barbour’s category of ‘integration/synthesis’ in the science and religion dialogue. However, she also maintains that the ‘experiential empiricism’ – unlike other synthesist approaches, such as process theology or theology of nature – ‘makes no *a priori* metaphysical assumptions’ (59). This is a somewhat surprising claim as the previous section has identified various core theological beliefs and assumptions which seem to deeply inform Quaker epistemology. In part 5 Rediehs compares Quaker epistemology with feminist epistemology, and argues that both emphasize the holistic, communal, and relational nature of knowledge. She finishes the work by applying the insights of her distinct epistemology to what she calls ‘Today’s Crisis of Truth’ and the problem of incommensurability between different paradigms (76, part 6).

In sum, this short book is illuminating. It is probably of particular value to those interested in the history of Quaker philosophy in the context of wider European intellectual culture. The book also makes a contribution to the ongoing discourse of articulating and developing tradition-specific rationalities. As the work is a mini-monograph, Rediehs’s arguments are often suggestive and not developed in detail. Indeed, I hope that she and others will go on to develop some of the concepts identified in the work. For example, a future task might be to bring Quaker epistemology into a critical dialogue not just with certain schools of philosophical thought, but also with other experiential religious epistemologies (e.g. the biblical pragmatism of the Pentecostal movement).

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William Lane Craig, Erik J. Wielenberg, Adam Lloyd Johnson (eds) *A Debate on God and Morality: What is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?* (New York and London: Routledge, 2020). Pp. xii + 234. £32.99 (Pbk). ISBN 9780367135652.

In 2018, William Lane Craig and Erik Wielenberg debated whether God is the best explanation of objective moral values and duties. This book contains