

BOOK NOTES

Dan Cohn-Sherbok. *Medieval Jewish Philosophy: An Introduction*. Pp. xi + 196. (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996.) £35.00 hbk, £12.99 pbk.

Dan Cohn-Sherbok's new book is a useful and typically well-written introduction to medieval Jewish philosophy. The structure and style of the book is straightforwardly expository. After an initial chapter outlining the nature of Jewish thought before the Middle Ages – which includes discussion of Biblical Judaism, rabbinic law, and the mystical tradition – individual chapters document major aspects of the thought of Jewish philosophers from the 9th to the 15th century. Some of these figures (say, Moses Maimonides) are familiar, but the author's great achievement in this book is to introduce the reader to countless other intriguing (and neglected) philosophers of the medieval period.

Paul Gwynne. *Special Divine Action: Key Issues in the Contemporary Debate (1965–1995)*. Pp. 372. (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1996.) \$28.00.

This book is, at its title suggests, a thorough and careful analysis of the main contributions to the recent debate about special divine action, by which is meant particular actions of God at certain times and places, rather than general divine action (creation, etc.). Gwynne shows how the notion of special divine action is indispensable to theism, underlying such crucial elements of the Christian worldview as incarnation, providence, miracle, petitionary prayer, sacrament, and so on. Nevertheless, the growth of scientific knowledge has led us today to see such divine action as deeply problematic and indeed implausible. Hence, if the coherence and integrity of Christianity is to be kept intact, then these problematic elements need to be rebutted. Gwynne begins his defence by considering issues of language (the nature of action, causality and intention). He then moves on to the crucial matter of the scientific mentality, and he claims that the scientific attack on special divine action is faulty on four counts: scientific enquiry cannot be exhaustive; the Humean attack on the miraculous misunderstands the nature of scientific laws; scientific reductionism is inadequate; and strict determinism is untrue. The final area concerns the nature of the divine agent, and defuses the apparent contradiction between three of the divine attributes (transcendence, fidelity to created order, and moral goodness) and a fourth (God's involvement in his creation). Gwynne's conclusion is that the concept of special divine action emerges 'battered but intact'. This study is a helpful record of the main drift of debate over the past three decades, and will be of use to those with research interests in the subject.

I. M. Lewis. *Religion in Context* (second edition). Pp. xv + 198. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.) £35.00 hbk, £12.95 pbk.

This is a new edition of Ioan Lewis' important anthropological work, first published in 1986, the principal argument of which is that such phenomena as witchcraft,

spirit-possession, cannibalism, and shamanism are closely related expressions of mystical power, which Lewis terms 'charisma'. For this second edition, Lewis has added two new chapters. The first of these effects a comparison between two kinds of animal symbolism (the tarantula and the pangolin), and serves as a springboard for a critique of Mary Douglas' theory of animal 'anomalies'. The other addition, 'Expelling spirits, controlling women', explores the relation between exorcism and the interests of male hierarchy.

Bernd Magnus & Kathleen M. Higgins (eds). *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*. Pp. ix + 403. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.) £40.00 hbk, £12.95 pbk.

This excellent series of Cambridge Companions to major philosophers continues with a substantial and fascinating collection of pieces on Friedrich Nietzsche. The book divides into four parts. The first part consists solely of a supremely useful summary of the themes of each of Nietzsche's books. The second part, headed 'The use and abuse of Nietzsche's life and works', contains essays on the political misappropriation of Nietzsche's philosophy, and on the myth of Nietzsche as a solitary, suffering, lunatic-genius, as well as a religious biography of the philosopher. The third section, 'Nietzsche as philosopher', offers essays on Nietzsche's style of philosophizing, his use of *ad hominem* arguments, perspectivism, and Nietzsche's account of modernity. The final section focuses on the influence of Nietzsche, charting his impact on twentieth-century philosophers. There are also here two articles dedicated to Nietzsche's influence in France and in East Asia.

Rudolf Otto. *Autobiographical and Social Essays*. Edited by Gregory D. Alles. Pp. 317. (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1996.) DM 68,00.

For those with an interest in Rudolf Otto, this will prove to be a very useful collection of papers. Gregory Alles has put together a selection of Otto's previously untranslated articles covering five areas: autobiographical fragments; politics and society; the academy and the study of religions; the work of the church; and ethical reflections. The editor also provides a substantial introductory chapter, detailing Otto's career, impact and influence, and documenting the criticisms made of Otto's work by such figures as Wayne Proudfoot and Walter Baetke. Of the Otto papers themselves, the pieces on his political views are perhaps the most interesting. Otto emerges as a moderate left-liberal with idealistic views about the ability of religion to better society. He proposes, for example, a 'Religious League of Humanity', which will bring together the great religious traditions in order to 'rescue the world from the overwhelming universal misery into which we are sinking' (p. 145). But in contrast to this idealistic vision of international co-operation based on religion, Otto's nationalism is also attested to in this collection, principally in his fascinating 'Service to celebrate the fatherland' (1925), in which hymns praise German blood, and a sermon stresses duties toward nation, state, and those in authority.

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