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Book reviews

Hugh Rice *God and Goodness*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Pp. viii+139. £19.99 (Hbk). ISBN 0 19 825028 2.

The core of Rice's book is the claim that 'there is a universe such as this, obeying laws such as these, *because it is good that it should be so*' (49). What precedes the statement of this claim is discussion of its presuppositions; what follows it is consideration of its implications, together with the further claim that it is equivalent, in all important respects, to traditional theism: what can be said of a personal God can be said equally about this 'abstract conception of God'. To the extent that Rice is right about this equivalence, the arguments he considers for and against God so conceived and his assessment of these, represent a contribution, and an extremely interesting one, to the familiar debate about the pros and cons of theism. Whatever one makes of Rice's central claim, his book emerges as a stimulating brief introduction to the philosophy of religion.

As such, it has distinct merits. It is written with great clarity and remarkable conciseness. It displays a refreshing independence of mind in its treatment of a range of fundamental philosophical issues. The main tendency of Rice's argument is to suggest that theism, as he understands it, follows from certain beliefs which we naturally and, he believes, rationally accept: (i) a belief in an ordered universe and in laws of nature, which are central to the scientific outlook; (ii) a belief in rationality and inference to the best explanation, as is exemplified in science, but not only there – this involves him in a reasoned rejection of Humean and other empiricist accounts of science; and (iii) a belief in objective value.

Rice considers three objections to the objective status of our ordinary beliefs about good and bad, right and wrong. (a) Metaphysical oddity – but even strict empiricists admit logical truths; why not moral truths? (b) Epistemological oddity – we do not arrive at our knowledge of moral truths in the same was as through deduction or perception. But why assume that these two exhaust the possibilities? (c) The extent of moral disagreement – but we disagree also about the nature and extent of evidential support for factual beliefs, and our reliance on this is an essential part of our acceptance of rationality. In any case 'should we favour highly metaphysical worries over our firm conviction that it is wrong to torture children?'. (iv) A further belief which it is natural to accept is a belief in necessary

truths, of which he asserts that his central claim would be an instance. After what is, for him, an extensive discussion of how we can be said to know necessary truths, Rice concludes that necessary truths can affect contingent beliefs. Thus moral truths, acknowledged to be among necessary truths, affect one's actual thoughts. 'Objective value is capable of making a difference to what happens because it is capable of shaping our thinking' (48).

At this point Rice has assembled the various considerations which he believes he needs in order to persuade his readers to accept his central claim. For once we have accepted the scientific account of the universe as explaining the details of what we experience, there is, he suggests, a natural momentum which leads us to look for an explanation, which could not be a scientific explanation, of the existence and the intelligibility of the universe itself. And, given that we have already accepted that objective value makes a difference at the level of thought, this opens the possibility that it may do so more generally, so that the explanation we look for is to be found in the central claim that the universe is as it is because it is good that it should be so.

It will not have escaped notice that, substantially, the arguments Rice has marshalled in favour of his 'abstract conception of God' are the same as those appealed to by theists like Richard Swinburne for God conceived of as personal. By such theists 'personal explanation' is invoked to explain the existence and intelligibility of the universe. Rice, however, is insistent that no personal intermediary is needed to account for the link between goodness and existence. The mere fact that something is good is enough to explain its existence.

It cannot be denied that, if his 'abstract conception of God' can do what is needed, it has the advantage of economy. But can it do what is needed? It is, in the first instance, highly counter-intuitive. As any gardener knows, it takes a great deal of energy and determination to bring good about and to keep it in existence when it is there. If Rice's central claim is a necessary truth, it is plainly not true a priori. Whether it, or any theistic claim, is necessary can only be established as part of a total explanatory scheme which has the required degree of coherence and comprehensiveness. We do not have experience of goodness producing results on its own, whereas we do have experience of people producing good. Hence, as Swinburne and others have argued, the category of 'personal explanation' is straightforwardly available to us through a natural analogy. Rice might argue that the absence of analogy need not matter so long as the concept invoked in the theory does in fact explain, but for it to explain we need some intelligible notion of how it works. Rice rightly dismisses the strong empiricist contention that all causality must be law-governed, but that is not enough to provide a positive account of the sort of causality his theory requires.

He admits, in passing, that 'there are, of course, other arguments for the existence of a personal God' but does not go into them. Their force, however, is not negligible. To deprive the main theistic religions of their appeal to revelation,

conceived on the analogy of personal communication, or of their experience of God as personal encounter, is to inflict upon them a marked impoverishment.

The remainder of the book deals with possible objections to theism as Rice understands it; and since he believes that his 'abstract conception of God' is equivalent in all essentials to traditional theism, these objections and his replies to them are for the most part familiar to philosophers of religion. Nevertheless, his treatment of them gains a certain freshness from his unorthodox approach. In considering this stage of his argument the reader is all the time being confronted by two questions: (i) how adequate are Rice's answers to these objections to traditional theism?; (ii) how far is his claim tenable that his 'abstract conception of God' is equivalent to the God of traditional theism? When he asks such questions as whether an act is good because God wills it, or God wills it because it is good; whether God acts in the world; whether God responds to events in the world; whether He can inform, promise, command, he is asking whether God as he understands God can do these things. But inevitably his answers are relevant, and often illuminatingly so, if taken as referring to God as traditionally understood.

However, it has to be said that the answers Rice gives, when interpreted in terms of his central thesis, impress one as something of a tour de force. The problem is that the personal character of these action-verbs keeps on obtruding itself. Rice anticipates this objection under the heading 'The adequacy of the abstract conception' (87ff.). He considers two difficulties: 'the first is that on the abstract account God is not a person; and the second is that what the abstract accounts represents as God's willing, knowing and acting are not really cases of knowing, willing and acting at all. So to use these words is just sophistry' (88).

He responds to these objections by reminding us of the familiar problems of analogy which attend any attempt to talk intelligibly about God. On any showing mental predicates like willing, knowing, loving, have to be carefully qualified when applied to God. In particular, it is impossible to make sense of them outside time, which has led thinkers like Swinburne and John Lucas to argue that God's eternity is not to be construed as timelessness. All this is true, but the constant attempts of philosophers and theologians to wrestle with this problem attest the importance for theistic religions of holding on to the personal analogy. That there is a problem of how far analogies can be stretched does not require us to abandon them altogether.

It is not clear, in any case, that Rice is content to abandon analogies altogether. His characteristic move when meeting the complaint that something essential is missing in his abstract conception of God is to admit that something is missing, but to claim that, nevertheless, there is enough analogy remaining. Thus (135) he acknowledges that gratitude and worship are attitudes to persons which are not reflected, as such, in his account of what they must mean when offered to God. But, he says, we can recognize that the world is as it is with gladness and we can view the power of goodness with humility, and 'that is not so very much further

from the notion of gratitude to God when conceived of as a person than the notion of gratitude, so conceived, is from ordinary gratitude to other people'.

The trouble is, though, that in its literal sense simple gladness is not analogous to gratitude: it is a separate component of gratitude, and what has to be added to it to make it gratitude is reference to a person who is responsible for it. To be sure the personal reference need not be explicit. 'Cosmic gratitude' – and 'cosmic awe' are often inchoate experiences which are appealed to as part of an argument from religious experience; but they function as such only because they are taken to point to a transcendent creator.

The sense that something is missing in the substitution of Rice's abstract conception for a personal God is reinforced by his treatment of the relation between God and morality. It is an important corollary of his argument to claim that knowledge of good and bad, right and wrong, does not require belief in God's existence, and that such belief does not affect the content of morality. On the face of it this is to eliminate one of the central Judaeo-Christian grounds for belief in the sanctity of human life, viz. that God has created us and destined us for eternal life.

All in all Hugh Rice's book is a stimulating one to read and well worth disagreeing with.

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Marilyn McCord Adams *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*. (Ithaca NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1999). Pp. xi + 220. £29.95 (Hbk). ISBN 0 8014 3611 7.

Marilyn McCord Adams closes her book by saying that she hopes to have persuaded many readers that even horrendous evils can be defeated by the goodness of God, but that her intention was also to disrupt a family of discussions about the problem of evil. She adds that if along the way she has said something to offend almost everybody, then she can take satisfaction that her effort has succeeded in its aporetic aims. In truth, however, it would be difficult to take offence at a book which is so manifestly honest in its search for the truth, and which so clearly expresses a deep awareness of, and compassion for, the suffering and moral frailty of human beings. One must also admire the range of scholarship and grasp of detail which McCord Adams brings to the exposition of the argument, and her sympathetic treatment of different approaches to the problem. Whatever their own views on the problem of evil, most readers will find insights here that they will want to hold on to.

The writing, in some places in Part 1, is difficult and demanding, requiring fairly

good background knowledge of somewhat technical debates in analytical philosophy. Elsewhere it is clear, elegant and forceful. If there is a problem for the reader, it is chiefly in the overall structure of the argument. The discussion is wide-ranging and is drawn from previously published papers, and it is not always easy to see how the different parts of the thesis fit together.

McCord Adams explains the three parts of her book as follows (Introduction, 3–4). In Part 1 she examines J. L. Mackie's argument that the existence of evil is logically incompatible with that of an omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good God. She attempts to show that Mackie's methodological assumptions have distorted the issues at stake, mainly by overemphasizing moral considerations ('the value-theory imperialism of morals'). Part 2 is largely concerned with introducing other dimensions of value, besides the moral, into the debate. In Part 3 she 'draw[s] these materials together to show how the wider resources of Christian theology can be deployed to formulate a family of solutions to the so-called logical problem of evil' (4).

The immediate issue is what is meant by the logical problem of evil. That is, presumably, the problem raised by Mackie's attempted proof of incompatibility. If so, then a solution to the logical problem of evil should consist in showing that God's existence (as perfectly good, etc.) is compatible with the existence of evil in the world. Now even if it is true, as McCord Adams claims, that Mackie overemphasizes moral considerations to the exclusion of other relevant values, it is hard to see how this diagnosis can point to a satisfactory solution to the problem he posed. Suffering is, on the face of it, a bad thing, which God could have prevented. If so, then suffering counts against God's goodness, and whether the goodness in question is moral or of some other sort seems a secondary matter.

McCord Adams is critical of Nelson Pike for accepting 'ordinary' moral intuitions in discussing Mackie's paper. She argues that disagreement between theists and atheists about how much evil is acceptable might turn on the different ontological and value commitments of the two sides; thus the notion of perfect goodness may turn out to be equivocal (11–12; see also 158). But again, even granted its truth, it is not clear what the force of this claim is. On the face of it, it might seem to point towards a solution to Mackie's challenge. If, say, some theists believe that God's perfect goodness does not involve any concern for humans, then they will not regard suffering as an evil at all. Or again, some theists might judge that the suffering in this world is acceptable because it can be redeemed in an eternal life after death; atheists, since they don't believe in an afterlife, will disagree. Yet McCord Adams does not accept this sort of consideration as providing a solution, for she endorses the view that there is widespread and pre-theoretical agreement that some situations in the world are evil (29). Mackie's starting point was just that. Accepting (pre-theoretically) that evil exists, how can a good and omniscient God can permit any evil at all? The ambiguities of perfect goodness seem irrelevant at this point.

Yet McCord Adams does claim to have the resources for a solution to Mackie's logical problem. Her strategy (laid out on 155–156) turns on the claim that it is not necessary to show why a perfectly good, omnipotent God doesn't prevent horrendous evils (i.e. such as give reason to doubt whether those involved in them could thereafter have a life worth living). Instead we need only show how God can guarantee to those who suffer or participate in such horrors a life which is, on the whole, a great good to them. That certainly shifts the original ground of the debate; and, given an everlasting afterlife of enormous happiness, it does seem genuinely possible that any suffering and degradation would be absorbed and eventually transformed. But what justifies the shift in approach from explaining to redeeming evil? McCord Adams offers two considerations: (a) we cannot think of plausible reasons why God should have permitted such horrors; and (b) in attempting to find plausible reasons, people are led to present credible partial justifications as total ones, thus making God's actions appear perverse (155–156). It looks as though the failure to find a solution to the problem is somehow taken to show that the problem doesn't need answering. Maybe from a position of faith it doesn't; we simply trust that God has His reasons. Nevertheless, this looks like disengagement from the debate rather than a solution to Mackie's challenge.

There is no doubt that McCord Adams is unhappy with the ground on which the debate about evil has recently been conducted, complaining of its high level of abstraction and its free-floating value-judgements (3). One may have some sympathy with this view. Perhaps, moreover, a case can be made for saying that philosophical understanding is advanced, not by solving problems head-on, but by moving around them. However, this case would need making. McCord Adams does not say at all clearly how her strategy for solution relates to the original problem.

Also in Part 1 McCord Adams discusses Alvin Plantinga's well-known reply to the problem posed by Mackie. In the course of his article Mackie had considered the Free Will Defence: perhaps it is better that people act freely and make mistakes than that God create robots. To this Mackie had replied that God could have created beings who would freely do only what was good. Plantinga questions whether this is indeed possible. It may be that, in any world containing free agents which God could have created, some people would act badly ('transworld depravity') and that the actual world is better than any other that God could have created. Sometimes McCord Adams appears favourable to Plantinga's argument, but ultimately she complains (24–25) that his response treats evil abstractly rather than addressing the horrendous evils in the world, and suggests (26) that he needs to strengthen his argument accordingly. The complaint seems to be that the peculiar horror of some evils in the world render Plantinga's case for the defence implausible. Yet Plantinga was answering a charge of inconsistency in traditional theism, and his point is that a defence against inconsistency does not need to be plausible, but only to point out an overlooked possibility.

In Part 2, on the way towards her own resolution of the problem, McCord Adams examines value systems which have characterized other societies at other times. In particular, she identifies two such systems, the code of honour, and the purity/defilement calculus, as giving a better account of what it is that is bad about horrendous evil, and identifying ways in which God can do something about it. She discusses purity and defilement in chapter 5. God is pure; humans (by nature straddling the physical and material) are unclean. Concentration on moral categories leads some authors to overrate the extent to which humans can subdue their lower natures and act to decide their own destinies. Hence they see divine intervention as potentially a threat to human freedom, where instead we should see it as a necessary precondition (through the nurturing presence of the Holy Spirit) for genuine agency. Honour/shame is considered in chapter 6. Concentration on moral categories encourages one overlook the symbolic power of evil; its ability to degrade by symbolizing that one is worthless. Pain, disease and bodily deficiency, as well as our actions, can shame us. We are needy clients, whose chief source of dignity is the honour and glory of God. The honour code does not require the divine patron to show goodness to all his clients – to bring it about that each gets a life which is a great good to him on the whole. Nevertheless, God has honoured the human race by becoming a member of it and taking a stand with the shamed. 'Each of us secure in the sense of his/her enormous worth to God, we will spend eternity in acts of mutual appreciation' (128).

Later (192) McCord Adams points out that although each of these alternative schemes is illuminating, they are not congruent with each other or with the calculus of morality. She doesn't attempt to render them congruent, but still takes points from each of them. In a way that seems right: the illumination gained outweighs the drive for theoretical consistency. But one feels that ultimately these insights should be contained in a single consistent calculus of value.

The shift in approach to the problem of evil which McCord Adams advocates is closely connected with a rebalancing of aesthetic against moral considerations; this is discussed mainly in chapter 7. How far are aesthetic considerations of cosmic harmony compatible with the guarantee of divine goodness to each person? Global aesthetic solutions in terms of overall harmony are not enough. God must make each person's life a great good to himself or herself if the problem of horrendous evils is to be solved (49): the ability to contribute to the positive meaning of a person's life by overcoming evil with good is in part a function of aesthetic imagination, of the capacity to weave evils into complex goods through subtle irony and reversal. Given the horrendous evils God permits, God must have extraordinary aesthetic imagination to overcome them (147). Why not 'moral imagination'? McCord Adams takes a narrow definition of the moral as exchange of obligations (158), a classification which would, for example, treat virtue ethics, with its talk of human flourishing, as aesthetics. So she insists that the wreck of persons is different from the negative evaluation of sounds or colours 'not because it is a

moral *rather than* an aesthetic matter, but because *personal* ruin is differently related to other value-dimensions' (149). That may be the case on her narrow definition of morality, but on a wider definition it is not clear. In general it might have been better to operate with a wider concept of morality rather than to the introduction of the category of the aesthetic.

The problem of how a perfectly good God can permit evil, as we have seen, is transformed into the problem of how a perfectly good God can redeem evil. In Part 3 McCord Adams considers several possible solutions, including the one she favours (166). Through incarnation, God saw the world from a finite human consciousness without access to divine omniscience. In the Crucifixion, God identified with all human beings who participate in horrors, not just victims but perpetrators too (through Jesus' being ritually cursed, and so, symbolically, a blasphemer). Hence, participation in horrors becomes a secure point of identification with the crucified God. Evils do not lose their power to ruin lives, but in an afterlife they can be integrated into a close relationship with God and even come to take on a positive aspect. McCord Adams stresses (167) that participation in horrors is not necessary for the achieving of the individual's incommensurable good; a horror-free life would equally give rise to that. This point would seem rich fuel for Mackie's sort of doubt: how is it possible for a perfectly good, omnipotent God to put some, apparently arbitrarily selected, individuals through extreme suffering, if it is not even a necessary condition of their achieving great good? But by that stage the argument has moved on.

The final impression of the book is that it is a stage in the author's continuing wrestling with the problem of evil rather than her definitive solution. To the very end she is still grappling with various rival positions, always in the spirit of one seeking and finding in them contributions to the truth rather than sources of error.

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Holmes Rolston, III *Genes, Genesis and God: Values and Their Origins in Natural and Human History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Pp. xvi + 400. £40.00 (Hbk). £14.95 (Pbk).

Genes, Genesis and God is the result of Holmes Rolston's Gifford Lectures (1997–1998). Rolston's objective is to determine whether the phenomena of science, religion and ethics can be reduced to phenomena of biology (xiii). That is, whether three of the most notable products of human culture can be reduced to nature in such a way that the sciences, especially biology, are sufficient to explain these phenomena and that therefore no other explanatory category is needed. In

short, does Darwinism, or perhaps more accurately sociobiology, explain everything or is there more to life than natural selection? Rolston's answer is 'No', and he suggests a different way of understanding the relationship between nature and culture than the one offered by contemporary evolutionary biologists such as Richard D. Alexander, Richard Dawkins and Edward O. Wilson.

Rolston takes the general sociobiological view of human nature to be that a 'quite simple biological force producing the most offspring in the next generation pervades and is the most basic determinant in all human affairs' (120). Natural selection and adaptive advantages reach through to the very core of our being and achievements. Rolston accepts the idea that the content of some of our beliefs is genetically fixed in this way. We should not, for instance, be surprised that all cultures teach that a person should avoid incest, and over the millennia, humans who had genes that inclined them to avoid such behaviour left more reproducible offspring. But does this hold true for all our beliefs?

Rolston notes first that the sociobiological explanatory scheme is not needed for understanding reproduction across generation because one simply needs adequate provision for such reproduction, which keep population levels above some threshold of flourishing, not some law by which cultural practices are always tested for their power to maximize biological fitness (124).

It is, moreover, not true that the content of our beliefs in general is genetically fixed. Rolston's thesis is that people are capable of developing and evaluating scientific theories, ethical principles or religious convictions independently of whether these theories, principles or convictions optimize their biological fitness (124). He develops different strategies to support this claim. One strategy is to find examples of beliefs and practice that undermine the sociobiological explanation. A clear counter-example to what sociobiology predicts seems to be, for instance, that in modern Western societies parents have fewer children than they could successfully raise with their resources (131). The most plausible reason for these changes is cultural and not genetic. Another is the movement for the liberation of slaves, women and other oppressed people. A genetic theory common to all *homo sapiens* cannot explain these liberation struggles, because it lacks the relevant categories within its scope to discriminate the ideological differences between cultures. Instead, 'the critical difference lies in the historically emergent ethical conviction that slavery is wrong and freedom is right; that women and blacks are, in morally relevant respects, to be given equal opportunities and responsibilities with men and whites' (154).

Hence, the 'genius' in culture is 'nongenetic transmission', or what we typically call communication (144). People teach each other how to do and how to think about things, such as evolutionary theory, the golden rule, growing wheat, and baking bread. Such ideas are discovered in the past and transmitted non-genetically from parents to children, from teachers to students and so on. Rolston suggests that a model we can use to understand the relationship between biology

and culture is the hardware–software model: the human cognitive equipment has what structure it has, like computer hardware, as a given to work with. Quite diverse software programs can be run on this hardware, and, in terms of selecting among the broad cultural options faced, nothing is hard-wired. 'When humans choose between competing options, those who use this and not that software will better succeed in reproducing, and their children will inherit copies of it. This better capacity to survive is copied, but not by hardware rebuilding (not by genetics), rather software duplication (cultural transmission)' (139). It is, of course, important how the hardware evolved and it sets some limitations for what software can be used, but the cultural software that is run on the biological hardware does make a critical difference.

The real challenge to evolutionary theory and to sociobiology is that the human mind can be religious. We cannot find any parallel to it in wild nature. There exist no prayers, no religious rituals or belief in God (or gods) among the members of other species living on this planet. Rolston states the evolutionary explanation of religion and scrutinizes it critically. The explanation is that persons who are religious leave more offspring than those who are not, and that thus religion can be explained as a purely material phenomenon (308). Rolston's response is that such an account might explain the way in which religion originated, but it can no longer explain the way religions operate because once religions become universal they transcend biological categories. The reason is that the missionary activity of the world religions, from an evolutionary viewpoint, helps to ensure the replication of genes unlike one's own, but that is not what the Darwinian explanation predicts should happen (318–319). If a tribe has a religion that serves their genes well by producing group loyalty and producing numerous offspring, then why would this group attempt to convert people with foreign genes to their religion? If maximizing genetic fitness is the most dominant determinant of religious beliefs and behaviour, then convincing people with foreign genes to become, for instance, Christians should have been selected against. But this has not been the case.

So *contra* Dawkins, Wilson and others, 'We have no cause to think that the startling genesis on Earth, recorded in the genes, recorded in the cultural heritages, including the religions, is not sacred' (348). This claim is in *Genes, Genesis and God* supported by a number of good arguments. But Rolston wants to go further because he also claims that,

> **…the divine spirit is the giver of life, pervasively present over the millennia. God is the atmosphere of possibilities, the metaphysical environment in, with, and under first the natural and later also the cultural environment, luring the Earthen histories upslope. God orchestrates such self-organizing, steadily elevating the possibilities, making for storied achievements, enriching the values generated.** (367)

But this is quite a different claim. It is one thing to establish the possibility of the divine or sacred reality and yet another to give us good reasons to believe in the actuality of the divine or sacred reality. Concerning the second point, Rolston

merely suggests some ways in which such an argument could be developed and I do not think that this is enough to convince 'religion's cultured despisers, including its scientifically cultured despisers' that religion is a live option (xiii). This is a disappointing shortcoming of the book, or perhaps this is to ask for too much of a single book which already contains so much material, and the authors' grasp of biology, ethics, as well as religion, is truly impressive. But let us hope that this second stage of his argument will be the topic of his next project because *Genes, Genesis and God* is indeed a very good and very interesting book.

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Richard Cross *Duns Scotus*. Great Medieval Thinkers. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), Pp. xxi + 250. £35.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0 19 512552 5. £15.99 (Pbk). ISBN 0 19 512553 3.

Richard Cross's introduction to the thought of the medieval theologian John Duns Scotus (ca. 1265–1308) is the first volume of the new OUP series, 'Great Medieval Thinkers'. In the foreword, the editor of the series, Brian Davies, states that these volumes are intended to provide clear and accessible overviews of the lives and thought of medieval philosophers and theologians, with an eye not only on college and university students in philosophy and theology, but also on the general reader.

Cross's monograph is particularly welcome, as it is the first comprehensive treatment of Duns Scotus's theology in English. Until now the English reader had to rely on works such as E. Bettoni, *Duns Scotus: The Basic Principle of His Philosophy* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1961) and B. Bonansea, *Man and His Approach to God in John Duns Scotus* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1983). These works, however, are not comprehensive, philosophically inadequate, and out of print. To find another extended treatment of Duns Scotus in English we have to go back to the two volumes by C. R. S. Harris, *Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927; repr. New York: Humanities Press, 1959), which, however, have been superseded by more recent scholarship. No one of these works, moreover, focuses specifically on Scotus's theology. Cross makes clear that, after some hesitations, he has chosen to write for specialist theologians and philosophers rather than for the non-initiates. Actually, the content of his book is hardly accessible for a reader without any previous knowledge of medieval thought.

This little book is a remarkable achievement. It covers all the most important topics of Scotus's theology in 151 pages (endnotes excluded). Throughout these few

pages, Cross confronts the legendary complexity of Scotus's work 'head-on' (xi). He often draws comparisons between Scotus and Aquinas, not because Aquinas was particularly influential on Scotus, but for 'pedagogic purposes', since Aquinas is likely to be more known to the modern reader than other theologians who were, however, more important to Scotus himself. Along the way, Cross makes clear where he thinks that Scotus 'has gone wrong – (xii). His struggle with often forbiddingly difficult texts is all the more to be admired since we still do not have critical editions of most of Scotus's works, and the scarcity of English translations relegates them to the periphery of contemporary theological and philosophical debates.

Cross's book consists of eleven short chapters, devoted to Scotus's views on theology (chapter 1), God (chapters 2–5), humanity (chapters 6–8), Jesus (chapters 9–10), and the sacraments (chapter 11). There follow an appendix and extensive endnotes that include references to Scotus's texts, bibliographical information, and sometimes brief discussions of the most controversial issues. A bibliography, an *index locorum*, and a general index conclude the volume.

In what follows, I will first give an overview of the content of the book, then put forward a few remarks on it. Chapter 1 is devoted to a brief account of Scotus's life and to his distinction between what he calls 'theology', i.e. revealed theology, and what he calls 'metaphysics', i.e. natural theology. Cross notes that revealed theology is for Scotus a practical science, namely a science that is action-directing, since the more we learn about God, the more we are disposed to love Him. Chapters 2–4 deal with what Scotus would call 'metaphysics', i.e. natural theology. Chapter 2 is devoted to the study of Scotus's demonstration of the existence of God, of which Cross gives an idealized formulation based on elements taken from several of Scotus's works. Chapter 3 is devoted to the issue of religious language. According to Cross, Scotus is a champion of the so-called 'perfect-being theology', i.e. the view according to which from God's maximal perfection a series of divine attributes can be inferred. In this context, Cross presents one of Scotus's most famous doctrines, that of the univocity of the words we use to signify God's attributes such as 'wise', 'good', 'just', 'true', and above all, 'being' (which properly speaking is not an attribute). As Cross succinctly puts it, 'Scotus claims that some words, when applied to God and creatures, have exactly the same meaning or sense in both cases. Such a word is univocal to God and creatures' (31). One of the consequences of univocity, according to Cross, is that Scotus must posit some complexity in God. For Scotus, as Cross has shown, maintains that an attribute such as 'wise' keeps the same meaning when it is applied to God and when it is applied to creatures; but when applied to creatures, 'wise' has a different meaning from, say, 'just'; consequently, 'wise' has a different meaning from 'just' also when applied to God. So God's being wise is different from His being just and both are different from His essence. Scotus, however, manages to reconcile this complexity with God's real simplicity by virtue of his doctrine of

formal distinction, which Cross briefly deals with in the Appendix. Cross concludes this dense chapter with a presentation of Scotus's concept of infinity, which again is very different from Aquinas's, since Scotus refuses Aquinas's view that finiteness and infinity are relational properties and adopts instead a quantitative model of infinity, which he applies to the case of God. Chapter 4 is devoted to God's knowledge and action. Here one of the problems is to reconcile God's foreknowledge and determination of future contingent events with human freedom. Scotus elaborates a theory according to which a freely creaturely action has two causes, the creature and God, and the former is essentially dependent on the latter but is not reducible to it.

The next seven chapters are devoted to issues of revealed theology. Chapter 5 deals with God as a Trinity and Scotus's account of Creation. Chapter 6 deals with the human body, the human soul, and the immortality of the soul. Scotus, unlike Aquinas, maintains that the human soul is not the form of the body. As a consequence, it is easier for Scotus to show the possibility of the immortality of the soul, even though he maintains that there is no demonstration that the soul is actually immortal (which is something we hold by faith). Chapter 7 is devoted to moral issues such as human freedom and sin. The main feature of Scotus's approach seems to be his doctrine of the radical indeterminateness of the will. Here Cross also deals with Scotus's distinction between the inclination to self-fulfilment (*affectio commodi*) and the inclination to justice (*affectio iustitiae*), which Scotus takes over from Anselm. Cross maintains that Scotus's ethical views share important characteristics with divine command theories, according to which things are good because God commands them and not vice versa. Cross, however, emphasizes that Scotus, properly speaking, does not endorse such a view, for according to him there are some laws binding God, because God is intrinsically just. With regard to the original sin, Scotus does not adopt the strict Augustinian view according to which the prelapsarian state of original justice is natural, as he maintains that original justice is a supernatural gift and that the Fall simply reduces us to our natural state. Scotus derives this aspect, too, from Anselm. Chapter 8 is devoted to predestination, merit, and grace. Here Cross stresses that Scotus manages to avoid the double predestination adopted later by Calvin: according to Scotus, men are saved because God wants them to be saved, but they are damned because of their actions and not because God wants them to be damned.

Chapter 9 is devoted to Jesus as God and as man, namely to the thorny issue of the hypostatic union, according to which Jesus Christ, when incarnated, has both divine and human nature. Chapter 10 is devoted to the role of Jesus in the salvation of the world. Scotus agrees with a theological minority view, according to which Christ could have become incarnate irrespective of the Fall, since Christ is the fulfilment of creation. Moreover, Cross briefly deals with the issue of the immaculate conception of Mary. Chapter 11 is devoted to the sacraments, among which a

particular place is occupied by the Eucharist and doctrine of transubstantiation. The Appendix deals with the topics of the transcendental attributes (i.e. those attributes that transcend the classification of predicates proposed by Aristotle and are applicable to God), the formal distinction, and the issue of the beatific vision.

As is clear from this brief overview, in a few pages Cross manages to cover many different and difficult issues. This is indeed a great merit. Cross also tries to evaluate the merits of Scotus's solutions. He seems to be particularly sympathetic to Scotus's account of divine language, as he notes that 'a theory like Scotus's is required for theology – natural or revealed – even to get started' (45). He is less confident of the value of Scotus's Trinitarian views, but he recognizes that Scotus's doctrine is 'perhaps the most consistently rational exposition' of the Augustinian tradition 'that has ever been attempted'. He also notes that Scotus's discussion of God's knowledge and agency are similar to modern discussions on the same topic, and he stresses the subtlety of Scotus's Christology. Admittedly, sometimes the reader may risk getting lost in the diversity of topics Cross deals with, as Cross is reluctant to provide any indication of the general direction in which Scotus's theology is moving. On the other hand, the reader already familiar with medieval philosophy could find some discussions a little too compressed and a few assertions not sufficiently warranted by textual evidence (presumably because of editorial strictures, the texts on which Cross's interpretations are based are only referred to and almost never extensively quoted).

Cross's decision to confront Scotus's complexity 'head-on' is also very welcome, but sometimes such a method can lead to perplexing consequences. As a matter of fact, although Cross's analytical skilfulness is always rewarding, it seems that some of Scotus's philosophical vocabulary may be misunderstood if it is too readily translated into modern jargon and is not read in the light of his contemporaries' discussions. I give two examples, one concerning the possibility of our knowing Gods's essence by natural reason, the other concerning the doctrine of univocity.

With regard to our knowledge of God's essence, Cross maintains that, according to Scotus, we cannot obtain any knowledge of God in His essence by natural reason (7); consequently, without the aid of revelation we can know only God's attributes, formally distinct from his essence, whereas God's essence is only known by revelation (44). This interpretation, however, is at least questionable, since it neglects Scotus's distinction between knowing an essence under a universal concept and knowing an essence as an individual essence. Scotus admits that by natural reason we cannot know God as an individual essence, but he explicitly states that we can and do know God's essence under a universal concept by natural reason alone. And this knowledge under a universal concept is a knowledge of God's essence, even though not of God's essence as an individual essence. Actually, Scotus maintains that transcendental univocal concepts are precisely concepts of God's essence obtained by natural reason, and this claim seems to be central to his

theological achievement (see *Ordinatio* I, d. 3, p. 1. q. 1–2, n. 25, ed. Vat. III, 16–17: '*Dico ergo primo quod non tantum habere potest conceptus naturaliter in quo per accidens concipitur Deus, puta in aliquo attributo, sed etiam aliquis conceptus in quo per se et quidditative concipitur Deus*'.)

A second case in which Cross's interpretation of Scotus raises some perplexities is that of univocity. Cross maintains that Scotus's univocity is an identity in meaning between terms (presumably, between different occurrences of the same term), and he interprets 'to have the same meaning' as 'to have the same lexical definition'. So a term is univocal, on Cross's interpretation, if it is not ambiguous, i.e. if it has only one lexical definition. Cross here follows a trend established among contemporary religious philosophers: see, for example, the contributions by Richard Swinburne and Janice Thomas to the volume *The Philosophical Assessment of Theology: Essays in Honour of Frederick C. Copleston*, G. J. Hughes (ed.) (Tunbridge Wells: Search Press, 1987). It is far from being clear, however, that Scotus's univocity can be interpreted as a term's possession of a single meaning. Scotus, like any author of the later Middle Ages, considers signification not as a relationship between a term and its lexical definition, but as a relationship between a term, a concept, and a thing. (On the difference between the medieval notion of signification, which implies the causation of an understanding in our intellect, and the modern notion of meaning, see P. V. Spade, 'The semantics of terms', in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 188.) So two terms are univocal if they signify the same concept (medieval authors say if they have the same *ratio*, and '*ratio*' is not always synonymous with 'definition') and if the concept signified represents different things. Consequently, a term cannot be characterized as either univocal or non-univocal on the mere basis of its lexical definition. This different approach carries some important consequences. For example, since a term has either one lexical definition or more than one lexical definition, for Cross no term can be both univocal and non-univocal. By contrast, in Scotus's view the same term can be both univocal and non-univocal with respect to different things . For example, 'animal' is univocal with respect to man and horse, because it signifies a common concept that represents both man and animal; but the same term 'animal' is equivocal to a living horse and a painted one, because there is no concept common between the two horses (the real and the painted) that could be signified by the term 'animal'. Scotus calls the common concept so signified 'univocal concept', and it is such a concept, and not the lexical definition of a term, that is common between creatures' and God's attributes. Unfortunately, much of what Cross says about univocity and non-univocity – including his analysis of Scotus's criteria for univocity – turns out to be beyond the point when the medieval view on signification is taken into account. In a similar vein, Cross identifies analogy and ambiguity. But again, ambiguity is a relationship between a term and its lexical definitions, whereas a medieval thinker would typically see analogy as a relation-

ship between a term, the different but related concepts signified by that term, and the things represented by those concepts.

These few remarks only testify to the richness of Cross's analysis. This little book is not easy reading, but it is definitely worth the effort. Cross is to be thanked especially because he does not conceal the difficulty of the subject, and infects the reader with the desire to study Scotus's works directly, which is indeed the mark of a successful introduction.

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Kenneth Seeskin *Searching for a Distant God: The Legacy of Maimonides*. (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 2000). Pp. xi + 252. ISBN 0 19 512846 X.

Admirers of Kenneth Seeskin's writing in philosophy will not be disappointed with this book. The two main themes of the book are the issue of monotheism and how it is to be understood in Judaism. The most discussed thinker here is undoubtedly Maimonides, which is hardly surprising given his key status on this as on virtually every other issue in Jewish philosophy. Seeskin discusses a number of highly controversial topics in Jewish philosophy, in particular the integral role which philosophy plays in Jewish thought, and he is rightly scathing of all those thinkers who erect a huge dichotomy between Athens and Jerusalem, between reason and religion. Then he looks at the problems of understanding what it means for God to be one. The purer the conception of divine unity, the less He resembles a person, and so the more abstracted He is from us. This fits in nicely with Maimonides' constant assault on anthropomorphism, but it does raise the awkward question as to how one can then accept the viability of traditional religion, which does seem to be based on the notion of God as a person to whom one prays and who pays attention to our actions in the world of generation and corruption. This runs as a theme throughout the book – how to reconcile what, ever since Pascal, has come to be known as the God of the philosophers with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Maimonides seems to prioritize the philosophical understanding of religion over the ordinary conceptions of the believer, but he does not argue that the latter gets it wrong; on the contrary, he suggests that the unsophisticated believer is on the right road, but perhaps not as far along it as he might be were he to be able to understand Judaism philosophically. Yet it is surely problematic if (presumably, the majority of the) believers are restricted in their understanding of what are, after all, vitally important aspects of faith; yet once they come to improve their intellectual grasp of their

faith, they may find it impossible to continue to enjoy the same personal relationship with what will turn out to be a highly abstract and basically incomprehensible principle. Plenty of people are apparently happy to invest their money in ideas which they do not really understand, but how many will be ready to base their entire conception of the universe and themselves on a principle which they do not really understand?

One might say cynically that there is no problem here, since these very important theoretical questions are of little practical importance to most people, and so they are happy to put up with a lot of vagueness here. But to provide a satisfactory intellectual grasp of two contrasting notions of the deity, that of committed monotheists such as Maimonides, and those of ordinary believers and the thinkers who defend many of their views, such as Buber, is not easy, especially when one can see that both notions have much to commend them. The monotheistic view brings out nicely the unity and otherness of God, but presents us with a concept of God who seems far too distant to be worshipped (hence the title of the book). On the other hand, the more personable conception of God seems to be break every rule about divine transcendence and radical simplicity held by most of the philosophers and theologians in Judaism. This is a conflict which Seeskin constantly interrogates, and with much success. Maimonides is shown to argue that the ordinary conception of God as a person should be taken as the starting point in religion, and then the believer is encouraged by everything in Judaism to refine his belief progressively until it becomes closer to the correct view.

There is one aspect of the book where I think Seeskin's approach is questionable, and this concerns his treatment of Hegel. This is very important, since it is the theme of the whole book, namely, the notion of monotheism, which Hegel criticizes as equivalent in the Jewish version to enslavement. Hegel quite rightly argues that the gap between God and humanity, according to Judaism, is infinite and without the possibility of much significant mediation. We are in the position, then, of contemplating a God to whom the only appropriate attitude is awe, and this constitutes alienation and then enslavement. Hegel is very critical of this conception of God, which he suggests is oppressive in its very abstraction, since the total incomprehensibility of God means that His commandments become both entirely obligatory and at the same time incomprehensible. As we know, Hegel far preferred the religion of the Greeks which is at a more advanced stage of the Spirit, and then eventually Christianity offers a way of reconciling humanity with a transcendent God through the intermediary of His son. In Christianity the estrangement or unhappiness of the separation from God comes to an end since the unity of the divine and human natures is accomplished.

Now, this is not the place to consider the accuracy of Hegel's characterization of Judaism, let alone any other religion, and as Seeskin says Hegel leaves out a lot of Judaism in his account. But Seeskin accepts that he gets a lot of his description right, in particular the significance in Judaism of the enormous gap between us

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and the Almighty. What Hegel gets wrong, Seeskin claims, is that the law is a burden and was not created out of love for God's creation. Yet Seeskin suggests that Maimonides showed that all the laws, even the ceremonial laws, have a rationale, and so they have not been imposed on Jews by a distant God as entirely arbitrary aspects of His unbridled power. Well, it is true that Maimonides suggests that all the laws have a rationale, but he also accepts that given our distance (that concept again) from the conditions in which the law was originally produced, we may not understand its point, and yet we are nonetheless obliged to follow it, however difficult it may be to understand its relevance to contemporary conditions.

The blank cheque which Maimonides gives the Almighty here may be appropriate, but it does not help escape the charge of putting the issuers of the cheque in a rather humiliating position. Seeskin says that Hegel entirely ignores the covenantal aspect of the relationship between the Jews and God, but does this really help his case? For one thing, there are frequently references in Judaism to doing before hearing what it is that one is to do (Exodus, 24.7), the idea that the Jews accepted the Torah even before they knew what it was. Secondly, it is not clear what an agreement actually is when it is made with a being who is so different from us as God. If Maimonides is right and there is no comparison at all between our use of language to describe our world and God, then what does it mean to say that He has an agreement with his people? Finally, Seeskin argues that it is a mistake to emphasize the total obedience of the main Jewish thinkers, since they frequently argued with God and questioned His decisions. This is true, but then they just as often carried out His orders without question. One thinks in particular of Abraham not once questioning God for demanding the sacrifice of Isaac, a request whose difficulty the Almighty emphasizes by describing Isaac several times as 'your only son'. Yet when Sodom and Gomorrah were under threat, Abraham spoke up for their innocent inhabitants. Hegel would emphasize the *aqedah*, Seeskin the plea on behalf of the innocent citizens of the evil cities. This brings out the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of attempting to characterize a religion under just a few general categories which are supposed to express its essence and so 'what it is all about'.

Instead of criticizing Hegel's description of Judaism and seeking to replace it with something equally questionable, Seeskin might have used Maimonides' account of law to develop a notion of precisely that *Versöhnung* or reconciliation with God which Hegel demands of a free people. What reconciles the Jews with their distant God is law; this is the main topic, after all, of Jewish thought. Living in accordance with the Torah is to live in accordance with law, and that law is not to be blindly followed and accepted, since law cannot be blindly followed and accepted. This is because it always calls for interpretation, explanations as to how it might be applied to previously unconsidered cases, and so on. As we know from the famous dispute on law between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua (*Baba Metzia*

59b), judgement on these issues is not in heaven (Deuteronomy, 30.12) but has to be determined by human beings using their reason and knowledge. We can find here also a route to answer Hegel's claim that Judaism leaves the world *entgöttert* (deprived of God), since the divine transcends the world of generation and corruption so overwhelmingly. This is not a claim which Seeskin considers, and it is surely an important part of Hegel's attack on Judaism, that it so emphasizes the distance of God that none of His divinity can actually seep into the material world. The use of law as a counter-example to this critique gets us over the hurdle of a distant and incomprehensible God. He remains distant, but the use of law can allow us to be creative in carrying out the task He has set us, and can sketch out for us a way of life which is both feasible for us as mortal beings and yet which also recognizes a basis in what is over us, in God.

It is not only to law that we can turn for *Versöhnung*. Prayer is also highly relevant here, since if Maimonides is right, then we need to interrogate the literal meaning of prayer. Where prayer tends to represent God as like a person, we need to consider the images of God which we call up and see how we might gradually replace them with more sophisticated and accurate views. The emphasis here should be on the gradual nature of this process, something which God could of course carry out instantly, but we are left with the task of perfecting ourselves and our thought, since only in this way can we acquire merit and realize our natures as creatures created in the image of God but living in a very different environment. Although God is distant from us, it is not true that we have no scope for coming closer to Him, or reconciling us to the gap between us. The processes we use here are the traditional Jewish processes of law and prayer, through interrogating and refining our ways of living and speaking. This is a direction in which Seeskin could have gone, as opposed to saying defiantly to Hegel that 'the logic of monotheism is either/or and no purpose is served by trying to overcome it' (174). The task of overcoming the gap between us and God is indeed not one which we can entirely bridge, yet it does not follow that we should not set out to bridge it, in so far as we can, as the Mishnah says 'It is not up to you to complete the task, but nor is it for you to desist entirely from it'. For a thinker like Hegel such a persistent gap is a sign of tragedy, but we have seen that there are the resources in Maimonides to resolve it satisfactorily. It all comes down to what one thinks *Versöhnung* really means. If Seeskin is right and Hegel is insisting on the gap between us and God being entirely overcome, then this is certainly not something which Maimonides would contemplate. But if *Versöhnung* means not so much 'overcome' but rather 'reconcile' then progress is possible on the lines Maimonides describes.

Although on this particular issue I have argued that Seeskin does not really do justice to his material, the quality of the argument and analysis in the book is first class throughout and the reader will be frequently stimulated by the approach which the author adopts. He has a real mastery of the topic, both the ancient and medieval aspects of it, together with its modern developments, and his style is

entirely without mystification or redundancy. In short, the book is a pleasure to read and sets standards of exposition on this issue which it will be difficult to follow.

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Timothy Fitzgerald *The Ideology of Religious Studies*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Pp. xi + 276. $45.00. 0 19 512072 8.

Consider this position, which I will call the 'standard view' (SV). There is a widespread human concern with a reality taken to surpass the ordinary world revealed by sense perception. It is thought to consist either of sentient supernatural beings (e.g. gods, *Adonai*, or *Brahman*) or of an insentient metaphysical principle underlying the universe (e.g. The Unconditioned, *Sunyata*, or the *Tao*). Either way, the supermundane reality is positioned to figure centrally in the satisfaction of substantial human needs. It is controversial whether 'religion' can be defined; however, systems of practices rationalized by beliefs according to which the practices place us in a relation-of-value to such a reality are paradigmatic religions. Religions have social and political dimensions, but they should also be studied *qua* religions, as practices, institutions, beliefs, scriptures that flow from this sort of concern.

Timothy Fitzgerald's provocative book, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, is dedicated to uprooting SV root and branch. He writes: 'Religion cannot reasonably be taken to be a valid analytical category since it does not pick out any distinctive cross-cultural aspect of human life' (4). 'Religious' phenomena have profoundly different meanings within different cultures; when the phenomena are understood in the context of their local symbol systems and ritual institutions, the 'religious' dissolves into the anthropological, the political, and the sociological. The academic discipline of religious studies obstructs a clear view of what happens in other cultures. Fitzgerald proposes that it 'be rethought and re-represented as cultural studies, understood as the study of the institutions and the institutionalized values of specific societies, and the relation between those institutionalized values and the legitimation of power' (10).

Fundamental criticisms of an academic discipline should be taken seriously. Fitzgerald writes with intelligence and vigour, but with considerable detail. Much of his book's force lies in the details. I can deal only with the arguments that strike me as most central, and then only in broad strokes. The reader is forewarned that I'm constantly missing the trees for the forest. The first part of the book argues that religious studies is an ideology. In Chapter 1 Fitzgerald writes: 'The construction of ''religion'' and ''religions'' as global, cross-cultural objects of study has been part of a wider historical process of western imperialism, colonialism, and neo-

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colonialism' (8). Contrasts between 'religion', on the one hand, and the 'secular', 'society', 'politics', on the other, are ideological constructions that were imposed on colonial cultures as part of establishing Western hegemony.

An immediate problem (which Fitzgerald acknowledges) is that every concept applied in cross-cultural studies (e.g. 'values', 'institutions') may have played an ideological role. More important, that concepts are constructed for imperialist purposes doesn't prove that they don't carve reality at the joints. In general, the fact that concepts and theories are the product of enterprises having little concern for truth should alert us to the possibility that they are mistaken, but it hardly warrants concluding they are false. The theory of evolution would have been true if it had originated as Nazi propaganda. To fail to see this is to commit the genetic fallacy. It's unclear to me how much work Fitzgerald thinks this 'deconstruction' talk does in supporting his book's thesis.

Another difficulty: Fitzgerald underestimates SV's cross-cultural adaptability – as though 'religion' is wedded essentially to all these 'Western' contrasts. When I lived in India I soon recognized that the distinction between 'religion' and 'the secular' doesn't apply – religiosity runs like electricity through virtually all things Indian – but I had no trouble applying my old concept of religion. The cross-cultural inapplicability of the contrasts doesn't prove the inapplicability of 'religion'.

In chapter 2 Fitzgerald argues that religious studies, from its beginning in the nineteenth century, has been 'imbued with theological principles of the liberal ecumenical kind' (33), and is 'heavily loaded with Western Christian assumptions about God and salvation', thinly disguised as the scientific study of religion (34). The emphasis has been on interfaith dialogue and 'fitting the non-Christian institutions … into the framework of liberal ecumenical theology, and into a classification system dominated by Judaeo-Christian concepts of worship, sacrifice, and so on' (54).

Once again Fitzgerald appears to be flirting with the genetic fallacy. That SV is theologically motivated is no reason to deny its truth. Indeed, if there is such a thing as religion, and Christianity is an instance, proceeding in covertly Christian terms may reveal much of importance about other religions. Assuming otherwise begs the question against SV.

In chapter 3, devoted to the work of Ninian Smart, Fitzgerald concludes that 'the language of "religion" and its "social dimension"' obscures 'the real object of study', which is not 'religion' but the way that power is legitimated in a particular context – a job for sociology (71). Suppose the category of 'a world religion' is valid for Christianity. This means that several distinct social groups claim to believe in 'something called Christianity'. Fitzgerald continues: 'But Christianity is here a theological concept, and its interpretation will depend on how it is understood by each different group. To grasp this ideological entity … we have to approach it through the sociological structure of the relevant group' (70).

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But why call Christianity – on the face of things a pretty definite body of practices and beliefs (about Jesus, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection) – a 'theological concept' that requires 'interpretation', not to mention an 'ideological entity' in need of being 'grasped' through 'sociological structures'? Fitzgerald's argument's are often ill served by the jargon of cultural studies; it is hard to resist the view that he sees religion himself through an ideological lens.

Philosophers lately tend to agree that there is merely a 'family resemblance' between religions (to use Wittgenstein's term), a network of features generally shared, no single one of which belongs to every religion. In chapter 4, which deals largely with the work of Peter Byrne, Fitzgerald maintains that a 'family resemblance theory of religion overextends the notion so badly that it becomes impossible to determine what can and what cannot be included' (72). Without some essential characteristic, 'the family of religion becomes so large as to be practically meaningless and analytically useless' (73). I am sympathetic to this objection. The 'family resemblance' theory invites the charge that philosophy, ideology, politics, anything people really care about, is religion; but then 'religious studies' is defined too broadly to constitute an academic discipline.

I disagree, however, with Fitzgerald's additional claim that the failure of the 'family resemblance' theory of religion suggests that religion has 'no distinctive theoretical property and therefore cannot supply the basis of an academic discipline' (95). Religious studies is hardly the first discipline to need rescuing from Wittgenstein. I've argued in this journal that a religion is a system of practices meant to place us in a relation-of-value to a supermundane reality (that is, a reality surpassing the world revealed by sense perception) so grand that it can figure centrally in the satisfaction of substantial human needs. Fitzgerald's principal objection to such definitions appears to be that they are 'imbued with theological principles of a liberal ecumenical kind', which is hardly fatal. In any case, one of the book's strengths is that it shows that much depends on the success of such essentialist efforts.

Part 2 of the book concerns religion in India. Chapter 6 is about Ambedkar Buddhism. In the last century millions of untouchables in Maharashtra (led by B. R. Ambedkar, one of the framers of the Indian constitution) tried to change their status by converting to Buddhism. This led to a remarkable form of Buddhism in which Ambedkar, who died in 1956, is revered as much as the Buddha. Buddhist soteriology plays virtually no role in Ambedkar's version of Buddhism. 'According to Ambedkar's understanding, Buddha dhamma is essentially morality. By morality he means compassion, caring for one's fellow human and for the natural world.... On this line of reasoning, Buddhism becomes the basis of the new egalitarian society' (127). Fitzgerald finds the concept of religion 'unhelpful' in studying this movement (121). 'The concept of religion either as a traditional soteriology or as interaction with superhuman beings is patently inadequate for dealing with the realities of the situation of untouchable Buddhists' (129). An

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obvious response to Fitzgerald is that the concept of religion is unhelpful, not because it is defective or meaningless, but because Ambedkar Buddhism is principally a political movement in Buddhist trappings.

Hinduism is not a religion as much as a religious civilization. One cannot 'convert' to Hinduism, for instance; it is necessary to have a caste. In chapter 7 Fitzgerald argues plausibly that the wish to depict Hinduism as 'a world religion' has often led writers to ignore the profound influence on Hinduism of caste and concerns about ritual pollution. In addition, he suggests that categories such as 'ritual', 'hierarchy', 'gender', 'caste', 'ritual specialist', 'purity', and 'pollution' may provide a more precise framework than 'religion' to study Hinduism (144). Most fruitful to that study is understanding the 'fundamental symbolic system underlying the whole range of ritual institutions' (145). This system is rooted in *dharma*, Fitzgerald suggests.

Dharma is an eternal ritual order that defines the correct condition of all beings, whether they be gods, demons, animals, ancestors, members of different castes and subcastes. *Dharma* is fundamentally an ideological expression of hierarchy or ritual order that embraces the whole mythical cosmos but is manifested to the observer most evidently in caste, including the power exercised by the king or the dominant castes in contemporary India (145). I take the force of this to be that to understand Hinduism, finally, we must understand the relevant institutionalized values and their relation to the legitimation of power; but then talk of 'religion' is irrelevant.

This perspective is illuminating, but perhaps Fitzgerald is carried away by his vision. If the more 'precise' categories plus *dharma* explain Hinduism, what is the supernatural realm doing there at all? It's a bit hard to take seriously the claim that 'the human quest for the Divine' fails utterly as an explanatory category in a culture positively swarming with deities. While concerns about caste and pollution affect the ordering of the supernatural realm, one can hardly dismiss a priori the contention that this is a two-way street; for instance, caste is provided a supernatural warrant in the *Rig-Veda*. *Dharma* is itself a religious concept, at least by the theory of religion I mentioned above, and the claim that it is an 'ideological expression of hierarchy' is hardly self-evident – though I expect there is some truth to it. Why not allow that a powerful religious vision (or collection of such visions) plays a role in shaping Hindu society? Above all, Fitzgerald fails to recognize that caste is itself a religious institution (a central part of a system of practices meant to place practitioners in a relation-of-value to a supermundane reality), one reason it is so very hard to uproot. This failure, I suspect, flows partly from his apparent conviction that the concept 'religion' is wedded essentially to 'Western' contrasts with 'society' and the 'secular'.

The book's third section, which concerns religion in Japan, argues in part that 'religion' is a category foisted on the Japanese in the last two centuries by Western countries. (In Part 4, concerning problems with the category 'culture', Fitzgerald

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responds to the concern that all concepts deployed in cross-cultural studies are defective.) Fitzgerald is an apt observer of Japanese culture, as evidenced by his discussion of Japanese baseball. He is also a gifted storyteller. Chapter 10, 'Bowing to the taxman', contains a beautifully crafted account of a Western friend's adventures with the Japanese national tax office, which culminate in his unexpected adoption as a member of Japanese society.

I fear that this review fails to do justice to the intelligence that informs Fitzgerald's writing. I frankly don't know whether religious studies can withstand fundamental criticism. Anyone interested in these matters will profit from reading *The Ideology of Religious Studies*. While unpersuaded by Fitzgerald's book, I am nervous that its thesis is true.

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