

## BOOK NOTES

EDITED BY BRIAN R. CLACK

Peter Byrne & Leslie Houlden (eds). *Companion Encyclopedia of Theology*. (London: Routledge, 1995.) Pp. xxiv + 1092. £85.00.

It is a testimony to the quality of this encyclopedia that the only criticism that can be levelled at it is that, at £85, it is extremely expensive. But even this criticism is not unmitigated, for, with well over a thousand pages and constituting a remarkably comprehensive guide to theology, this book is certainly a reasonable investment for any scholar. The encyclopedia is split into six sections: The Bible; The Tradition; Philosophy; Spirituality; Practical Theology; and Christian Theology: Scene and Prospect (comprising articles on the future of theology). Each of these sections contains eight articles written by well-known authors, such as John Barton, Alister McGrath, Rowan Williams, Jack Dominion and John Macquarrie. Readers of *Religious Studies* will be especially interested in the section on philosophy of religion. Here one finds a fine assessment of the history of the discipline, and its current state of play, with articles contributed by a distinguished collection of writers (Ward on God, Penelhum on reason, Pailin on natural theology, Wynn on religious language, Byrne on scientific understanding, Trigg on theological anthropology, Sutherland on evil, and Jantzen on feminism). And outside of the philosophy section there are contributions which will also be of interest to readers of this journal: for example, William Wainwright on religious experience and language, Stephen Clark on environmental ethics, and Theodore Jennings on making sense of talk about God. All the articles here mentioned (and more) will be beneficial to newcomers to the subject, but the book will also stimulate debate among older hands, for many of the pieces included are not purely descriptive of an aspect of theology, but seek to explore new ways of understanding theological issues. In short, a deeply satisfying work of reference, to which one will have need to turn again and again.

B. R. C.

Stewart Guthrie. *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.) Pp. 336. \$30.00 hbk, \$16.95 pbk.

This book was missed by *Religious Studies* upon first publication. It has now been reissued as a paperback. The omission is to be regretted, for it contains a clear, well-argued theory of religion, which does indeed contain elements of novelty. Guthrie endeavours to explain religion as the outcome of anthropomorphism. He defines anthropomorphism as a cognitive and interpretative strategy and claims that it is at the heart of human perception. Perception necessarily involves interpretation and the search for meaning. We naturally and almost inevitably see meaning in perception by seeing the human form in things around us. Much of the book is about anthropomorphism as a cognitive strategy – its logic, power and ubiquity in human

thought (chapters 2–6). This general picture of human cognition is fitted to religion via two chapters (1, 7), which contend that earlier theories of religion do not work, while the anthropomorphism theory fits the bill. In order to make this theory work, Guthrie must identify religion as the belief in superhuman beings. In this, and other respects, his interpretation of religion develops, while it extends, a familiar tradition which includes E. B. Tylor, Melford Spiro and Robin Horton. Guthrie's arguments are challenging throughout and will be of interest to scholars from a number of different fields: philosophy of religion, anthropology, psychology and others. It seems to this reader that they are weakest in dealing with the preliminary questions which face any general, radical theory of religion, namely: how religion should be defined, whether it can be treated as a uniform phenomenon explicable throughout in the same terms, whether and how any explanation can go beyond the concepts of the religious themselves. If Guthrie does not convince that he has the clue to interpret and explain religion, he certainly establishes himself as an interesting and significant partner in debate.

P. A. B.

C. J. F. Martin. *An Introduction to Medieval Philosophy*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996.) Pp. 148. £11.95.

This book is not a comprehensive study of medieval philosophy and philosophers, but is rather intended by its author to be 'an intelligent guidebook to the habits and manners of the fascinating and foreign inhabitants of the realm of medieval philosophy' (p. 14). In other words, it aims to introduce to the student the broad concerns and themes which underly the work of medieval philosophers. To this end, the book divides into two halves. In the first, Martin outlines the ideals of the medieval project, including the desire collectively to perfect the tradition and to reconcile Christian thought with pagan philosophy. The aim of the second part is to show how far these ideals were in fact achieved. This involves a broad survey of the history of medieval philosophy: the conflict between the Augustinian tradition and the approach of Boethius; the discovery of Aristotle; and the attempt (principally by Aquinas) at a synthesis of Augustinian and Aristotelian thought. The book is successful in a number of areas, principally in its preliminary discussion of authority and tradition, and in its sketch of basic Aristotelian concepts. It is a shame that the book is not longer, for one would like to hear more about a number of philosophers (e.g. Chalcidius, John Scotus Eriugena) who are only mentioned in passing; and, again, a book of this nature could perhaps have included within its scope greater discussion of Jewish and Islamic philosophers. Of course, that one's appetite for these neglected philosophers is wetted is testimony to the effect of this introduction, and to the enthusiasm with which the author speaks about his subject. Indeed, Martin's love of medieval philosophy is apparent throughout this book. Concerned to illustrate the hiatus between medieval and modern philosophy, he frequently tries to show how superior a project the medieval one was. This results in some rather unnecessary jibes at the modern form of the subject, which is unsupportedly said to be in a 'disastrous state', largely due to the 'mistakes' of Descartes. Martin sees the only hope for philosophy to be, bizarrely, 'a return to the acceptance of some kind of authority', and, given what he earlier has to say, presumably a reunion of theology and philosophy. But given the current 'Christian philosophy' experiment, this may be exactly what should be avoided.

B. R. C.

T. Kermit Scott. *Augustine: His Thought in Context*. (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1995.) Pp. 253. \$14.95.

This is a very fine book, which will be of immense help to those seeking to understand the thought of St Augustine. It introduces Augustine's work by placing his life and central teachings in their natural context, that of the Roman Empire in the fourth and fifth centuries. The book divides into three sections. In a captivating and wide-ranging first section, Scott details Augustine's world, emphasizing the prevalence of belief in gods and the supernatural. In this way, it is shown that in his unquestioning acceptance of the existence of God (and gods) Augustine is simply a perfectly normal person of his time. Scott collects together a considerable amount of evidence to show this, and proceeds to reflect upon the material conditions of Roman society which fostered such an outpouring of religion (here there are some interesting reflections on the nature of religion and the needs it meets). In the second section of the book, Scott charts Augustine's search for God (the search for 'a satisfying myth'), documenting the development of Augustine's thought from naive Catholicism, through Manichaen and Plotinian stages, to the mature outlook, characterised as 'the imperial myth', whereby God is the absolute emperor of the universe, absolutely omnipotent and perfectly good. The final section provides careful accounts of central features of Augustinianism: free choice of the will; divine foreknowledge; predestination; original sin; and the fall. Scott shows how Augustine's system falls short of complete consistency, foundering on the inescapable tension between divine goodness and omnipotence. One of the great strengths of this book (and there are many) is the way in which Scott manages to show both how much of western culture (e.g. its conception of God and of the atomistic individual) we owe to Augustine, and the reasons for the triumph of Augustinianism (his conception of God was universally satisfying but – crucially – also serving the interests of the dominant classes as a conservative myth). Early on, Scott describes Augustine as 'an old and comfortable friend... with whom I disagree about almost everything' (p. 7), and this is perhaps the key to the book's success: true, the book is critical of Augustine, but it never becomes a bitter indictment. Rather, the greatness and limitation of Augustine's thought is fairly documented, and the reader leaves the book with a greatly enhanced knowledge of this remarkable philosopher. A lucid and humane work, which deserves a large readership.

B. R. C.

Richard Worsley. *Human Freedom and the Logic of Evil: Prolegomenon to a Christian Theology of Evil*. (London: Macmillan, 1996.) Pp. viii + 222. £40.00.

Richard Worsley, vicar in the parish of Caludon, Coventry, has written a 'prolegomenon to a Christian theology of evil'. In so doing he discusses several other approaches to the problem of evil. Unfortunately, his handling of this material does not generate confidence. Already in the second chapter there are serious errors and distortions concerning Alvin Plantinga's free will defence, John Hick's soul-making theodicy, and the theodicy of process theism, probably the three most influential recent approaches to the problem of evil. The third chapter is devoted entirely to Plantinga and reveals major misunderstandings of his views; similar problems recur throughout the book. Philosophically knowledgeable readers will be exasperated and frustrated, while others are liable to be seriously misled. The core idea of the book seems to derive from John Polkinghorne's suggestion that the solution

to the problem of natural evil must lie in a 'variation of the free-will defence, applied to the whole of the created world. One might call it the "free-process defence"'. This is an intriguing suggestion, and it is to be hoped that a book will appear that develops it in a lucid and philosophically responsible way. *Human Freedom and the Logic of Evil* is not that book.

W.H.