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Book reviews

Keith E. Yandell (ed.) *Faith and Narrative*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Pp. 271. £35.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0 19 5131452.

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This collection of thirteen original essays on faith and narrative, together with an introduction by the editor, is thoroughly interdisciplinary: the authors are philosophers, theologians, historians, psychologists, and much else besides; and the essays themselves cover topics from the impact of the translation of Christian works on African culture to a consideration of narrative aspects of Freudian and Jungian theory and practice.

The chapters fall into four sections: 'The power of narrative', with contributions from Lamin Sanneh, David L. Jeffrey, George Steiner, and Eleonore Stump; 'The place of narrative', with contributions from James Billington, Robert E. Frykenberg, and John B. Carman; 'The promise of narrative', with contributions from Paul Vitz, Jon N. Moline, Gabriel Fackre, and Nicholas Wolterstorff; and 'The problems of narrative', with contributions from Paul Griffiths and the editor, Keith Yandell.

The book has both the advantages and some of the disadvantages that go with such a diverse collection: anyone concerned with faith and narrative should find at least a few of the contributions of interest; but not many readers, even those deeply concerned with faith and narrative, are likely to want to read all, or even most of them. As a reflection of my own interests, rather than of the qualities of the individual contributions, I should like to comment briefly on three.

Eleonore Stump, in 'Second-person accounts and the problem of evil', discusses the notion of a 'second-person account' in the philosophy of mind, and tries to show how it can be used to explain Job's acceptance, through his dialogue with God, of his suffering, which Job considered at first to be unjustified. Second-person accounts are contrasted with first and third-person accounts. A first-person account is an account, from my point of view, of my own experiences. A third-person account, according to Stump, is the sort of account that a neurologist would give of my experiences, so, in this sense, it would not be an account of my experiences *as such*; rather, it would be account of the neurological goings-on in my body that are identical to my experiences, or (depending on what sort of mind–body theory you embrace) that correlate with my experiences. (I would prefer this sort of account to

be called 'impersonal', for calling it 'third-personal' suggests that we cannot talk of other people's experiences third-personally, but in the same way as we can of our own, and this is surely not right. However, Stump is not alone in using this locution.) Stump's idea of a second-personal account is not just the idea of an account that I might give of your experiences, where that account is expressed in the second-person, as I might say, for example, 'You are in terrible pain'. The idea is more than that: a second-person account is an account where 'you interact consciously and directly with another person who is conscious and present to you as a person' (87). Thus, what is essential is not the grammar (*pace* what the editor suggests on page 5 of his introduction), but the idea that there is an account of *inter*action between two or more conscious beings, recognizing each other's thoughts, sharing each other's feelings, looking at the same things together, and so on. So, as I understand the idea, this could be a fragment of a second-person account: 'John and Mary gazed lovingly into each other's eyes'.

This notion of Stump's is potentially very fruitful. When someone reads such a passage, in a novel perhaps, she is able to imagine what it would be like from the perspective of John, from the perspective of Mary, and 'what it would have been like for her if she had been a bystander in the second-person experience represented in the story' (89). Moreover, and Stump does not consider this possibility, it is possible for her to imagine what it would have been like for Mary and for John from a perspective external to the imagined scene, by acentrally imagining, to use Richard Wollheim's term. Having put forward this idea, Stump goes on to argue that the Book of Job contains 'an intricate set of nested second-person accounts' (90), and that their being second-person, concerning God's 'personal' relations with his creatures, explains how God is doing more than just explaining to Job what power He has; He is also showing to Job how 'parentally' He *cares* for His creatures. That God has this sort of relation with Job, and that Job comes to understand this through the second-person account, explains, in part, why Job is finally able to accept his suffering. Whether or not this works so far as the Book of Job is concerned (a matter on which I cannot comment), the idea of second-personal accounts is one of great independent interest.

Paul Vitz, in 'Narrative and theological aspects of Freudian and Jungian psychology', discusses the role of narrative in Freud and Jung. Vitz sees Freud's interpretation of the mind as essentially involving *tragic* and *ironic* narratives – exemplified, of course, in the Oedipus complex; whereas Jung's is essentially *comic* and *romantic*. Whether or not this is accurate, there is a deeper question (one that Vitz does not discuss in any detail) of what is the essential purpose of narrative interpretations in theorizing about the mind: is it to reveal the truth, or is it rather to make the analysand's life better, or at least, in Freud's memorable words, 'to return the patient to the normal level of human misery'. Vitz would seem to go in the direction of 'usefulness' (166, for example), so the psychologies of Freud and of Jung have to be assessed just in terms of what good they do for the patient. This

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would certainly be the approach of Roy Schafer, who is much cited by Vitz in this chapter. However, there remains the possibility of making room for truth without a recoil to the idea of an impersonal or 'objective' account of the mental in terms of brutely causal forces at work (for some suggestions, see Charles Guignon's 'Narrative explanation in psychotherapy', *American Behavioral Scientist*, **41** (1998), 558–577): perhaps we need the notion of a narrative account being 'true to' a person's life, where that notion is something other than just true as corresponding to the facts naturalistically conceived, and something more than just true in the pragmatist's sense of being useful. We could then have the satisfaction of echoing Sellar and Yeatman in *1066 and All That*, wondering whether Freud, like the Roundheads, was Right but Repulsive, and Jung, like the Cavaliers, Wrong but Wromantic.

Paul Griffiths, in his very careful and thorough 'The limits of narrative theology', questions what kind of knowledge narrative discourse can yield for religious communities, and whether this kind of knowledge is available through other means. Griffiths contrasts narrative discourse, whose content is 'diachronically ordered', with discourse that has 'a logical rather than a temporal structure' (220); he calls the latter 'systematic discourse', citing as an example Kant's *Critiques* and Locke's *Essay*. Narrative discourse, Griffiths says, has cognitive significance because it is better able to represent the phenomenology of life, its fine details, and the meaning or significance of historical events, where events can come to be seen in a certain way – a sort of 'seeing-as' as opposed to a sort of discursive or systematic knowledge. Contrasting efficacy and possibility, Griffiths suggests persuasively that narrative discourse is more effective in communicating the phenomenology of life (and so forth) than is systematic discourse, but it may be that it is still *possible* for systematic discourse to achieve the same level of 'cognitive significance' (225) in relation to such phenomena. But then there is another contrast that Griffiths makes, between effect and content: whilst the content of narrative discourse *can* be communicated systematically, Griffiths argues that the effect on the audience of narratives can involve 'cognitive transformations' (226) that *cannot* be achieved systematically:

> … consumed skilfully, narratives shape the phenomenal properties of lived experience; they create and foster perceptions of value in the temporal succession of events; they provide, at the most general level, a set of perceptual and cognitive skills, the exercise and application of which in a specific life itself has narrative structure. (226–227)

It is surely right that narratives are uniquely capable of achieving such effects. However, it is not so clear to me that there is not also a sort of content that narratives can uniquely communicate, or at least that systematic discourse cannot communicate (for these two sorts of discourse do not exhaust the field). But the answer to this will depend in part on whether content is individuated in terms of things and properties or in terms of the concepts that are used to pick out those

things and properties. If systematic discourse is restricted to use of impersonal concepts (or what Stump might call third-personal concepts), then systematic discourse cannot communicate the *phenomenology* of life. If content is individuated in terms of concepts, then, for example, in systematic discourse the content of the propositions 'James is in pain', or 'Mary is in love' would involve impersonal concepts, of the sort, roughly, that could be understood fully by Martians, who are not capable of experiencing pain or love, and who have no idea what it is like to have such experiences. The concepts, that is to say, would be material or theoretical concepts, rather than phenomenal ones, and their use would not serve to communicate *what it is like* to be in pain or in love, even though they pick out the same properties as are picked out by the phenomenal concepts. But this is not a point of disagreement with Griffiths, more a point for elucidation.

Finally, Griffiths discusses 'how to understand the nature of the relations between narrative discourse and systematic discourse within the theological enterprise' (229). Here he concludes that, whilst there is a vital place for narrative discourse, it is not able easily to satisfy the need of theology to make 'nontemporally indexed claims of universal axiological and descriptive import' (230). Again, this sounds right. But Griffiths puts forward an argument, which he takes to be 'decisive', against those who stand for a 'pure narrativist program' (231). This is that his opponent's position is 'self-referentially incoherent' (231): if the narrativist claim is that all theological discourse is narrative, then, Griffiths says, this claim is itself surely *not* part of narrative discourse but part of systematic discourse, as would be any arguments that the narrativist might put forward in its support. So it follows that not all theological discourse is narrative. This argument of Griffiths's, of self-referential incoherence, is strikingly parallel to the argument often put forward against the moral relativist: the claim that all moral discourse is, in some sense, relative to a community or practice, is surely a non-relative claim, so all moral discourse cannot be relative. However, whilst I am neither a friend of moral relativism nor of 'narrativism', there is a response that can readily be made by holders of either position. That is to 'go meta', and insist that the claims that are being made are being made *about*, and *external to*, the discourse itself; thus the charge of self-referential incoherence cannot be made to stick. But this is a minor quibble with what is a fascinating and thorough discussion of the place of narrative in theological discourse.

Taken as a whole, this collection should be of interest to all who are concerned with faith and narrative, although, to repeat, it is doubtful that all or even most of the chapters will be of interest to any one reader (maybe that is too much to hope for from any collection). With this in mind, perhaps a potential buyer would be best advised to go to a bookshop and browse through the chapters before making a purchase, rather than buying 'blind' off the Internet.

PETER GOLDIE
King's College, London

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Stephen Mulhall *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001). Pp. xi + 448. £40.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0 19 924390 5.

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The book is divided into three parts, one for each of the philosophers named in the subtitle. For anyone interested in the relation between philosophy and theology, Stephen Mulhall's trio of chosen figures is highly promising, all three having had a pervasive influence on the philosophy of religion in the last fifty years or so. But rather than tackling his subjects' theological preconceptions head on, Mulhall approaches them obliquely, via a trilogy of exhaustively detailed commentaries on their key writings, aiming to uncover what each has to teach us about the nature of language.

For Wittgenstein, the important point is his denial of 'the idea that rules of grammar approximate to calculi with fixed rules'; instead, his *Philosophical Investigations* invites us to be responsive to 'metaphors and similes' and the 'liberating resonances of aphorism', by exploring the 'capacity of language to generate secondary meanings' through its 'openness to gestural or mythological senses' (181). In like manner, Heidegger rejects a literalistic theory of language in which 'words are names coordinated with things', and suggests instead that our relationship to words should involve a responsive attention to etymological and other factors – 'the history of their composition and decomposition, their transformations and translations' (308–309). Finally, in the case of Kierkegaard, we appear at first to be plunged back into something much more primitive and literalistic: in *Fear and Trembling* (in the discussion of the Abraham's preparing to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah), it is *deviations* from the literal that attract the deepest scorn of the pseudonymous author 'De Silentio'. And so it seems at first that the intention is to leave the reader no alternative but to construe the words of the Bible with 'fidelity to the literal meaning of the Genesis narrative as his interpretative ideal' (368). But then, in a subtle turnaround, Mulhall argues that Kierkegaard's true agenda is to get us to see that his emphasis on the literal is 'exemplary of an obliviousness of the true nature of religious uses of language, an oblivion that his readers are intended to overcome in the end, just as Abraham eventually overcomes his own misunderstandings on Mount Moriah'. The moral emerges from the Abraham story that 'perhaps a proper evaluation of the goods of the spirit requires an escape from the imagery of economic exchange altogether, and thus from the idea that every form of language use can always be evaluated in terms of a single dimension of meaning' (372).

Readers who have persevered this far (Mulhall's journey to reach this point has been a long and arduous one) will finally see opened up to them an extraordinarily rich horizon. If the spiritual insights of our religious inheritance are to stand any

chance of survival in our science-dominated age, no task can be more important than getting people to appreciate the nature of the language in which those insights are expressed. Yet current analytic philosophy, in its decision to glue itself to a scientific model of language – cold, impersonal, abstract, rigidly exact – seems to have wilfully exiled itself from the very domain within which alone religious writings can properly be understood. Mulhall's ingenious strategy is to employ those virtues of which the analytic tradition's defenders are rightly proud – precision, carefully constructed argument, close attention to the relevant texts – in order to disclose the multiple layers of meaning that characterize religious discourse. More important still, we begin to see by the end of his argument that for interpreters to set the literal and the figurative uses of language against each other in mortal opposition is to miss the point: it is only by attending in the first place to the literal meaning of a text, in all its cultural and historical specificity, that we are able to discern the further levels of meaning, the richer resonances that might otherwise be missed (cf. 381).

In the book's final sections, what with an ironic echo he calls his 'Concluding Dogmatic Postscript', Mulhall weaves out of his commentary on Kierkegaard some closing reflections on the meaning of the Christian story. The 'analogical' interpretation of the Abraham narrative presents it as a drama of 'symbolic substitution and transfiguration', which prefigures the sacrifice of Christ himself (380). But what was that sacrifice?

> Christ's Resurrection and Ascension unveils the divinity of his Incarnation by transfiguring our understanding of his Crucifixion as its fulfilment rather than its negation. If the crucified body is resurrected and glorified, then the meaning of death – even a death full of pain and humiliation, even one experienced by its victim as God-forsaken – must be reconceived. (432)

This conclusion perhaps has no striking novelty for those who have pondered on the Christian message (nor, I think, would the author make any such claims for it); the point rather is that in order fully to grasp the viability of such a 'reconception' we need first to have understood how language can operate through nested layers of symbolic meaning – and such an understanding is precisely what Mulhall has earned for himself, and his readers, through the complex analysis and argument provided in the rest of the book. The story of Christ, like the Old Testament myths discussed by Kierkegaard, is not to be evaporated into bland moral generalities, for that would be to rob it of the specificity that gives it power; but neither, on the other hand, is it to be boiled down to the crude 'plain truth' beloved of the fundamentalists, since that would deprive it of the complexity essential to its true meaning.

I hope enough has been said to indicate something of this unusual book's scope and power. Critics will argue about whether it is too long. Certainly, its message emerges only in the considerable fullness of time, but that seems to me in part a necessary consequence of Mulhall's 'method of commentary', as it may be called,

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a method that is inseparable from his conception of what philosophy can and should try to achieve. (One of the book's secondary messages is that method and content, in each of the chosen authors, as in philosophy in general, are inextricably interlinked.) If I had to voice a criticism it would be about the balance of the book, which seems to me rather too heavily weighted in favour of the first of its three parts: there are long passages in the discussion of Wittgenstein where technical debates in the philosophy of language are pursued, to my mind, beyond the needs of the thesis as a whole; and it would be a pity if students of philosophy of religion were discouraged from reading through to the subsequent parts on Heidegger, and on Kierkegaard, where (in the latter case in particular) they will find great rewards. That said, for Mulhall to have covered three such disparate figures in such a thorough way, yet to have managed to integrate the analyses into a convincing whole, is a very considerable achievement. The book is also remarkable for the way in which it implicitly challenges the impoverished models of philosophy (whether over-restrictive or over-diffuse) that are currently on offer from the contemporary analytic and continental academic stables respectively. Few will complete the volume without a strong sense of how philosophical inquiry that challenges those models can contribute powerfully to our understanding of language in general, and the language of religion in particular.

JOHN COTTINGHAM
University of Reading

John Hick *Dialogues in the Philosophy of Religion*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). Pp. iv + 217. £15.99 (Pbk).

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John Hick's contribution to the philosophy of religion is enormous and undisputed. How far this book furthers that contribution is open to question. The reader is presented with a range of fairly recent articles by Hick, along with responses from other thinkers and Hick's counter-responses, and ultimately the collection makes for a largely frustrating experience. Even Hick's characteristic intellectual virtue, which is a gracious courtesy, can become cloying, as yet again we have a sharp criticism of Hick met with the same bland, endlessly repeated reassurances that, for instance, the mind makes a 'contribution' to our experience, or that there are wise people to be found from all the great world religions.

There are glimpses of the importance and breadth of Hick's contribution to philosophy of religion simply in terms of the scope of the topics which come up. Parts 1 to 4 cover in turn 'dialogues' with philosophers, evangelicals, Catholics and theologians.

Much of the debate in part 1 – 'In dialogue with contemporary philosophers' – sees Hick battling with Alston, Plantinga, and Van Inwagen as to whether or not it

is 'arrogant' to be exclusivist, or even inclusivist, rather than pluralist. This vaguely phrased issue is given more coverage than is interesting. So much of the debate here seems to be hand-waving until we are told what the exact problem is with being 'arrogant'. At times it seems that it amounts to not much more than being a little rude or gauche in polite (neo-Kantian) society; at other times it has more weighty implications of making claims about sotieriology which are immoral and arbitrary – in which case the problem is not 'arrogance' as such, but a substantial doctrinal objection to a defective and immoral sotieriology. The best and definitive contribution to the 'arrogance' question comes from Van Inwagen, who states pithily all that need be said: that any truth-claim is 'arrogant' in that it excludes positions which oppose it, including Hick's own pluralism. Indeed 'practically everyone in the world', Van Inwagen points out, 'believes something that is inconsistent with his (Hick's) Anglo-American academic religious pluralism' (58). To that extent religious pluralism is not the opposite of religious exclusivism but one more version of it. Of course, the issue looks quite different depending on whether one is considering access to truth or salvation. To declare that the faithful of other traditions are barred from 'salvation' could be judged arrogant or morally repugnant: but one can be sotieriologically speaking inclusivist upon the basis of an epistemically exclusivist belief in traditional Christianity (or Islam, or Judaism). Hick is sometimes concerned with salvation, but more usually and centrally with the distinct issue of truth-claims, where the insistence on pluralism is nakedly another truth-claim which contradicts the self-understanding of most religious believers. One suspects that Hick is attempting to smuggle the outrage felt at sotieriological exclusivism (where others are not saved) – where it might be appropriate – over into epistemic exclusivism (where others have wrong opinions), where it is not only gratuitous but, in Hick's formulation, self-undermining (in that epistemic exclusivists are, in Hick's view, *wrong*).

The remaining 'dialogue' in part 1 – with Mavrodes, Rowe, Insole, Eddy, and Phillips – is more concerned with familiar Hickean discussions of 'the Real'. So we find the following themes re-emerging. (1) The mind of the observer makes a positive, inseparable and irreducible contribution to what is experienced and known. This is as true for religious experience as any other type of experience: 'The general truth that the form in which we perceive our environment, both natural and supernatural, depends upon the nature or our cognitive equipment and conceptual resources, suggests another analogy' (34). (2) From (1) we can see that, with respect to the divine, that which is the 'ground' of religious experience is in itself ineffable, such that we can know nothing about it except for 'formal', 'logically generated' properties such as 'being such that our substantial concepts do not apply'. With any 'substantial' property *p*, 'the Real' does not have (or cannot be said to have) either *p* or not-*p*.

Set against this are some strange, seemingly substantial, claims about the Real: (3) that it is the 'best explanation' of wide diversity of religious experience as

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against naturalism, or a more traditional theism whereby God is revealed in Christ; (4) that 'there is a sense in which the Real can be said … to be good or gracious, namely as the necessary condition of our highest good which the great religious traditions variously speak of as eternal life' (16); (5) that 'the Real' has the property of not being uniquely revealed in Christ.

The responses from other authors (in particular Mavrodes in chapter 2) are allowed to cover some, but not by any means all, of the pressing problems of combining (1) to (5) above, although not in a way which is systematic, well-structured, or satisfying. Fragments of criticisms are conveyed, with Hick repeating the same argument to objections more at the level of assertion than dialogue. In the Postscript (213) Hick reports that 'looking back at this book' he is struck by 'the repetitions' in the presentation of his argument. Hick's explanation is that this repetition is inevitable given that each argument is a response to his 'critics'. It is perhaps not enough to ask the 'reader to accept the joint result'. If the selections had been better made, and less repetitiously set out, the replies and the overall result might have needed less accepting.

Considering the more substantial issue of Hick's arguments, they are consistently less than persuasive. That the mind makes a contribution to experience (1) is indeed uncontroversial; but repeatedly there is the progression from this banal commonplace to there being a Kantian-type 'Real' which is completely ineffable, such that for any 'substantial' property *p*, neither *p* nor not-*p* can be asserted of it. It is clear that we are dealing with a peculiar sort of ineffability in that it is recognizably the 'same' (how do we individuate ineffabilities?) ineffability which is operating within mediaeval-mystical notions of the divine, as well as in notions of the 'formless' in Eastern religions, *and* is the best *explanation* for a wide diversity of religious experience. Typically an explanation is a theory which renders the evidence it is explaining more likely than it would have been: (1) without the hypothesis, (2) with any other hypothesis, and (3) as simply as possible (without positing gratuitous detail, processes or entities). The evidence Hick invokes throughout the book is the wide diversity of religious experience producing wise and saintly people across all religious traditions. It is baffling to me why an *x* which has no substantial properties at all (nor negations of such properties) is supposed to be so much better at *explaining* this 'evidence', than, say, a high Christology with an inclusivist sotieriology (Pinnock's suggestion in chapter 6). Indeed it is not clear that such an *x* could be any sort of hypothesis (causal or otherwise) for *anything at all*.

Hick only makes this ineffable *x* look like a passable explanation by smuggling in plenty of 'substantial' properties on the basis of theological and sociological convictions. For instance, as he tells us in chapter 6, living in multicultural Birmingham and experiencing the faithful of a wide diversity of traditions led Hick to believe – although he would be allergic to this formulation – that God *has the substantial property* of 'not being exclusively, or even superlatively, revealed

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in Christ', with the corollary that Jesus was not the second person of the Trinity. This is interesting, controversial, and to the point. If only Hick would stick his neck out and say just this, we could get to the heart of the issue. We might then dispense with the whole scholarly industry of discussing Hick's use of distinctions such as the 'noumenal/phenomenal', or the 'substantial/formal'. He appears to make substantial claims about the divine which undermine the self-understandings of all traditional faiths, whilst all the time claiming not to be doing controversial theology, but merely working out the inevitable implications of a higher 'philosophical' position whereby post-Kantian epistemology and a respect for human beings in all cultures *demands* as a corollary a liberal and pluralist perspective.

Parts 2 and 3 feature Hick in dialogue with evangelicals and Catholics respectively. Tempers are slightly frayed here, and consequently the book becomes more amusing. Claire Pinnock's response from an evangelical position is robust and well-made. She expresses 'annoyance' at Hick's previous 'testimonial about how he escaped the evangelical faith' (141), commenting that she felt 'talked down to', with the 'distinct feeling that the reason he wants us to know he was once an evangelical is to make liberals of us all' (141). She complains that Hick's 'scholarly' conclusions about Jesus' self-understanding – which conclude that, at most, he conceived of himself as a significant eschatological agent – are really and covertly motivated by the a priori conviction that Jesus could not be the second person of the Trinity, whatever his self-understanding (there not being a Trinity). This is probably true, although Hick's Christological comments in part 2, and the links he draws with his pluralist model, remind one of his impressive achievement in earlier works – such as 'The myth of God incarnate', in Hick (ed.) *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1993, 2nd edn) and *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1993) – where he unites historical, biblical, philosophical, and systematic considerations with a rare competence.

Apart from a reply to D'Costa, the dialogue with Catholics in part 3 is dominated by Hick rapping Ratzinger's knuckles on the basis that the lazy Cardinal has not 'properly studied' Hick's texts. Hick has detected this negligence with 'regret' on the basis of some inaccurate page citations (158); but Ratzinger – for a man who has not done his homework – seems to have made a lucky guess when complaining that Hick's talk of a move from 'self-centredness' to 'reality-centredness' is 'empty and vacuous'. Indeed where that reality is 'ineffable', emptiness and vacuity would seem to be appropriate human reactions. It would have perhaps been more elegant if Hick had taken on the substantial complaint rather than conducting a viva on the footnotes. The book then fizzles out in part 4, with Hick expounding further on his now familiar 'expanded understanding of religion' (189) which understands 'the great world faiths' as 'different culturally formed responses to the Ultimate, and thus independently valid channels or contexts of the salvific human transformation' (189).

For those who know Hick's work, this book will offer few fresh insights. For those who do *not* know Hick's work – and students of religion and theology should know it, as it is exemplary of its kind and justifiably influential – this is not the place to start.

CHRISTOPHER INSOLE
Heythrop College, University of London

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