

Book reviews

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John Hick *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). Pp. xxxi + 448. £18.99 (Pbk). ISBN 1 403 94445 8.

This new edition of John Hick's much-discussed account of his pluralistic theory of religion contains a fresh twenty-six-page introduction but otherwise only very modest changes to the 1989 edition. In the body of the text I noted new endnotes to chapters 2 and 4, a revised endnote in chapter 10, and a change in the layout of a short paragraph on pages 270–271. The bibliography is four pages longer, largely because the new introduction generates many new references. Students of Hick please note: your old edition pagination remains valid save for a few lines on 270–271!

It is the new introduction that is therefore of interest in this volume. Apart from that, everything is much as it was. In the introduction Hick notes fourteen lines of criticism that have emerged in the many articles and books discussing *An Interpretation of Religion*. He seeks to respond to them all. The first ten relate in some direct way to the central hypothesis of the book in chapter 14: that there is a divine Real in itself above and beyond the many appearances of the divine that are directly worshipped/contemplated in the major world religions. The four remaining lines of criticism pertain to his distinction between literal and mythological truth; his denial of mysticism unmediated by concepts; the alleged gendered character of his account of liberation and salvation; and the claim that his pluralistic hypothesis is a 'post-Enlightenment Western imposition'.

One can understand Hick's preoccupation with criticisms of his central metaphysical postulate. It is to be regretted, however, that he does not devote some space to the critique of his concept of liberation/salvation that comes from the likes of J. A. DiNoia (*The Diversity of Religions*, 1992). Like many religious pluralists, Hick seeks to overcome the conflicts between religions at the doctrinal level by finding agreement at the practical level – they all offer roughly similar routes to liberation from human finitude. DiNoia's discussion strikes at the heart of this strategy by contending that soteriologies are internally related to doctrinal schemes. It is the latter that define the precise character of the end state of

salvation and different conceptions of that end state in turn prescribe concretely different patterns of life and spiritual paths as appropriate to its attainment. Practice cannot trump theoretical diversity if it is itself given shape by theory. There are responses to DiNoia's critique and it would have been helpful if Hick had added to them in this new addition.

What is immediately striking about Hick's response to criticisms of his posit of the Real is the extent to which he simply cannot see his critics' feeling that an entity that is completely quality-less and transcendent of all categories would be: (a) an empty posit, and (b) religiously pretty useless. Here we do find him insisting that his Real is neither personal nor non-personal, good nor evil, just nor unjust (xxi), and yet that there are some ways of responding to the Real that are appropriate and some that are inappropriate (xxiv). He distinguishes his thesis of the ineffability of the Real from an apophatic theology and from an analogical one (xx and xxi). Apophatic theology is ruled out on the ground that 'Transcategoriality excludes the attribution of properties either positively or negatively' (xx). The most that Hick allows to penetrate this bleak metaphysical picture is that the Real has *in relation to us* certain qualities, such as benevolence, but we are forbidden to speculate that therefore the Real must have some quality *an sich* that enables it to produce happiness for human creatures.

In this introduction Hick takes further a hint in the text of Part IV by seriously entertaining the thought that the specific personal and impersonal realities that are encountered from within the traditions are real things independent of consciousness while not yet the Real *an sich*: 'These are intermediate beings between ourselves and the transcategorial Real' (xxx). They are said to be analogous to the *devas* of Indian religion or the angels and archangels of the Abrahamic faiths. The pluralistic hypothesis of Part IV now smacks of polytheism and indeed Hick concedes that his account is polytheistic: there is one ultimate religious reality but many manifestations of it to human consciousness (xxvii).

Hick's assertion of a quality-less and transcategorial Real prevents him from adopting one way of understanding this assertion of a single religious ultimate alongside diverse pictures of it in the religions. He cannot say it is a thing of many aspects, only some of which get apprehended by the faithful in any one tradition (owing to that tradition's cognitive filters). The Real would then be both personal and non-personal. Aside from his more explicit speculations about intermediate beings, the other striking fact about his restatement of the postulate of the Real in this new introduction is the extent to which the divine phenomena appear to be merely mental beings. This comes across on pages xxx to xxxi in such statements as 'when Muslims refer to "Allah" ... they are referring to the image – mental image not graven image – of the ultimate reality given to them in Qu'ran' (xxx). This image is contrasted with the Christian image of God as a trinity of persons – another mental image of ultimate reality. Both images arise 'at the interface between the Real and human minds' (xxx). I, for one, find it very hard to

see the thought that when Christians worship their Trinity they are worshipping a mental image as anything other than sceptical and as a denial of religious realism.

I have not, by any means, covered all of Hick's answers to his critics in this new introduction. He is a courageous and interesting defender of his own views. While many of his lines of response to his critics here are already published (in journal articles and in Hick's own collections of essays post-1989), it is good to see them collected here.

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James K. A. Smith *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002). Pp. viii + 200. \$109.95, £63.00 (Hbk); \$34.95, £19.99 (Pbk). ISBN 0 415 276950 (Hbk); 0 415 276969 (Pbk).

'How to avoid not speaking?', is the question Smith sets out to answer in this stylish, precise, and highly stimulating book. On the one hand, we must not avoid speaking, because we are called to worship and praise God: a completely apophatic theology is not an option. But at the same time, we do not know how to speak of God, because of the 'violence' enacted when we attempt to comprehend a non-linguistic reality in conceptual terms. This violence is particularly destructive when the reality being spoken of is alterity in the highest, God, 'who exceeds all categories and transcends all conceptual determination' (3). Smith attempts to indicate a 'third way' between silence and 'violent' reductionist speech. He does this by drawing on a range of sources: Levinas's concept of the 'other'; Marion's account of the 'saturated phenomenon'; the early Heidegger's treatment of concepts as 'formal indicators', that point to that which they cannot adequately capture; the notion of the 'secret' as developed by Kierkegaard, and an 'incarnational' model of meaning drawn from Augustine.

Smith allows Levinas to articulate the problem of violence when speaking about the other. Speech is implicated in the totalizing tendency of knowledge, where the known being is 'objectified' by means of the concept, 'a third term, a neutral term', 'which deprives the known being of its alterity by forcing the other to appear in terms of "the general"' (29). Levinas seeks to overcome the 'injustice' involved in such a reduction of the other to the same, by calling for 'an-other phenomenology', a 'relation which is otherwise than knowledge' (31). Marion similarly objects to the way in which 'the phenomenon, in order to appear, has had to measure up to certain standards or criteria of phenomenality', such that

'its right to appear has been established by conditions or laws which govern appearance' (34). The solution, for Marion, is to recognize that it is the phenomenon *itself* which sets the rules for appearance. The phenomenon as gift is liberated from the violence and injustice inflicted upon phenomenon when it is understood as the always-already-appropriated phenomenon of Kantian experience. The phenomenon is not appropriated and constructed by the subject, but rather overwhelms the perceiver. It is given excessively, 'more than adequately, exceeding meaning, overflowing the intention of the ego, leaving, instead of an excess of meaning, an overabundance of donation' (39). God, as the saturated phenomenon par excellence fails 'to appear' only because of an 'excess which bedazzles the intentional aim' (41).

Ultimately, and for not entirely clear reasons, Smith rejects the solutions proffered by both Levinas and Marion. His objections sometimes focus more on their negative characterization of phenomenology as necessarily involving violence, with Smith commenting, 'if the other person can show up in phenomenology, why can't God?' (56). At other times, and on first blush inconsistently with the first objection, Smith objects that the solutions offered by Levinas and Marion will not work, because phenomenology demands (legitimately?) that the transcendent appears in the *immanent* to be known, and so spoken of. In that this is the demand of phenomenology, Levinas and Marion are guilty of wishful thinking if they think that recognizing the face of the other, or experiencing the 'saturated phenomenon', will enable them to escape the inevitable objectification and reduction-to-immanence of the other. So on Marion Smith comments that

... for God to be given more than adequately he must be given at least adequately, which would require that God be given immanently – thereby undoing his transcendence. Thus Marion's proposal, which seeks to maintain God's transcendence, would seem to fail to allow God to appear, or unwittingly consign God to the same conditions that he seeks to displace. (55)

It is worth keeping at eye on this ambivalent movement on Smith's part: at times upholding the demands of phenomenology, and at times critiquing those same demands as over-rigorous. Perhaps contained within this ambivalence is a seed of insight into what might be called the 'problem of the problem' – the problematic nature of the demands made by phenomenology – as well as a needlessly critical presentation of non-theological solutions, which one suspects is necessary to the rather imperialist theological solution Smith arrives at in the end.

Smith goes on to praise Heidegger's search for a non-violent way of speaking. In view here is Heidegger's critique of the prioritizing of a treatment of the world as an array of objects 'present-at-hand', the nature of which is best grasped by the objective gaze of the observer. The *formale Anzeige* is an attempt at a 'non-objectifying and non-violating mode of description' (86), such that 'formal indication maintains and *respects* the alterity and incommensurability of the

phenomenon' (86). The proper way of speaking 'attempts to describe pre-theoretical experience' but in such a way 'that it honours or "respects" the dynamics and excess of "life", which cannot be stilled or grasped by theoretical concepts' (87).

The approval Smith extends to Heidegger seems to be motivated by Heidegger's humility in the face of a pre-linguistic vitalism. Language, by its own self-deprecation and self-reflexive declaration of partiality and inadequacy, points beyond itself to a pre-theoretical 'life'. Smith brings Kierkegaard's 'secret' into play here, where 'truth' is a (pre-theoretical and existentially concerning) happening, rather than a static entity to be approached as an object (objectively). Inasmuch as this 'truth' cannot be objectified, it cannot be a 'public' and direct communication. Rather it must be indirect, secret: 'it is only indirect communication of religious truth which maintains this essential secret: that the God-relationship is essentially secret'. The absolute relationship with the absolute is 'a site of deep interiority ... an "essential secret"' (90).

Heidegger and Kierkegaard are on the right trajectory, providing indications for how the phenomenology of religion might develop. Smith concludes the book by finding the highest theological achievement to the problem of violence and speaking in the figure of Augustine. The violence of speech is overcome in Augustine's understanding by a twofold movement. On the one hand, it is overcome by God's incarnational appearance, a condescension to the conditions of the finite. Although God exceeds the Word, the Word is nonetheless a genuine manifestation and revelation, whereby God appears but is not reduced. The second movement to overcome the violence of predication, or the silence of apophatics, is a responsive one: our attitude of praise and worship, which Smith describes as non-objectifying and non-predicative.

Kataphatics reduces God's transcendence to immanence, and apophatics reduces God to mere transcendence. Both then, Smith considers, are grounded in the '*mythos* of original violence, whereas the incarnational paradigm operates on the basis of a non-oppositional, analogical account of difference rooted in the Christian *mythos*' (154). The problem of theological speech is found in God's own speaking, where the incarnation is God's own refusal to avoid speaking.

Smith goes on to make an extraordinarily bold claim, hardly justified by the argument that precedes it: 'I am suggesting that it is the Christian confession and understanding of the Incarnation which ought to undergird a general philosophy of language' (155). Here we see that Smith's book really does belong doctrinally in the Radical Orthodoxy series of which it is the seventh book. There is the typically Radically Orthodox description of 'secular' approaches, characterizing them negatively as reliant upon a *mythos* or 'original violence'. Then there is the invocation of the peaceful, analogical Christian *mythos* which understands the secular better than the secular understands itself. Finally there is an invocation of a certain theological position that provides a definitive answer to a

wider social/philosophical problem (in this case, a problem in philosophy of language).

At the origin of Smith's whole argument there is a motivating anxiety, which may turn out to be the most problematic assumption of the book. This anxiety is the concern that in some sense speaking about that which is other – whether that be the external world, other people, or God – is intrinsically 'violent', in that it reduces the rich reality of the 'other' to the categories by which it is appropriated by the speaking subject. The problem of speaking about God is just a special case, albeit an extreme example, of a general problem of the relationship between speech and world.

Even without challenging this account of the problem, we might be alarmed at the way that theology is invoked as a solution. We have a philosophical gap in our theory of language (how to speak of that which is not speech). This gap needs to be filled. We bring in God (in this case God's speaking in the incarnation) to fill the gap. But we might worry that we have seen this sketch before: it looks suspiciously like a variant of the justly maligned 'God-of-the-gaps' theology emanating from Descartes. Descartes faced the problem of the relationship between mind and world (of which the relationship between speech and world is clearly a descendent). He was unable to fill a gap in his theory (because of the persistent problem of scepticism), and so invoked God (via the ontological argument) to underwrite his epistemology: because there is a God, I know that where I have a clear and distinct idea, my idea is reliable. Here the origins of phenomenological problem are revealed to be genuinely Cartesian: we have a problem in our general epistemology, and so we bring in God to solve it. This is dangerous, in that God is made to fit the shape required by our general problem, and is liable to be squeezed out all together if the problem disappears, or if it can be solved more elegantly by another means.

It is possible to dissent from this whole project on the more philosophical ground that there simply is *not* such a problem in the relationship between speech and world. One is only likely to think that there is such a problem if one assumes the disgraced (from Smith's point of view) Cartesian position of an observer framing theories about an external environment, rather than the preferred Heideggerian notion of our being always-already-engaged in the world. It is not that there is 'world' or 'otherness' out there, to be trapped and contaminated by speech; rather 'world' and 'otherness' is always already language-shaped, and language is always already a part of the world and otherness. Granted there is still the special problem of the relationship between God and speech. But this is how it should be: God as a unique and specific problem of otherness, rather than God as just the extreme case of a universal epistemological problem of otherness.

The answer to the problem of how to speak about God without reducing God to the 'same' ('the conceptual categories by which we talk about God') could then

have something to do with disambiguating two possible meanings of the verb ‘to comprehend’ (*comprehensio*). An entirely satisfying framework for the solution of how we can speak of comprehending God is then provided by Aquinas, who observes that “‘to comprehend’ can mean two things’. It can mean ‘to contain something ... in this sense God cannot be comprehended either by the mind or by anything else’. Or there can be a second ‘broader’ meaning, which is ‘the opposite of letting something slip ... it is in this sense that God is comprehended by the blessed, I hold him and will not let him go’ (*Summa Theologicae*, Ia.12.7). Such a conclusion, one suspects, would be entirely acceptable to Smith; perhaps the means by which he gets there are unnecessarily convoluted, leaving too many hostages to fortune (specifically, owing too much to supposed gaps in general ‘secular’ philosophy of language).

All this said, it is a testament to the stimulation provided by the book that it brings the reader to some of the deepest problems of philosophical theology. Whatever one makes of his conclusions, Smith’s passage through complex and diverse material is subtle and rigorous, and commands attention.

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Michael D. Robinson *The Storms of Providence: Navigating the Waters of Calvinism, Arminianism, and Open Theism*. (New York: University Press of America, 2003). Pp. x + 302. £33.00 (Pbk). ISBN 0 7618 2737 4.

In what way and to what degree is God in control of what goes on in the cosmos? In the last twenty years, we’ve seen a deep and wide discussion of these questions. In recent years the main voices have been the open theists, asserting a fairly untraditional understanding of divine providence, and their traditionalist critics, reasserting the visions of Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, or Molina (or some combination thereof). *The Storms of Providence* is a brief, informed, well-organized, and mostly clear entry into the discussion from an Arminian perspective.

The author interacts with the philosophical literature, but includes a somewhat wider set of topics than analytic philosophers are accustomed to covering, including not only foreknowledge, divine control of the world, free will, evil, and divine timelessness, but also predestination, grace, the means of salvation, prayer, divine guidance, Bible interpretation, and evangelism. Thus, like several recent entries from the open-theist camp, it aims at a wide readership, including students, non-academics interested in recent debates on divine providence,

theologians (professional and amateur), and philosophers. Robinson has a knack for summarizing complex material in an understandable way. He gives accurate chapter-length summaries of the three main positions on divine providence, Calvinism (Augustinianism), Arminianism, and open theism. Robinson sketches these positions and argues for the superiority of Arminianism without any of the proof-texting, partisan meanness, and unfairness which plague the theological and popular literature on these topics.

All the aforementioned features contribute to the book's suitability as a textbook for any sort of course focused on Christian doctrines of divine providence. Also relevant is the intrinsic interest of the book's stance. Christians who think that open theism obliterates God's perfection, and that Calvinism rules out human free will, and thus human responsibility, will be much interested in Arminianism. With open theism, it says that humans have libertarian freedom, God's grace is resistible, and 'predestination' doesn't mean what one would initially think. With Calvinism, divine timelessness is defensible, God foreknows (or rather, timelessly knows) every future free action, and God's eternal plan includes every detail of what occurs in history (though some of it is only permitted, not causally determined).

What then, is the main thread of argument? Calvinism falls to familiar objections: it seems inconsistent with human responsibility, divine justice, divine goodness, interpersonal relations between God and humanity, and free-will defences and theodicies. Open theism falls to a novel objection: it implies that God can't know future physically necessary events, the probabilities of future events, future events required by God's own nature, the future constancy of God's nature, that God will ultimately beat evil, or even that God will never cease to exist (136, 141). More on this novel attack in a moment – first to the matter of triumphant Arminianism, according to Robinson.

First, Arminianism makes at least as good, if not better, sense of the Bible than its competitors. Robinson's case here (chapter 5) is subtle, interesting, and original. Beyond the Bible, Robinson sketches out how the Arminian can successfully reply to common Calvinist charges that Arminianism is incompatible with divine sovereignty, makes God unduly 'dependent upon' creatures, relies on an incoherent doctrine of human freedom, and implies that humans are able to earn their salvation without divine grace. The Arminian can also reply to objections that the traditional doctrine of foreknowledge is incompatible with human free will, and that what is now called 'simple foreknowledge' – timeless or omnitemporal knowledge of all of history which is *not* based on 'middle knowledge' – provides God with no control over what happens.

Three controversial claims thus provide essential vertebrae in the book's backbone: (1) exhaustive and certain divine foreknowledge is compatible with libertarian human freedom; (2) simple foreknowledge is *not* providentially useless to God; and (3) open theism is committed to a God who can't know he'll be

around for all of the future. I wasn't persuaded by Robinson's arguments for any of these.

Robinson lays out the basic argument against (1), as discussed and endorsed by Jonathan Edwards. Robinson's analysis is:

- (1) Necessarily, if God knows that I will do A, then I will do A.
- (2) (Accidentally) necessarily, God knows that I will do A.
- (3) Therefore, (accidentally) necessary, I will do A.
- (4) If necessarily I will do A, then I will not do A freely.
- (5) I will not do A freely. (109–110, 200)

Events are 'accidentally necessary' if it is now too late in principle for them to be prevented. As Robinson acknowledges the validity of the argument, he must mean (4) to imply that 'if *accidentally* necessarily I will do A, then I will not do A freely'. Open theists, as he explains, reply that (1), (3), and (4) are true, while (2) is false, for some future events in principle can't be known. What is Robinson's response to the argument? It isn't terribly clear, but I believe it all comes down to denying (4) (understood as suggested above) (204–210). The idea is that even if every event of your life is at all times unavoidable, nonetheless, some of those events can be your own free actions (210). Only the causal history of an event matters, not its inevitability. I believe this line of thinking is common to other proponents of simple foreknowledge, as well as Molinists, so it is worth exploring why this strikes some of us as *faux* libertarianism.

The rock-bottom intuition on which libertarian free-will theories are founded is that a person has no control over whether or not any event happens unless she has, on at least one occasion in her life, a unconditional ability to do otherwise than she actually does. And if she doesn't have control over any event, she can't be morally praiseworthy or blameworthy for anything at all. If physical determinism were true, it would rule out such a unconditional ability. But states of affairs other than physical determinism conceivably could also prevent us from ever enjoying a unconditional ability to do otherwise. Suppose that *for whatever reason*, the objective probability of a certain action's occurring is at all times (or timelessly) 1. It logically follows that the probability of its *not* occurring is at all times (or timelessly) 0. It seems no comfort at all to be told that *the physical circumstances plus the laws of nature* don't entail that action at that time, or that when it occurs, the action in question will lack a sufficient event-cause.

Robinson (and any Arminian, and any theist but an open theist) is committed to all events at all times (seemingly 'free' actions included) having an unchangeable, objective probability of 1 or 0; to put it differently, one of the possible worlds (at all times, or timelessly) is the actual world. Either way, it is 'too late' (literally, or logically) for us to have a say about what does or doesn't go into the actual world. Robinson grants that all free actions are at all prior times unavoidable, but points out (in the words of Katherin Rogers) that 'it is my choice that is

the source of the necessitating knowledge. In the very act of choosing I make it impossible that I could choose other than I do choose' (204). What she means is that it is because the actual world contains my choosing a certain way that God eternally knows that I will make that choice. The second quoted sentence is misleading, though; at no time, in their view, was it possible that I do otherwise, so their view *can't* say that when I freely choose I rendered something impossible (that I not so choose at that time) which was previously possible. That it is in some sense *my* choice provides no comfort; in their view, I at all times do exactly what I must do, given that the actual world has already or timelessly been selected. As Robinson says in the process of criticizing certain Calvinists,

Can a being fail to do what it certainly will do? No! And if such an agent cannot act in a contrary way, how does this differ from ... an event that *must* happen? The answer is that it does not differ. If an event certainly will happen, then it appears that it must happen. (53–54)

In his view free human agents face 'at least two viable options' (243). 'Viable' here can mean consistent with the laws of nature plus the local physical circumstances, or consistent with the agent's character, but it cannot mean having an objective probability greater than 0 but less than 1. I'm not the ultimate origin of *any* event, on this theory, despite the existence of 'viable' options.

One strategy for Robinson would be to invoke Frankfurt scenarios to motivate denying 'PAP' – the Principle of Alternate Possibilities; there's a mountain of such literature to choose from, though some of it only a specialist could love (and some of it, only its author!). This might motivate an endorsement of libertarian freedom while denying that anyone ever has an unconditional ability to do otherwise. Robinson doesn't make this move, though, and this reader wonders if this is because he senses that such abilities are necessary to a workable free-will defence or theodicy (cf. 63–64, 249–255).

Robinson rather quickly mentions a claim that if true would short-circuit the preceding objections: 'one may assert that the actualization of events is relative to frames of reference ... even if events of all temporal coordinates are actual and thus accidentally necessary in eternity, they need not be ... actual and accidentally necessary in various *temporal* frames of reference' (210, author's emphasis). This claim is inspired by a discussion in Brian Leftow's *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), and Robinson discusses it at length in his previous book, *Eternity and Freedom: A Critical Analysis of Divine Timelessness as a Solution to the Foreknowledge/Free Will Debate* (New York NY: University Press of America, 1995). There he observes, 'If the future is both open and closed relative to one's temporal frame of reference, then, perhaps the future can be closed in the eternal frame of reference without being closed in temporal frames of reference' (109–110). I must leave it to the reader to evaluate the coherence of and justification for this claim. It is motivated by the *via media* interpretation of

relativity theory; for this, see the discussion in chapter 3 of Robinson's *Eternity and Freedom* and the sources cited therein.

In his discussion of whether, and to what degree, simple foreknowledge is compatible with divine guidance of human decisions (258–288), Robinson sometimes sounds like an open theist, who holds that there is no actual future from God's (or anyone else's) perspective, because in reality, the flow of history up till now (including nature's laws and God's plans) is compatible with more than one outcome. As an example, I can't see why *an Arminian* should puzzle over how God could know the consequences of a certain action so as to advise a human about whether or not that is the best course of action (268–269). Both the choice in question and the actual consequences, according to the Arminian, lie plain before God's eyes, as it were. Who cares about other *logically* possible worlds, which are *never* accidentally possible? Again, Robinson claims that if humans are significantly free, then God doesn't know 'the exact best course for the actual world' to develop (280), limits the options actually available to humans (280–281), and His 'vision of the best possible course often will change over time in order to fit the emerging circumstances of cosmic and human life' (282; cf. 283).

I can only make sense of these claims on the open-theist model of providence; such are ruled out by the Arminian claim that from God's point of view, the future is as settled as the past. In particular, by 'actual world' above Robinson must mean simply that part of history which has unfolded so far, the idea being that not all of history has yet been decided, as it were, so that multiple futures have yet to be ruled out. (It makes no sense, given the standard technical use of the term 'possible world', to speak of one turning out more than one way; each is defined as spatially and temporally complete set of circumstances, and of logical necessity such a thing cannot change.) Robinson points out that the advice doled out by a timeless God could be different at different times (286–287), but that being so, according to Arminianism, God's knowledge on which such advice is based *can't* change. Robinson admits that as to understanding divine guidance, his Arminianism is no better or worse than open theism (285). But it remains, he insists, that open theism absurdly limits God's knowledge.

Robinson offers a complicated argument, previously given at greater length in this journal (36 (2000), 251–275) that if open theism is true, God can't know (among other things) His own endless future existence. Briefly and too simply, if God is temporal and has no 'timeless vision' of His future, and God's non-existence is not contradictory, then even if God in fact can't go out of existence, how could God *know* that He won't? According to Robinson, this is both a serious difficulty for open theism, and consideration in favour of the doctrine of divine timelessness.

This is indeed an interesting challenge, and it seems to me that open theists owe him a response. One line of reply would be that given our limited conceptual apparatus, *we* are unable to see any contradiction in the proposition that God

doesn't exist, though He does. By being omniscient, He's aware that His non-existence is impossible. Robinson will (I think rightly) reject this as special pleading. What is it, he asks, that God knows about Himself in virtue of which He will ceaselessly exist? I suspect there is a principled answer here – something like: God knows it is impossible for Him to annihilate Himself (He's essentially good, and that would be a morally wrong action), and because of His radical ontological independence, He sees that it is impossible that any change external to Him would 'whip the rug out from under' His existence. Finally, He knows that His annihilation can't occur for no reason at all. Thus, He knows that He'll never cease to exist. Is this a viable open-theist rejoinder? Only further discussion will tell.

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Thomas Pink and M. W. F. Stone (eds) *The Will and Human Action: From Antiquity to the Present Day*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2004). Pp. viii + 219. \$104.95, £60.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0 415 32467 X.

In this collection of nine essays, plus a short introduction, the trees are more evident than the forest they define. With one (debatable) exception, each of the nine essays is an exercise in historical exegesis, focused on some figure, school, or period deemed to be of peculiar relevance to the evolving, or perhaps just shifting, notion of will in philosophy. The one exception to this is Brian O'Shaughnessy's essay, 'Theories of the bodily will', which is his own argument for a notion of volition that is primitive and physiological and therefore not some mental *doppelgänger* that is supposed to originate bodily movement from an immaterial plane. At the start of his essay, he ventures the suggestion that all of the major philosophers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had roughly the same view of volition: as a mental trigger for a desired bodily movement (an action). He intends to reject that legacy and take his cue instead from Schopenhauer, who proposed a dual-aspect, but non-dualist, theory of volition. The historical referencing ends almost as soon as it begins. When O'Shaughnessy gets down to his real business, he develops a careful argument for his own preferred version of a dual-aspect theory. His is a perfectly interesting argument in its own right, but I am puzzled by its inclusion in a volume that styles itself as history of philosophy. His essay has no notes, no bibliography, and only a hand-waving interest in historical figures.

Turning to the other essays – all historically oriented, all carefully referenced – the big question concerns the cogency of the unifying end that they are

intended to serve. *The Will and Human Action* is the fourth volume to come out in London Studies in the History of Philosophy, a series whose charge is to put out edited collections of essays that either explore some tradition or period of philosophy in depth, or survey the chronological development of a philosophical topic. The case is obviously the latter for the volume at hand. Sensibly the two editors, Thomas Pink and M. W. F. Stone (also contributors), have not designed their volume to be a *comprehensive* chronological survey of ancient, medieval, and early modern treatments of the will, but they say remarkably little about what has determined their more selective focus. They tell us, in the scanty introduction, that philosophical dispute over the will has basically been disagreement about the nature of the drive whose exercise differentiates actions from simple bodily movements. This drive could be, they say, a power to act from reasons, to act autonomously (to will from will), or even to express natural impulses that are fundamentally non-rational. They present their interest in these options as an interest in the nature of action itself: 'Whether or not we adopt any of these different approaches to the will, it is apparent that the obscurity of the will and of willing is just the obscurity of the constitution of action, when reflectively or philosophically considered' (2).

Pink and Stone are quick to fault contemporary British and American action theorists for generally being 'parsimonious' in their accounts of motivation, making too much of desire and not enough of will. They do not name names, but when they speak of philosophers who resort to talk of desiring desires when questions of motive deepen, one thinks naturally of Harry Frankfurt, his landmark essay, 'Freedom of the will and the concept of a person', and all the debate that followed that essay about different orders of desire and the difference (if any) between desire and volition. Are we then to understand that the history of philosophy holds some notion of will in tow that can profitably free action theorists from their fixation on desire? 'We believe', the editors write, 'that the history of philosophy can be used as a creative tool in which alternative ways of considering human beings as agents, and human action in nature, can be debated and discussed' (3).

It would be intemperate of me to want to diminish such a modest hope, but it still strikes me as odd that Stone and Pink would have framed historical investigation of the will in terms of action theory. Consider Frankfurt, whose work on the will has reaffirmed the importance of moral psychology for any would-be metaphysics of freedom. Frankfurt has never seemed especially preoccupied in his work with the status of action in nature, or with the metaphysics of human agency. In the essay I mentioned above, he attempts to dislodge philosophical reflection on the will from the debate between libertarians and compatibilists over the nature of freedom. Compatibilists are anxious to be at peace with the naturalness of desire and so feel no particular need for a distinctive notion of will: freedom of the will is just having the freedom to satisfy one's desires. Libertarians

worry a great deal about where those desires come from and end up insisting, out of a strong moral intuition, on the firmness of the difference between will and desire. Will, but not desire, is potentially self-determining. Frankfurt suggests that both sides have lost sight of the connection between will and personality, one side by overlooking the will altogether, the other by defining the will so narrowly. While it is fair to fault Frankfurt for having offered too thin an alternative – basically his concept of a person is two parts of Plato's tripartite psyche – it is more important to notice what he has revealed about the fault-lines of a contemporary debate.

Compatibilists and libertarians have not been offering two rival accounts of the will's involvement in human action; they have been working out two sides of an unhappy and perhaps doomed conjunction: on the one side the will and the metaphysics of freedom, on the other human action and the naturalization of the psyche. The ambition to advance naturalism and include human agency within its purview has tended to diminish, not accentuate, philosophical interest in the will, and that is a strange enough feature of contemporary naturalism to warrant some historical perspective.

In the first two essays of *The Will and Human Action*, Richard Sorabji and A. W. Price look at the landscape of ancient philosophy and conclude that there is no notion of will there, not if will is taken to be an autonomous source of motivation, free even of determination by reason. This is an important point to press. The libertarian view of the will, which is apt to seem like an occult invocation to many a naturalist, is based on the intuitively plausible connection between the will's autonomy and moral responsibility. If philosophical cultures of the past have made sense of moral responsibility without having to revert to (or even think of) such a notion of will, then the intuition supporting the libertarian position begins to appear suspect. Sorabji and Price do not quite do this work, however. Sorabji's essay is lifted straight out of his book, *Emotion and Peace of Mind* (see chapter 21), and it is not an essay that reads well out of its original context. The strategy of his essay is to disassemble the will into a cluster of notions – the two key ones being willpower and accountable freedom – and argue that no-one, until Augustine, puts all the notions together. It is only in his book (which I heartily recommend reading) that Sorabji goes on to assess the philosophical interest of having or having avoided this assembled notion of will. The limitation of Price's essay is that he is content to argue only a negative thesis: that volitions, whether defined as mental causes of physical activity or as motives independent of reason, are absent from Aristotle and the Stoics. 'I attempt to establish the fact', he writes, 'without offering an explanation; it is not my ambition here to suggest a moral' (46).

The next several essays are more promising and more ambitious forays into the history of philosophy. All of them take on theological figures; all avoid the temptation to quarantine philosophy from theology. Josef Lössl focuses on Augustine, and argues that the will's determination by grace is, for Augustine,

a heart-felt illumination of the intellect and not the abrogation of some putative libertarian freedom. His is an essay that deserves to have a wide readership among students and scholars of Augustine, many of whom have tended to reify Augustine's early notion of will, making it out to be a power of consent exercised in abstraction from a person's experience of good or evil. Near the end of his essay, Lösli makes the wise point that voluntarism in the West, the time in philosophy of the will's virtual apotheosis, has to wait for the full eclipse of Platonism in late medieval scholasticism. It begins some time after Thomas (the father figure of late medieval intellectualism) and also after Bonaventure (the father figure of late medieval voluntarism).

Carlos Steel writes his essay on Thomas Aquinas, and he showcases two virtues in Thomas where will informs intellect: faith and prudence. The illustration here is of the intimacy between will and intellect, not of the subservience of intellect to will. In his essay on Bonaventure, M. W. F. Stone also aims to illustrate the complex articulation of will and intellect in the thought of a pivotal medieval thinker. Stone suggests that Bonaventure gets his connection to a dissociative voluntarism only when his central ethical notion, that of will's rectitude, is unhelpfully divested of its theological infrastructure. To will rightly, as Bonaventure conceives of rectitude, is to will as God wills, and to will as God wills is to experience, as far as is humanly possible, the oneness of truth (intellect) and goodness (will).

Taken together, the essays by Lösli, Steel, and Stone suggest two important morals: one is that the scholastic debate between intellectualists and voluntarists, getting under way in the late thirteenth century, is likely to seem, upon further investigation, a stranger and more period-specific phenomenon than it has been made out to be; the other is that the best theological alternative to a will-eclipsing naturalism may not be a libertarian theism. It is increasingly the case that contemporary advocates of libertarian freedom advocate this kind of freedom from a theistic perspective and go on to find libertarian allies in the unlikely of historical places (e.g. the early Augustine). The historian of philosophy, by taking a more careful look at the history of voluntarism, can help us sort out what is old from what is new in the debate between contemporary naturalists and their theistic discontents.

The next essay in the collection, Thomas Pink's piece on Suarez and Hobbes, uses those two figures to ponder the transition between late scholastic voluntarism and early modern naturalism. This is one of the best, most rewarding essays in the collection, one that repays careful reading. In Pink's account, Suarez veers into voluntarism, not as a reaction to his inherited tradition of linking the will to reason (a linkage Pink refers to as 'a practical, reason-based conception of action'), but as the last, self-undoing expression of that very inheritance. It is because Suarez exalts reason and will in the same way, as two immaterial expressions of human personality, that he finds himself compelled to distinguish

them immaterially. The will wins its distinction from the intellect by self-relating itself to ends that are not intellectually transparent (as, say, mathematical truths would be). Suarez's attempt to secure the moral dignity and distinctiveness of the human rational animal is read by Hobbes to remove the human animal from nature – a silly and nonsensical undertaking. Pink does not take sides; instead he leaves us with a good sense of how a much fuller story of a neglected transitional period in philosophy might be told.

The final two contributors – excepting O'Shaughnessy, who is the odd man out – are J. B. Schneewind, who writes on Kant, and Christopher Janaway, who looks at the (ironic) pre-eminence of the will in the philosophies of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. By revisiting Kant's debts to and divergences from Wolf and Crusius, Schneewind follows the Kantian will as it emerges out of Kant's departure from two versions of a Leibnizian intellectualism. Schneewind's Kant tells us how to be modern, give prominence to the will in the moral life, and still not be libertarian. Kant's practical commitment to a providential order turns out to be as important as his purely formal definition of the will. Janaway spends most of his time labouring the resemblances between Schopenhauer's omnipresent will and Nietzsche's will to power, or two ways to find will in the rejection of mind-and-matter dualism. He builds up to his parting, provocative observation: 'these two philosophers might appear to assign the will a prominence it has not enjoyed everywhere in the history of thought. In fact, they succeed in rendering the status of human willing radically problematic' (193). Portions of Janaway's essay appeared earlier in his contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*.

My summary judgement of *The Will and Human Action* is that it is an uneven collection of essays, sorely in need of a better introduction, but one that is ultimately redeemed by the interest and originality of several of the individual contributions. The younger scholars – Lössl and Pink – have written particularly rich essays. I have invoked the libertarian notion of the will and its freedom throughout this review because that notion of the will is, for this collection of essays, the elephant in the room.

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Karin Schlapbach Augustin. *Contra Academicos Buch 1. Einleitung und Kommentar*. (Berlin & New York: Walter De Gruyter, 2003). Pp. viii + 254. \$89.00, € 74.

In 1997 Therese Fuhrer published her monumental commentary on Augustine's *Contra Academicos* (or *De Academicis*) books 2 and 3. This volume

fills in the remaining gap for book 1. Both books can now be considered the standard commentaries on the trilogy. They emerged in close collaboration between the authors and are comparable in quality, though Schlapbach's is just about half the size of Fuhrer's. Fuhrer's reasons for not including book 1 in her commentary are outlined again by Schlapbach in her introduction: books 2 and 3 contain the main philosophical arguments. Book 1 has often been considered a non-philosophical ('propaedeutic', 'protreptic') introduction to the later books. Many scholars have tended not to take seriously the philosophical content of the dialogue scenes, especially since the main participants were still quite young. Schlapbach singles out Marrou, Holte, and Hagedahl for putting forward the view that since Licentius and Trygetius were still pupils or students, and their dialogue was supervised by Augustine and used by him as a pedagogical tool (for rhetorical and philosophical training), what philosophical content could the dialogue possibly have?

Schlapbach argues that this view suffers from a misunderstanding of how philosophical argument worked in late antiquity and she presents some detailed analysis of the dialogues in book 1. Moreover, book 1 was also often used as a quarry for reconstructing Cicero's *Hortensius*. Some scholars even argued that none of the valuable material in book 1 is Augustine's but all is Cicero's. Existing collections of fragments of the *Hortensius* are heavily biased against Augustine. Even heavily paraphrased passages, which are obviously strongly influenced by Augustine's style and way of thinking, are often presented as Cicero's. Schlapbach argues against that tendency and offers alternatives. She also explores the possible presence of other sources of information for the participants in Augustine's dialogue, in particular Romanianus' son Licentius.

In the commentary, Schlapbach discusses numerous passages on points of vocabulary, grammar, style, even prose metre, but above all, philosophical questions, e.g. most impressively, on happiness (on §13f: *beati certe ... esse volumus*). She considers a wide range of classical and early Christian texts and cross-references extensively with other works of Augustine's. She also occasionally analyses arguments systematically and thus indicates in which direction one might develop them further, e.g. the assumption generally held to be true in antiquity that 'all human beings want to be happy'. Finally, an extensive bibliography and index of text references make this volume an excellent lexicographical tool. Everyone engaged in the study of Augustine's philosophy of religion and any adjacent field will greatly benefit from the use of this book, but especially those who are interested in the role of protreptic for and in philosophy.

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