

Book reviews

Robert Cummings Neville, *Behind the Masks of God: An Essay Toward Comparative Theology*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991, 200 pp. Paper US\$14.95.

In a forthcoming book Neville describes *Behind the Masks of God* as “a study of methodological questions in comparative theology. The book argues that comparative categories need to be developed carefully by abstracting and purifying motifs from concrete religious traditions and inquiring into how well they can be used to interpret other religions. The comparative categories of creation *ex nihilo* and of personal sanctification or individuation are explored in that book with reference to Christianity and Confucianism, with some reference to Buddhism and Taoism.”

This is a sober and accurate statement of the book’s scope. He uses a very powerful, because very abstract, notion of creation *ex nihilo*. His first assertion seems innocuous enough. “Anything determinate is contingent and hence needs a creator to be” (p. 90). Then we learn that “this ontological contingency applies to anything determinate, from physical things to moral laws, to logic, to metaphysical conditions” (p. 91). This includes most conceptions of God as well. God, conceived as perfect being or as omnipotent lord, is a determinate being requiring creation. If everything determinate is contingent, the creator must be utterly indeterminate apart from creating. Like Tillich’s ground of being, God is not a being but the source of all being.

Many hold creation *ex nihilo* to be unintelligible. They may assume that such intelligibility consists in seeing how things can be explained as illustrations of fundamental principles. The absolutely first principles cannot be explained, for everything is explained in terms of them. In contrast, Neville’s approach for a proper explanation is to locate the conditions from which things arise. If so, ultimate intelligibility for how determinateness as such arises could only be located in a radically indeterminate nothingness capable of creating it.

A more complete account of the logic of creation *ex nihilo* involves conditional and essential features. Fortunately Neville includes a good short exposition of this theory (pp. 89–98).

Traditionally the God of western theism has been pictured as wholly perfect and self-sufficient, who needs no world, yet nevertheless creates it. If, however, the creator is nothing apart from creation, “the concept can be specified by the creation stories in Hinduism, and by the dynamic relation between Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman. It makes good sense when specified in Taoism by the relation between the Tao that cannot be named and the Tao that can. And it finds straightforward Neo-Confucian expression in Chou Tun-i’s progression from Non-being to the Great Ultimate, to yang, to yin, the five elements, to the Ten Thousand Things” (p. 100). Even though Buddhism is more problematic, “the contingency of form on emptiness and samsara on nirvana is contingency upon a creative ground” such as creation *ex nihilo* supplies (p. 101).

The question of Buddhism is particularly difficult, and not only because there are so many different schools of Buddhist thought. It may be questioned whether *any* ontological interpretation is appropriate. Experience is interpreted into something like Hume's sense impressions, whose origin comes from "I know not where." Because the effort proved so fruitless in times past, most Buddhists refuse to speculate about the ontological ground of "emptiness," beyond its connection with "dependent co-origination."

Neville writes: "I submit as an hypothesis for further investigation that Buddhists could reinterpret their classic expressions" in his ontological terms (pp. 100 f.). Most Buddhists appear to resist interpreting their notions ontologically, but if their notions were so interpreted, as the Kyoto school has done, many illuminating similarities with creation *ex nihilo* could emerge. There could also be striking parallels with John Cobb's process conceptuality as expressed in *Beyond Dialogue* (Fortress Press, 1982), which seeks to overcome substantial endurance.

Ironically, this purified notion of creation *ex nihilo* may fit non-theistic traditions better than theistic ones, insofar as these require divinity to be conceived as essentially individual and personal. Since for Neville the creator is nothing apart from creation, for "its character as ground is a condition resulting from creation, the question of theism or non-theism is a secondary issue, depending on different interpretations of the world and perhaps genuinely different experiences" (p. 96).

If it is a secondary issue, then differing traditions interpret the same basic ultimate phenomena either theistically as an individual Creator or non-theistically as a non-individual pervasive creativity we and perhaps all things participate in. Essentially, however, the creator is ultimately an indeterminate nothingness which is also the source of being. This nothingness can be essentially identified with non-individual creativity, but not with an individual creator. Yet one of the central tasks of the creator for Neville is to determine which metaphysical alternative the world shall exemplify. It would take a centered individual contemplating the alternatives to make this decision.

Methodologically, Neville's comparative enterprise depends upon holding a suitably vague concept of creation *ex nihilo*. He has a very precise notion of what is vague. "First, the [vague] concept must be made more specific before it applies to a concrete phenomenon such as a particular expression of religious tradition. Second, various specifications of the vague concepts can be incompatible with one another and still equally well specify the vague concept to different phenomena" (p. 99).

Other terms receive fresh meaning. Thus to spread the gospel in New Testament times means "to think out the meaning of Christian existence in a non-Christian context" (p. 31). From that perspective *Behind the Masks of God* is preeminently a work in evangelical theology.

Sometimes the comparative endeavour reaches dead ends. Kenosis, the self-emptying of Christ (Phil. 2:7), would seem to have important affinities with the Buddhist concern for "emptiness". While there may be rich psychological and personal parallels, it turns out not to be very helpful for ontology.

Heretofore Neville's philosophy has shown considerable affinity with

Whitehead's account of the world, since this seems to be the cosmology the creator has determined upon. Yet there are also strong affinities with respect to its doctrine of divinity. Whitehead conceives concrescence as an act of becoming in which the actuality creates itself. Applied to God, this would be the way God determines the divine character by creating. Both reject any notion of a determinate God apart from, or before creation. Neville gives a very illuminating account of Whitehead as situated between positivistic science and its romantic reaction (pp. 59 ff.). The primary difference is that while Neville permits only one creator, Whitehead has many instances of self-creation. The key issue here turns on whether human freedom should be understood as created spontaneity or as creative activity.

Religious studies have experienced a massive transformation in the past thirty years or more. There is now an abundance of descriptive and analytic material on the various religious traditions. Some have proposed impressive world theologies. In contrast, the discipline of the philosophy of religion remains almost as parochial in its pre-occupation with the Western tradition as it always has been. Given this situation and his particular skills, Neville should be encouraged to try his hand at an introductory philosophy of religion within the context of world theology.

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Richard M. Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 422 pp. US\$44.50.

Hume's Philo is ubiquitous in Richard Gale's critique of contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. Gale has written a cogent and critical response to the recent attempts by analytic philosophers, such as Alvin Plantinga, William Alston, Robert Adams, and Richard Swinburne, to shore up the case for theism. Sympathetic and good willed, yet skeptical, Gale takes on a battery of arguments dealing with the nature and existence of God and shows their strengths and weaknesses. Confining himself to two kinds of arguments regarding the justification of belief in God: *epistemological* arguments, such as the cosmological and ontological arguments; and *pragmatic* arguments, providing prudential and moral justification for belief in God; Gale argues that neither are satisfactory, so that "if the only available arguments were the epistemological and pragmatic arguments examined ..., faith would lack any rational justification." Nevertheless, a fideistic Gale – in the spirit of Hume? – has the last word. "Such [a skeptical] outcome would be welcomed by a wide range of Kierkegaardian types who completely eschew any attempt to give an "objective" justification of faith. I resonate to their view of faith as a subjective passion that outstrips our reason" (p. 387, [but compare the closing passage of Hume's essay on "Miracles," "Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of [the Christian religion's] veracity. And whoever is

moved by *faith* to assent to it is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person which subverts all the principles of his understanding...”]).

The book consists of three parts, not entirely obvious from the table of contents. (1) Chapters 1–5 consist of an analysis of several Atheological Arguments, arguments which attempt to derive a contradiction from various properties connected with the concept of God. (2) Chapters 6–8 contains a critical examination of three arguments for the existence of God: the Ontological Argument; the Cosmological Argument; and the Argument from Religious Experience. (3) Finally, Chapter 9 is an updated version of his 1980 APQ article, “William James and the Ethics of Belief,” in which Gale scrutinizes pragmatic justification for belief in God.

All three parts contain rich material. In (1) Gale uses the atheological arguments to arrive at a more adequate notion of God, one which gives up the notions of simplicity and immutability, as well as timeless eternity (accepting the more Biblical notion of omnitemporality). The fourth chapter, on the problem of evil, is the best in the book, perhaps the clearest overall discussion of the current debate on the problem of evil, though I don’t think his negative conclusion is as strong as Gale does (oddly enough, Gale admits that Process Theology could be a way out of his main criticism).

The three chapters of the second part (on the deductive theological arguments) are well done. Again his discussions of the current debates over the Ontological and Cosmological Arguments are the clearest I’ve seen. Anyone working in these areas will have to take Gale’s criticisms into consideration. Similarly, his chapter on the Arguments from Religious Experience, in which he argues persuasively for the disanalogy between sensory experience and religious experience, deserves close attention.

The final topic, Pragmatic Arguments (chapter 9), is treated with the same care and cogency as the preceding. After a sharp, telling attack on Pascal’s Wager Argument, Gale dismisses Clifford’s act-utilitarian ethics of belief as misguided, but then mounts a deontological attack on James’s Will to Believe. Basing his argument on the fact that persons have Absolute (or very high) worth (it is unclear to me whence in Gale’s system this worth derives) and that acting on reasons is intrinsic to personhood, Gale mounts an argument against believing for non-epistemic reasons (i.e., for pragmatic reasons). In the end, he argues that it is not fair for someone to use volitional means to become moral. “Why should the more highly principled person ... be morally penalized [by not being allowed to obtain a self-induced belief in God in order to be more moral]?” (p. 386). I think the answer to this question is that the moral life is so important that just as paternalism is justified in dealing with children and less-than-fully autonomous adults, self-induced leaps of faith (self-paternalism) in the interest of moral character and actions might be justified with regard to one’s self.

Two minor points should be mentioned. First, Gale’s humor graces his discussion throughout (there is a hilarious moment where he and Phil Quinn get into an argument regarding modal intuition polls of the University of Notre Dame versus the University of Pittsburgh, p. 235 ff.), but occasionally it misfires (as when he jokes about killing British soccer fans, p. 155). Second, there is no bibliography, which would have helped in

locating sources. The footnote references do not make up for this deficiency.

In the end Gale's case against Theism, impressive as some arguments are, is not as strong as he imagines. Process Theology or the possibility that God lacks "middle knowledge," would avoid his attack on the free-will defense. On Plantinga's view, Gale over-estimates the force of his insight that God could have created persons with better dispositions than he did (so that they would more likely freely choose the right). Since Gale's critique of the Ontological Argument rests upon his conclusion that the Modal Problem of Evil is an insuperable problem, even his critique of Plantinga's version of this argument is flawed. His critique of the Argument from Religious Experience, which for the most part is cogent, nevertheless fails to distinguish between first person justification and third person justification and fails to place religious experience within the context of a whole world view. Finally, Gale's project is self-consciously, incomplete, not taking into consideration inductive types of arguments, such as the teleological argument and arguments from religious history. Not only are these arguments important in their own right, but together with the other arguments discussed, they may work together to make a cumulative case for theism, such as Swinburne has developed. Whether the cumulative case will ultimately be successful is still in question, and Gale's important work may be a contribution to the final answer, but the work itself, as Gale recognizes, is not that answer.

In spite of these reservations Gale's book is a treasure of contemporary philosophy of religion. Closely and cogently argued, with wit and good-willed wile, it's Philonic provocations would have made the Scottish Skeptic proud.

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Mary Midgley, *Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and Its Meaning*.
London and New York: Routledge, 1992, x + 239 pp. US\$25.00

In this solidification of her spring 1990 Gifford Lectures, Professor Midgley focuses upon a loose collection of writers who seek salvation in the scientific exploration of outer space. While she traces this curious obsession with salvific space travel back to the writings of J.B.S. Haldane and J.D. Bernal, she concentrates most of her critical attention upon more recent advocates, such as Freeman Dyson, Paul Davies, John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tipler.

In some of their more fanciful dreams, these futuristic authors imagine that even the farthest reaches of space will be colonized by mechanical or computerized substitutes for human beings. Such human replacements will be needed to overcome the natural limitations of biological life. Envisioned as capable of replicating themselves without limit, these machines are expected to be enormously powerful. Not only will they be able to

mine almost boundless energy from the depths of black holes, they may even restructure the most fundamental forces of nature, thereby tiptoeing delicately around the predicted heat death of the universe.

Professor Midgley accounts for the religious overtones of such preposterous space adventures in terms of human purpose. She is convinced that having a purpose need not presuppose any prior, conscious planning. After all, even if mammalian kidneys were produced by nothing more than blind, evolutionary pressures, they still can serve an important purpose by playing some crucial role in the overall functioning of an animal's body. For Midgley, no matter what their origins, things may serve a purpose if, like kidneys, they fall into place as parts of some larger structure, whole or pattern. Thus, by providing a special place for people, wild dramas of futuristic space exploration can supply a scientific purpose for human beings. Furthermore, since she believes that the human quest for salvation is essentially a struggle to find some significant role for people in the more comprehensive scheme of things, Midgley concludes that futuristic space epics also can offer the alluring promise of salvation.

Although she provides specific objections against particular variations on the generally salvific theme of future space travel, Professor Midgley puts most of her effort into developing a broader analysis, extracting assorted story lines, motifs and underlying motivations common to all the variants. In particular, she claims that the limitless expanse of space symbolizes unbounded freedom. To escape the dismal, petty problems of contemporary life, futuristic dreamers are driven by an arrogant desire for unlimited power mixed with a touchingly human fear of death. The characteristic shape of their dreams grows from a surprising interplay of influences. The conviction that only humans are of genuine value comes from a perverse secularization of Descartes and Kant. A hefty dose of reductionism mixed with Darwinian evolutionary theory effectively strips the natural order of any sacred mystery or creative spontaneity, transforming organisms into little more than curious contraptions, assemblies of self-replicating chemical machinery. To quench the religious longing for something higher and nobler, a Lamarckian twist allows the reformulation of Darwin's directionless struggle for existence into a goal-oriented enterprise. A self-serving and narrow-minded pride in the achievements of science dictates that the perpetuation and advance of scientific understanding is the only goal sufficiently lofty to serve as the ultimate end for natural history. Latent positivism generates the conclusion that only purely objective investigators could ever hope to reach such ethereal heights of scientific truth. Thus, if so glorious a goal is ever to be attained, incurably subjective human investigators eventually must be supplanted by bloodlessly computerized, emotionless collectors of information. Sadly, then, in the final scheme of things, the intellectual frailty of human beings dooms them to a shabbily meager purpose in life. Their salvation consists merely in the humble realization that they are currently useful, though tragically flawed and ultimately disposable, servants of science.

In the course of her critique, Professor Midgley traces a myriad of confusions and inconsistencies in this incoherent and deeply inhumane vision of the future. Though many of her observations are not new, she frequently finds strikingly effective ways of driving them home. Unfor-

tunately, in her attempt to maintain contact with a popular audience, she regularly abbreviates her arguments, compressing them to the point of obscurity. Typically, even her most crucial insights are only hastily sketched. As a result, instead of offering a polished exposition of settled analysis, this volume reads more like a preliminary exploration of promising ideas.

For readers who can overlook these stylistic shortcomings, Professor Midgley's fascinating, but peculiar choice of subject matter may prove disheartening. No doubt, she has targeted a deadly aspect of contemporary Western culture, the conviction that salvation lies in the promise of scientific or technological development. But in a society where people truly believe that better vaccines or fancier condoms will save us all from the social ravages of AIDS, in a world convinced that Stealth bombers can cauterize the injustices of ancient hatreds or that mass starvation can be eliminated simply by developing a few more potent pesticides or chemical fertilizers, it is difficult to share her passionate concern over the dangers posed by a small band of largely ineffectual dreamers. Surely, there are more insidious and immediately threatening manifestations of the contemporary faith in the powers of science than this handful of escapist stories about future voyages into the depths of space.

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David Ray Griffin, *Evil Revisited Responses and Reconsiderations*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991, 277 pp. US\$19.95 paper; US\$59.50 cloth.

David Griffin has done more than anyone to defend and expand upon the answer to the problem of evil found in the writings of A.N. Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. Largely because of Griffin's first book on the subject, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (1976), John Hick refers to process theodicy as one of "three main Christian responses to the problem of evil" (*Philosophy of Religion* 4th ed., p. 40). *Evil Revisited* is Griffin's response to criticisms of his earlier work. Almost all of Griffin's critics are theists – Alvin Plantinga, Randall and David Basinger, Stephen Davis, Bruce Reichenbach, John Knasas, Nancy Frankenberry, Nelson Pike, John Hefner, John Hick, and Edward Madden and Peter Hare. In addition to responding to critics Griffin revises his theodicy to address what he takes to be deficiencies in his earlier presentations.

Griffin's overarching purpose is to show that a process theodicy is superior to its rivals. His opening chapter is a lucid summary of his case against traditional answers to the problem of evil and for his own answer. The biggest change in Griffin's position where traditional theodicies are concerned is to explicitly acknowledge a difference between all-determining theism (henceforth ADT) and free will theism (henceforth FWT). According to ADT God can single-handedly create any conceivable state

of affairs. FWT holds that God freely chooses to create some beings with free will whose activity the deity cannot completely control. An important reason for being clear about this difference is that FWT and process theism (henceforth PT) are logical contraries of ADT. Furthermore, fully half of the critics to whom Griffin responds accept FWT.

There are three main differences between PT and FWT. First, PT proposes, as a metaphysical hypothesis, that every actuality has some power of self-determination. Hence, God cannot completely control any actual entity. FWT commits one to an ontological dualism in which some actual things have the power of self-determination and some do not. God can completely control the latter but not the former. The second difference is that PT maintains that God exerts power directly only on individuals and never directly on aggregates (Whiteheadian societies). FWT recognizes no distinctions in the beings on which God acts directly. Finally, PT posits as a necessary truth that there can be greater freedom if and only if there is greater opportunity for good and risk of evil. FWT can accept this correlation at the level of human freedom, but God alone determines the conditions for the possible realization of values in the nonhuman world.

By clarifying these differences, Griffin is able to highlight the distinctiveness of PT and show its advantages for theodicy. For example, traditional theodicies (ADT and FWT) tend to view the nonhuman world as important only insofar as it contributes to "soul making" (Hick) in the human sphere. The aeons before humans existed, being unnecessary to soul making, are an embarrassment for this view. Furthermore, traditional theisms trivialize animal suffering. PT affirms the intrinsic worth of values in the nonhuman world. The millions of years of evolution, though necessary to produce human beings, were no mere prelude to humanity's appearance. Nonhuman animals are neither unimportant in their own right nor unnecessary to the achievement of specifically human values.

Evil Revisited should end misunderstandings of PT such as the false identification of efficient and final causation with coercion and persuasion. Griffin's nuanced discussion is helpful in distinguishing the varieties of coercion and persuasion and explaining the senses in which the God of PT can and cannot coerce. In a metaphysical sense, to coerce is to unilaterally determine. Griffin argues that, in this sense, coercion only occurs between aggregates, between beings that lack all power of self-determination. For instance, my hand moves the pencil but neither is free. However, my control of my hand is not absolute. As Griffin notes, we are more or less coordinated. Our coercive power over other bodies is indirect, a result of our noncoercive power over our bodies. Unlike a localized creature God has no body that mediates influence on the environment. God exerts power over individuals within the universe but never on aggregates. If God has a body, it is the universe. Thus, God has no coercive power in this sense.

Griffin refines his theodicy in two ways, one suggesting that things are worse than we thought and the other suggesting that things are better than we thought. First, he recognizes the existence of the demonic, "that which intensely opposes the Divine Creativity of the universe" (p. 31). The possibility of the demonic is inherent in PT's axiology, for opportunities for good and evil are correlative. Second, he argues that PT's idea of being perfectly remembered by God (objective immortality) is not enough for

faith in the ultimate victory of good over evil. Objective immortality should be supplemented with a doctrine of personal survival of death. Griffin, who now believes in personal survival, says that the empirical evidence for it is “surprisingly impressive” (p. 39). He claims that a process theodicy without this doctrine is still superior to other theodicies. However, given his critique of objective immortality it is surprising that he views belief in survival as optional for PT. It is also unclear how personal survival of death strengthens any theodicy. Would the demonic be any less tenacious in the hereafter than in this life?

Every theodicy is caught between the Scylla of compromising divine power and the Charybdis of compromising divine goodness. Griffin navigates these difficult waters as well as anyone and better than most. His success is due in large measure to following his own advice about what one should expect from a theodicy. Against Plantinga he argues that theists should do more than reconcile the existence of God with the existence of evil. They should also strive to develop theodicies that are more adequate and illuminating than their competitors. Defensive and rearguard strategies are not enough. Process theodicy, embedded in a metaphysics that was deliberately constructed to take account of the best in science and culture, will continue to attract those who are open to new approaches and challenge those who defend time-honored traditions.

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Richard Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, 236 pp. £35.00 cloth; £12.95 paper.

This is the second volume of a projected tetralogy dealing with philosophical issues arising out of central Christian doctrines. It begins with a useful discussion of some general topics and distinctions related to language, expression, assertion, etc., and it ends with some provocative, and highly controversial, observations about the proper methods of biblical interpretation. The major element in the book, however, is a long argument to defend the claim that the Christian faith is based on a genuine divine revelation – a “propositional” revelation, important truths divinely conveyed to the human race – and that this revelation is incorporated in the Bible and is authenticated and authoritatively interpreted by the Church.

Readers familiar with Swinburne’s work may recognize a characteristic style – an extended probabilistic argument, combining *a priori* and empirical elements. An initial appeal is made to Swinburne’s earlier work on theism to establish a strong probability for the existence of God. Then there is an *a priori* speculation both about the desirability of a divine revelation as a guide to our supernatural end, and about what properties it would be good for such a revelation to have. Given the probability of God’s existence, it is not highly improbable that there is such a revelation.

Empirical evidence to establish the reality of such a revelation, therefore, need only be moderately strong.

So we come to the New Testament. We cannot *initially* claim any special status for it, and it may contain distortions of Jesus' life and message. Swinburne thinks, however, that some things are fairly clear. Jesus taught and preached some message or other. He undertook to found a continuing institution – the Church, a new Israel – whose first members were the twelve disciples. He instituted a liturgical observance, the eucharistic meal. And he allowed himself to be seized and unjustly executed in close conjunction with the Jewish celebration of the Passover.

And then came a really big and decisive event, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Swinburne says that the resurrection of Jesus was bound to be interpreted by his contemporaries as a divine stamp of approval on his teaching. And so, if this miracle actually happened then God must have intended it, at least in part, to have just that significance. So the resurrection would be an empirical confirmation of the claim that there was indeed a divine revelation. It would be God's own assertion, by a dramatic divine act, that Jesus indeed spoke for Him.

Did the resurrection actually occur? Given the existence of God, miracles are not impossible, nor even highly improbable. But to get any further on this question we must have recourse to some empirical evidence – historical, testimonial, etc. Well, what about that evidence? I suppose that Swinburne thinks that the evidence for the resurrection is strong enough to generate some substantial positive probability. Otherwise, he would not write this book. But here, perhaps surprisingly, Swinburne declines to evaluate it, saying modestly "That is not my expertise." I'll return to this modesty shortly.

Assuming that Jesus was resurrected, then, there was a divine revelation conveyed by Jesus' teaching. But a revelation which was intended for all mankind must be authenticated, preserved, propagated, put into the thought forms of diverse cultures, applied to new circumstances, and so on. How could this be done? No doubt this was to be the function (or one function) of the new institution which Jesus founded, the Church. And if the divine intention is to be fulfilled, then God must see to it that the Church performs this function well – perhaps infallibly, or if not, then at least reliably enough that the divinely provided information is sufficiently preserved, etc., to guide us into the Kingdom of God. So we have good reason to rely on the Church in its identification of the canon of the Bible, its judgment about the biblical authority, its formulation of the creeds as summaries of Christian doctrine, its interpretation of the Bible, and so on.

Which Church? Well, maybe it doesn't matter much, since (according to Swinburne) the doctrinal agreements among the major Christian groups are much greater than the differences. But he also has some interesting observations about the criteria for determining which modern candidate is the "best continuer" of an ancient institution. Given the criteria, of course, then we would need to apply them to the various candidates. But here again Swinburne declines this final step, leaving it to historians.

So much for a sketch of the main argument, as I understand it. Here I will end with three more critical comments.

First, I suppose that when Swinburne came to speculate about a revelation, etc., he was already a Christian and he already had some ideas about what revelation was actual. I think that readers who are not Christians may well suspect that his speculations on these matters are not entirely “pure,” not guided simply by some universal canon of reason, but are to some extent tailored to fit his antecedent convictions. At any rate, it will be interesting to see to what extent Swinburne’s argument here is convincing to outsiders.

Second, is there not something deeply disturbing about Swinburne’s reluctance to evaluate the historical evidence which is crucial to his own line of argument? Of course, he is not a historian. But isn’t that just the problem? I am not a historian either. And the world is chuck-full of people who are even less qualified to make historical judgments, or to choose among historians, than we are. Is it credible that a revelation intended for all mankind should depend on its recipients making historical judgments of this sort? And if I decline to make such judgments, then how can this line of argument be of any benefit to me?

Third, Swinburne’s whole approach, it seems to me, depends on the assumption that the divine revelatory activity, at least with respect to the really important truths, does not take place today. In fact, the assumption is that there has been no such divine revelatory act since the first century A.D. So we do not have the same access to the revelation which the first recipients had. (That is why, it seems to me, Swinburne thinks his line of argument is necessary.) Swinburne gives no reason for this assumption other than that is a part of the tradition. But not all Christians accept this assumption, and the actual practice of the church seems to me to fit it very poorly. There is no space here to pursue this topic further, but I suggest that questioning this assumption would lead to a much different treatment of the topic of divine revelation.

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Gordon E. Michalson, *Fallen Freedom: Kant on Radical Evil and Moral Regeneration*. Cambridge: University Press, 1990, xii + 172 pp. US\$ 39.95

This book explicates four ‘wobbles’ which arise in reading Kant’s *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (*Rel*). All four problems arise from what Kant calls the radical evil in human nature. By that he means that we do not do evil by mistake (cf. *Meno* 77b–78b) or because of improper education (cf. Seneca and Rousseau), nor merely that we ‘perform actions that are evil’ (*Rel* 16), but that we are fundamentally evil: opposed to the good in intention; in Kant’s language, we have ‘an underlying evil maxim’ (*Rel* 16). What Michalson says of Kant in regard to the antinomies which arise due to such evil applies as well to *Fallen Freedom*: ‘We should be interested, not because of anything [he] finally claims

about evil or salvation, but because the sheer instability of his position is a telling indicator of the difficulties facing religious thought in our own day' (p. x).

The first question Kant's contemporaries, notably Goethe, had about the *Religion* could be put thus: 'Why invent questions about radical evil at so late a date (after Rousseau and all the Enlightenment)?' That Goethe's distaste for the *Religion* is mentioned early (p. 17) and often (pp. 46, 48, 49) is one indication that Michalson is historicising Kant and the problem Kant faces. But if evil is chosen, it is radical. If it is a mistake, or the result of bad education, it is not moral evil. Moreover, if history teaches some new means of salvation from evil, then not only were all previous philosophers *theoretically* mistaken, but also neither Plato nor Goethe, Rousseau nor Kant were the same kind of moral beings as we are in these post-Enlightenment days, for seeing how moral evil really comes to be makes us responsible for getting rid of it, where those other, less knowing men could not have been expected to do so. All that follows from Michalson's historicizing suggestion 'that the instability in [Kant's] thinking is the inevitable result of a divided cultural inheritance – something which even a brilliant thinker like Kant could not clearly see, no matter how hard he looked. His difficulties are the difficulties of his historical setting rather than of philosophical argumentation' (p. xi). One of the difficulties facing religious thought in our day is precisely this one: whether the weight which the rails of history are made to bear by arguments like Michalson's is not significantly more than they actually do, or can bear.

In part one, 'Radical Evil,' Michalson lays out Kant's view of radical moral evil in human nature as a signal document within the context of 'an ongoing referendum on the idea of "otherworldliness"' (1) in modern religious thought. Kant is, then, a test case for the question, 'to what extent can religion avoid an other-worldly reference?' Or, in more theological language, 'to what extent can one be a liberal theologian?' What one's own answer to that question is will dictate, if not the answer to the question 'is Kant a liberal theologian?' at least the answer to 'should he have been?' Michalson seems to assume that liberal theology poses the right questions, even if it does not provide adequate solutions.

Michalson shows that Kant's strategy of limiting explanation to objects of sense and exhibiting reason as the source, if not the being, of the subject puts him in league with the purely this-worldly, natural and moral accounts of religion in liberal theology, but his claim that the good will suffices, though it effect nothing, and his practical postulates face him ahistorically and illiberally out of this world. He makes it clear that 'the issue [of evil] is deeply rooted in the structure of Kant's practical philosophy and in its tendency to move forward through the resolution of self-made antinomies' (p. 19), though he does seem to think that that antinomic structure, in the *Religion*, is a function of retrograde ghosts in the machinery of the West. Michalson develops four antinomies: (1) Humankind has an 'original predisposition to good' but a 'natural propensity to evil'; (2) Radical evil is 'innate' but 'brought upon us' by our own freedom; (3) We are morally obligated to deliver ourselves from radical evil, even though it is '*inexterrible* by human powers'; (4) We must 'make ourselves' good again, but divine aid 'may be necessary' to our actually

becoming good (p. 8, quoting *Rel*).

The first two are the foci of the first part of the book; the second two of the second ('Moral Regeneration'). Michalson's summary statement that '*moral evil itself is a property of the act of will that freely subordinates one incentive to another, the moral to the sensuous*' (p. 35) is correct. But conjoining that statement to the first two wobbles makes it difficult not to read Kant as 'a despiser of the body'. Michalson tries, but finally fails, to avoid that misinterpretation. He reminds us that natural predispositions – to animality, humanity, and personality – are good: '*inclinations, considered in themselves, are good*' (p. 39, quoting *Rel* 51). *Sed contra*, his own remark: 'It remains true to say that Kant's moral philosophy continues the Platonic-Augustinian denigration of the body and the sensual – a codifying of the moral good in terms calling for the subordination of, if not the total suppression of, what is physical and instinctual [although] he never flatly states that the body is bad' (p. 39).

Respondeo, to make any moral claim at all is to say that some thing is better than another. This is not denigration unless either the particular moral claim is wrong, or the making of any moral claim at all is so, and that latter claim denigrates morality, unless there is no such thing. (In which case there is no such thing as denigration, there is only shifting of power.) As subordination and suppression are distinct, so too are denigration and subordination. Insubordination always denigrates what it is insubordinate to, subordination does not necessarily do so, and when it does we call it suppression; but that kind of subordination *cannot be inspired by Wille*.

So, too, saying 'the body provides freedom with the opportunity to go wrong' (p. 69) is no more correct than saying '*Wille* provides freedom with the opportunity to go wrong', for without the latter there *is* no moral freedom, but only animal voluntariness. That Michalson's wobbles lead him where they do in this regard is an indication that where he goes it is not necessary to follow.

The serious problem for Kant, encompassing 'wobbles' 3 and 4 and the second part of *Fallen Freedom*, is how the radically evil moral agent becomes good. Again, where Michalson sees Kant caught in the slow machinery of the history of ideas – 'his awkward posture [is due to being] between a modern commitment to autonomy and a received tradition framed in terms of biblical imagery' (p. 89) – I think Kant is the modern version of a perennial problem. He is, then, not 'struggling to free himself from [biblical imagery] in order to do justice to [autonomy], but ... prevented from doing so by his own theory of radical evil' (p. 89f); rather he is indicating the lay of the land in the world of autonomously chosen, i.e., radical, evil. He *is* 'dealing with philosophical argumentation', he *is not* 'juggling centuries' (ct. 140).

Despite this continued historicizing flaw Michalson is correct that 'the chief culprit producing [Kant's] conceptual turbulence is what we might call the "before and after" feature of the transition from radical evil to a renewed disposition' (p. 83). While he seems to give equal weight to the questions *why* would a radically evil moral agent change his disposition?, and *how* could he, the crux of the problem, given the permanent presence of *Wille* and the purely intelligible character of the disposition, is clearly

the latter. *Wille* provides the permanent motive, but how can there be change in a realm where before and after, i.e., time, is not applicable?

The complex of problems spinning out from wobbles 3 and 4 can be gathered around the question 'How to attribute a persisting identity to the agent, considered as a free being' (p. 85); and in every move Kant 'call[s] into question the self-sufficiency of human autonomy' (p. 96). This is clearly a terrible problem for Kant, given the centrality of freedom in his philosophy, but it is also clearly not a problem that is imported by late-blooming dogmatic considerations, rather it is the fruit of Kant's mature thought about responsibility for both good ['the case of a righteous man' in the *Critique of Judgement* (KU 425f).] and evil. The *Religion* considers that last problem, and Michalson shows with great perspicacity how every move Kant makes from the morally corrupted position is checked, and only exacerbates an already impossible problematic. Atonement, for example, 'the payment of the surplus debt' for having been evil, is impossible. First, because whatever good we do is already only our duty, and secondly, because it 'requires a punishment, but the punishment itself entails a linkage between the moral and the temporal' (p. 116) namely, 'that the change of heart involved in moral regeneration occur in time and enjoy temporal duration' (p. 115). That linkage, we know, is not allowed to speculation, for time is merely a condition of sensibility.

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