THEOLOGY, ETHICS AND PHILOSOPHY

The New Atheists and the Problems of Fideism

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The New Atheists: The Twighlight of Reason & the War on Religion, Tina Beattie, Darton, Longman & Todd, 2007 (ISBN 978-0-232-52712-4), ix + 209 pp., pb $20.00

God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything, Christopher Hitchens, Twelve, 2007 (ISBN 978-0-446-57980-3), 307 pp., hb $24.99

The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever, Christopher Hitchens (ed.), Da Capo Press, 2007 (ISBN 978-0-306-81608-6), xxvi + 499 pp., pb $17.50

Abstract

This paper considers work by Christopher Hitchens, who is part of the group called the 'New Atheists', and a response to this by Tina Beattie. The concern of Hitchens is to alert his readers to the problems that arise from fideistic belief, and his proposed solution in common sense naturalism. The author argues that while Hitchens does raise important questions about fideism, he himself is a fideist in his claims about reality. Far from being new, these are the same claims as held by ancient materialists: all of reality can be reduced to atoms in motion.

Also considered is Tina Beattie's analysis and response to the New Atheists. Her cogent analysis is helpful, although her own proposal to resolve the debate encounters difficulties similar to those attending fideism.

Can all of reality be explained as atoms in motion? Is belief in something besides atoms in motion mere superstition? Can violence

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between humans be attributed to the unwillingness to use common sense naturalism to solve problems? The 'New Atheists', including writers like Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens, have asserted as much in a number of best selling books. And yet the designator 'new' may be a misnomer in that their form of naturalism is not different than ancient materialism, and Hitchens seems to acknowledge this in selecting Lucretius as the first reading in 'The Portable Atheist'. In the following, I will analyze the worldview of Hitchens, his claims about religion as a hindrance to the maturity of humanity, and Tina Beattie's volume which lays bare some of his presuppositions. I will argue that there are important challenges from Hitchens to fideism and the failure to use reason, that this failure extends to many of those who respond to him, and yet that Hitchens himself is a fideist when it comes to positing his own belief system. It is one thing to note the failure of fideism, indeed it is easy although rare; it is another thing to avoid it oneself. Two lessons can be taken from Hitchens and other 'new atheists': fideism is insufficient to find meaning and solve problems, and these skeptics who are pointing this out fall into a more painful fideism precisely because they claim to be so concerned to avoid it.

'The Portable Atheist' could have been a helpful collection of readings by materialists. As a resource it aims at being a collection of primary sources expressing materialism. Beginning with Lucretius the focus is set: all that exists is atoms in motion – all other belief is superstition. After this, most of the readings are attacks at religion understood in its most superficial forms. Hobbes argues that religion is used to oppress opposing viewpoints and censure free thinking. Hume's famous critique of miracles is included, although his arguments from *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* are more potent but perhaps not as threatening to popular fideism. After this the selections are mostly attacks at the superficial and hypocritical nature of popular fideism. These attacks might just as easily originate from religious philosophers wishing to call believers out of the unexamined life of fideism. It is in this sense that the collection is disappointing. Arguing against the least thoughtful forms of religion is easy, as is arguing against the least thoughtful forms of materialism. This is a classical *straw man* argument – having set up the weakest (although perhaps the most widely held) form of religion, these authors have knocked it over. But what about engaging with the most thoughtful forms of religious belief? Indeed, why not begin with addressing the criticisms of Plato or Aristotle against the belief that only atoms and motion exist? This would only be the beginning, there is a long history of strong arguments against atomists. The real concern seems to be not so much a defense of some actual belief, but a rejection of fideism as a source of problems in the world.

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This is where Hitchens's book 'God is Not Great' takes over. It is a sustained argument against the evils of religious belief. It is largely aimed at Christian theism, but includes criticisms of Islam and Eastern Religions. The essence of the argument is that religious belief is used to control others, therefore leads to wars and violent oppression, is unfounded and disproven by scientific naturalism. The origin of violence can therefore be overcome if people would be wiling to abandon superstition and fideistic belief in favor of scientific naturalism. Hitchens's arguments could be helpful in pointing out to fideists why their position is less than what they think it is. Often, feelings of confidence are mistaken for epistemic certainty, and yet since these feelings are found in believers with logically contradictory beliefs they are not a source of certainty. A witness who confidently proclaims from the witness stand but has no proof is dismissed as unhelpful. While most theists seem to think that the traditional theistic proofs are successful, Hitchens points out some reasons that this is not so. While most theists seem to think that religion is a positive thing for human civilization, Hitchens argues that in its fideist forms it is harmful.

His argument that all violence can be attributed to religious belief would be more powerful if it were modified to claim that all violence can be attributed to fideism. Similarly, his claim that all religion is harmful would be more powerful if it is were about fideism. Because Hitchens does not make this distinction, and instead uses the term *religion* to refer to belief in anything nonphysical, his arguments are not sound – they overextend from some to all. Essentially, he maintains that empirical naturalism is the correct worldview and all other views are fideism. It is true that many/most persons are fidesits, this is a result of their leading the unexamined life. Plato (not a materialist) was also concerned about this problem. The question becomes: is Hitchens's approach and argumentation method the most successful way to argue against fideism and encourage people to live the examined life? Isn't Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* a more powerful argument against theistic and fideism belief, and one that theists have yet to fully and successfully address? Is Hitchens himself doing this, or is he also a fideist (blindly accepting empirical naturalism)? I suspect that his arguments will convince those who already agree with him, and further alienate the fideists he wishes to instruct.

Tina Beattie offers a helpful study of the New Atheists. She points out that they are engaged in religious belief themselves because religious beliefs are those used to give meaning to one's experiences and empirical naturalists use these metaphysical beliefs to give meaning to their lives. Her attention to the need for meaning is perhaps the most useful critical tool in her book. She categorizes the New Atheists as fitting within the British-American philosophical tradition. This is because they use empirical argumentation to argue that God does not exist and

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therefore should not be an object of belief. Here, she offers her own position which is that such arguments are male dominated and marginalize the majority of religious believers who do not believe in God as a being that can be proven to exist through empirical argumentation. 'Christian theology has been hamstrung by its preoccupation with rationality, at the expense of other ways of speaking about God' (p. 165). This is because reason is not universal, but is instead culturally conditioned (p. 125). That is, what counts as rational depends on an historical and cultural setting, and this has been male dominated in an attempt to maintain privilege and power (p. 126). The solution is in moving beyond God as the name for a thing, and instead use of this term to refer to a shared experience that is best expressed through creativity and art (p. 175).

A focus on power structures, and taking power in the material world as the basic explanatory concept, is indicative of postmodernism. Unfortunately, this is a kind of *ad hominem* where focus is shifted from critical analysis of what is said, to who said it and why they said it. This is unfortunate because the *who* and *why* misdirect attention away from the truth and meaning of what is said. Power structures and motivations do not help in determining truth; presumably, a person who is not part of the dominant group can utter a false statement, and a powerful elite can utter a true statement. Furthermore, it is far from clear that power structures are basic, indeed they seem to assume beliefs and ideas which are in the realm of reason. Therefore, Beattie's analysis does not threaten the claim that reason is universal, or that there are rational structures of power that are necessary to help humans live the good life. Reason as the laws of thought is not cultural or conventional (as if '*a* is *a*', or 'not both *a* and *non-a*' is true for the Greeks but not the Chinese). The ability to use these laws to critically analyze assumptions behind power structures is universal, and is something both men and woman can do.

Beattie seems to be correct in arguing that the method of New Atheism is unhelpful in actually solving the problems of belief. However, her analysis of power structures and attempts to find sexual imagery behind belief gets in the way of her argument. Rather than thinking of descriptions of belief as based in imagery for sexual conquest and male dominance, it might be that sexual descriptions are signs for the reality which is thought and the world of ideas – taking the physical to be the basic reality and the mental to be symbolic assumes what must be proven.

But does art offer a solution? Does art communicate cognitive truths, propositions, such as 'the formerly unknown can be understood to be . . . ' If so, then won't these require support of some kind to avoid becoming another form of fideism? Competing artists will communicate contradictory propositions and need to argue in favor of one or the other. If instead art does not communicate propositions but instead

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invokes feelings, then it does not help in answering questions about what exists, questions which trouble even those who otherwise lead the unexamined life. These particularly arise in one's consciousness when a competing claim is made, which is what Hitchens does. While Hitchens may not convince a fideist, he will most likely provoke a response as an attempt to justify fideism. In saying that the debate needs to move beyond God as a *being* Beattie seems to concede that this belief is not that important, or is used to justify oppressive power structures. But this in itself is a belief about what exists, and needs to be justified. Art that will invoke a feeling will not provide this justification.

The crux of these books is that fideism cannot be maintained in the contemporary world. Fideism does result in violence because when pressed to its limits, it cannot offer a rational response. It does result in the censorship of free inquiry because it cannot support rational justification of its own beliefs. Furthermore, it comes in materialist as well as nonmaterialist forms. The problem is the unexamined life, rather than belief in something besides atoms in motion. A successful response would engage the presuppositions of materialism, and encourage the examined life.

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Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity II Biblical Interpretation in the Reformed Tradition, Wallace M. Alston, Jr. and Michael Welker (eds.), William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007 (ISBN 978-0-8028-0386-5), xi + 457 pp., pb $49.00

This collection of papers from a conference held at Stellenbosch, South Africa in 2001 sponsored by the Center of Theological Inquiry combines offerings from an eclectic array of theologians and biblical scholars representing most areas of the globe, all working under the title of *Reformed theology*. The diversity of the contributors alone provides more than enough value to justify the read. The fact that all of the papers are easily accessible to ministerial theologians and professional theologians alike provides another benefit. Indeed, the readability combines with the applicability of the unifying theme of the work, the 'intrinsic contextuality of theological work' (p. ix), to make this a substantial entry into the discussion of how culture and theology interrelate.

Though not presented as such, the individual contributions could be divided into two groups: those which provide descriptive (often historical) overviews of different tasks (e.g. 'Old Testament Studies from African Perspectives' by Hendrik Bosman and 'Calvin and Qoheleth Meet after a Hard Day's Night' by William P. Brown) and those which provide prescriptive elements for the theological tasks at hand (e.g. 'Tamar's Cry' by Denise M. Ackerman and 'Peacemaking and Humanitarian Intervention' by Iain Torrance), with a few papers falling into both categories. By categorizing the papers in this way, the reader can use this work to help develop a clear theological foundation – firmly grounded in the Reformed tradition – while maintaining and enriching a link to his or her own personal context as well as that of the Reformed church worldwide and the universal church in general. The fact that these papers can be categorized as such but are not begs the question as to the logic behind the collection's order. Unfortunately, the editors do not provide any insight into their reasoning, and the purpose of the order is not readily apparent.

The theme of this collection is one that has, until recently, been significantly overlooked in Reformed theology, and indeed in most strains of theological inquiry. With the increasingly global society and the interaction of cultures due to that globalization, the recognition of the inherent role played by culture within any theological system or task has rightly garnered increasing amounts of attention. That attention both necessitates and facilitates conferences such as the venue for these papers. Sadly, the increase in academic attention given to the issue of culture and context does not necessarily equate to an increase in

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application at an individual and/or local level. Thus, this collection serves to fill a void which remains surprisingly large.

The work is not without its problems. The varying levels of scholarship – which, at times, changes greatly from one paper to the next – sometimes detracts from the otherwise helpful content. This problem is highlighted all the more by the fact that the collection includes twenty-nine separate papers, thus providing for a great amount of variation in scholarship and removing any possibility of developing a coherent rhythm. Also, the reader would greatly benefit from some introduction of the contributors which would provide an insight into each author's personal context. This is a surprising omission given the collection's focus on the importance of context. Finally, some discussion of the understood definition of *Reformed theology*, given its role as one of the underlying and assumed contexts of all the papers, would be helpful for the average reader. Even those coming from an academic background often have different, even contextualized, understandings of that term, and a discussion and/or definition would help to clarify any misconceptions associated with the term.

The danger with any collection of conference papers is a lack of relevance to anyone who did not (or would not) attend the conference itself. Many times this danger is warranted as the value of any contribution would be minimal outside of the conference setting. This is surely not the case with this collection of papers as it provides a wealth of insight into the theological task as it is undertaken by colleagues in all areas of the world – historically and contemporaneously. For the reader who is normally immersed in the theology of the West, simply reading Brian K. Blount's essay entitled 'Reading Contextually as Reading Reformed' – which highlights the importance of context even within the revered works of the early Reformers – provides ample impetus to read the rest of the work. By reframing the Reformation in contextualized terms, Blount allows the reader to glimpse the interaction of biblical theology and culture even at a time when recognition of that interaction was limited at best. With that reframing, the willing reader is enabled to tie this discussion back to the Reformed tradition, and the skeptical reader is encouraged to accept the influence of culture as a necessary – even welcomed – aspect of theology. One could easily wish that this type of discussion appeared in the introduction which would help to catch the attention of the casual reader who might pick up the work and even read the first chapter (the editorial introduction) but fail to see any personal relevance. This would surely be a grievous error, as the work provides unique benefits to the reader – even those readers who would completely disagree with various readings and interpretations – as it opens a window to aspects of global theology that otherwise remain unknown, even unknowable, despite the globalized culture.

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Several other contributions deserve special attention. For instance, 'Tamar's Cry' by Denise M. Ackerman provides unique insight into a world far-removed from Western academia. Ackerman's context is a South Africa riddled with the HIV/AIDS pandemic which is only made worse by some extraordinary beliefs about gender, authority, and sexual and informational power. For Ackerman and her neighbors, the reading of the rape of Tamar provides a real connection to the biblical world. The interpretation of that biblical pericope, then, holds obvious import.

Konrad Schmid's retelling of several intra- and interdenominational debates presents a view of a world much closer to the West, yet is equally enlightening. Schmid uses these debates, focused on two passages out of Genesis, to inquire about the historical role of denominational loyalties in exegetical endeavors. Within those two examples, Schmid shows – albeit without in-depth study – that denominational ties did not seem to color the interpretations. Rather, the determining (or correlated) factor appeared to be the distinction of 'liberal' and 'positive' theologians regardless of denomination. These examples certainly beg for further inquiry both regarding the effects of denominational ties on a person's exegesis and/or the determination of other contextualizations which play significant roles in that process. At the very least, this paper raises some important questions regarding influence on theology and raises awareness of some of the previously unacknowledged influences.

The rest of the collection varies greatly from the three papers discussed in detail. However, each adds its own unique flavor to the work as a whole. While some papers will surely prove more beneficial than others, indeed some may even be nearly disregarded, the collection as a whole proves to be valuable both as a tool for reflecting on the influence of one's own context in the exegetical process and as a connecting point to the influences affecting the church universal.

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Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics, Richard A. Burridge, Eerdmans, 2007 (ISBN 978-0-8028-4458-3), xxi + 489 pp., hb $35.00

Richard Burridge, noted for his work on the genre of the Gospels, has set his sights on the issue regarding how to approach ethics 'biblically'.

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While some New Testament ethicists have focused more on the logic of ethics, and others on the relationship between the Bible and modern practical issues in moral discernment, Burridge attempts to do both by advocating a unique approach to the subject.

From a theoretical perspective, Burridge is particularly unsatisfied with how 'New Testament ethics' is done, especially taking concern with what passages and books are explored and where the emphasis lies. Specifically, Burridge finds it a major methodological failure that almost all explorations of this topic do not begin with Jesus (and here he is particularly concerned with Richard Hays's pattern of beginning with and relying too heavily on Paul's letters [see Hays's *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, Harper, SanFrancisco, 1996]). Though Burridge is not just interested in beginning with Jesus because it is chronologically appropriate, his archaeological illustration is foundational to his approach. He observes that scholars like W. Meeks and F. Matera take an approach to NT ethics which is like the archaeologist who begins with the most recent stratum and then works down to what is earlier. Such a view, in Burridge's opinion, puts too much priority on the developments of moral thought on the basis of Jesus' life and ministry. Instead, using the same analogy, Burridge argues that 'when the archaeological report is written up, it will often begin by describing the bottom layer first: what is crucial is why this site was settled in the first place, or the reasons why there is anything at all' (p. 21).

This focus on Jesus, for Burridge, is just the beginning of how to approach NT ethics rightly. A second major step in his ethical model is being attentive to the genre of the Gospels. Since none of the books of the NT are written specifically to teach a systematic view of ethics, the interpreter must consider the genre of the document and understand its moral dimensions accordingly. For Burridge, the Gospels, as a genre which shares many 'generic features [with] ancient biographies', are meant to encourage the reader to imitate the main character. A third step taken in his argumentation is that, in ancient biographies, it was expected that the reader would imitate *both* the subject's teachings *and* his actual deeds. What Burridge finds problematic in previous research on NT ethics is an almost exclusive interest in the moral teachings in the Gospels. To study only this aspect, he argues, is to misunderstand or ignore the natural ways biographies were meant to be interpreted.

The way that Burridge proceeds through his argument begins with the ethics of Jesus using higher critical methods of determining what Jesus did and said (pp. 33–80). Then, he turns to Paul and considers whether or not the great apostolic theologian follows closely the ethics of Jesus (pp. 81–154). Third, he handles the Gospels in chronological order (beginning with Mark) to see how their redactional interests divulge their understanding of the ethics of Jesus (pp. 155–346). What Burridge comes to conclude is that Jesus (as well as the NT writers)

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holds to a 'rigorous teaching' when it comes to ethics, but practices 'open acceptance' (p. 76). This 'deeds' approach is also referred to from the standpoint of encouraging an 'inclusive community' where 'good and bad are allowed to live alongside each other until the judgement' (pp. 220–1). There is an eschatological dimension to this tension between teaching and deeds, exclusive demands and inclusive practice, in that the gospel is a proclamation of the kingdom and obedience to God's will involves responding to this call. Burridge explains: 'While it may be a call to perfection eventually in the kingdom of heaven, the realities of life must allow for a generous acceptance of others who are also engaged in following Jesus along the way . . . ' (p. 283).

As Burridge is not just interested in theory, he always has in mind a particular test-case – the problem of apartheid and how the Bible was used both to justify it and to oppose it. This issue is particularly important to Burridge as he himself spent much time in South Africa in the 1990s and studied the Truth and Reconciliation process closely (especially through the aid of Archbishop Desmond Tutu). It is easy to see how this offers an important 'thought-experiment', as Burridge puts it, for dealing with how the New Testament is used in ethical reasoning. Here, obviously, Burridge sees the relevance of questioning some scholars' use of the NT to justify 'forced segregation' (see p. 399).

Overall, this is a bold work, thoroughly researched, well-written, and academically stimulating. Burridge has taken his work on the genre of the Gospels, and his interest in modern ethics and hermeneutics, and has developed an approach to the ethics of the NT in a way that seriously challenges previous standard positions. Burridge is at his best, I think, when he handles the ethical material in the Gospels, offering numerous insights into the particular moral interests of each Evangelist. Also, his hermeneutical discussions in the introduction and conclusion are invaluable and warrant much attention from all NT scholars.

A few points of concern did arise as I progressed through this tome. On a structural level, I wonder if Burridge was trying to do too much by including Paul in this work. Given that a main plank in the construction of his argument is the genre of the *Gospels*, he seems to try too hard to find narrative features in Paul and draw him into this issue. Second, given that Burridge wishes to begin with Jesus (through the eyes of the Evangelists) and also to study the redactional interest of each writer, there seems to be quite a bit of overlap in the material covered. This can add up to many redundancies. Finally, at times it is unclear how Burridge uses the words 'inclusive', 'mixed', and 'acceptance'. When it comes to social status, birth place, or ethnicity, certainly his case is easily tenable (for both the issue of apartheid and the deeds+words approach in the NT). But, when it comes to Paul's concern with homosexuality, for example, I think Burridge may be deviating from his Gospels-genre pattern of inclusivity by arguing that the apostle's ostensible hostile

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attitude toward it was possibly only inherited from Jewish tradition and, if such an issue were a real concern in his churches, he would have had a more 'inclusive' attitude. Such a conclusion is a *non sequitur* from the line of evidence Burridge has provided.

In the end, though, his deed-and-words approach is beneficial and the reliance on the Gospels genre yields much when it comes to a balanced and comprehensive view of moral action and reasoning according to the NT. His work is carried out thoughtfully, especially in the Gospels, and with deep sensitivity to a number of ethical issues that plague the church and society. This book will prove to be an important reference for ongoing dialogue in biblical research regarding the theology, hermeneutics, and practice of NT ethics.

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Barth, Eberhard Busch, Abingdon, 2008 (ISBN 978-0-687-49246-6), viii + 95 pp., pb $12.00

This volume is, though diminutive in stature, a veritable treasure-trove of Barth scholarship. Authored by Eberhard Busch – Professor Emeritus for systematic theology at Georg-August-Universität in Göttingen, Germany, as well as Barth's last research assistant and first biographer – it provides a compact yet richly insightful introduction to Karl Barth's life and work. Indeed, Busch makes it a point to treat the unity of Barth's biography and scholarship. His introduction begins by recollecting a conversation between Barth and the editors of *Der Spiegel*, wherein Barth described himself as 'God's Cheerful Partisan' (p. vii). Throughout this volume, Busch never loses sight of to whom or what Barth was responding, in this way paying tribute to Barth's theology as one which is and remains 'in constant movement and transformation' (p. viii).

The first two chapters deal with the stages of Barth's life leading up to the *Church Dogmatics* period. An important phrase for Barth from the period in question serves to focus each chapter, and it is illumined as Busch weaves in aspects of Barth's biography. For instance, the first chapter is organized around the phrase, 'God is God', and Busch explicates this with reference to Barth's years as assistant pastor in Geneva, those spent as 'the red pastor' (p. 3) in Safenwil, *Der Römerbrief*, and the dialectical theology movement. Chapter 2 is concerned with Barth's insistence on 'The One Word of God', treating his involvement with the

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Confessing Church in the 1930s and his consequent drafting of the 1934 Theological Declaration of Barmen. It is here that we are first introduced to a strand of Barth's thought to which Busch will repeatedly return, namely, the way in which Barth conceives of human persons as active in their relationship to God. Here, Busch explains, 'our passivity is not in accord with [God's] grace, but our active response is' (p. 9). In the next chapter he will write about how Barth's theology, especially after *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 'looks to the cooperation of the free God and the free human person' (p. 17).

Chapter 3 provides an introduction to the *Church Dogmatics* as well as a winsome account of Barth's irenicism, concluding with a number of anecdotes about Barth's interactions with Roman Catholics – Pope Paul VI and Joseph Ratzinger – as well as about his 1962 trip to the Unites States and his experiencing a stroke that left him temporarily mute. It is in the lengthy, nine-part Chapter 4, however, that we find Busch's treatment of the *Church Dogmatics*. The same procedure is followed here such that these subchapters are organized around key concepts, which often correspond to Barth's varying preoccupations in each of *CD*'s part-volumes. Another instance of the theme noted earlier arises in the fifth subchapter in Busch's discussion of how Barth understands the relation between God's covenant grace and God's covenant law: 'The commandment demands that a person be the one God has made him to be, namely, his partner. To be, then, a partner is given to him and, at the same time, thereby commanded of him. God brings himself in relation to man and God brings man into correspondence to himself' (p. 54).

Busch says of Barth in the *Church Dogmatics* that, 'At every point . . . [he] tries to keep the whole of the Christian faith before the reader's eyes, always speaking about the whole with specific concreteness' (p. 16) – the same could be said of Busch's treatment of Barth in this volume. While specialists in the field may regret the dearth of engagement with the field's secondary literature in relation to various interpretative questions, specialist and novice alike will appreciate the way in which Busch has lucidly consolidated such a vast terrain. 'Questions for Reflection' are included at the end of each chapter and subchapter, further enhancing the volume's usefulness as a teaching and learning tool for interested laypeople and beginning theology students. Busch has, without a doubt, done the world of Barth scholarship a considerable service in providing such an excellent introduction.

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Back to Darwin: A Richer Account of Evolution, John B. Cobb, Jr. (ed.), William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008 (ISBN 978-0-8028-4837-6), xiv + 434 pp., pb $36.00

The unstated but carefully enforced rule in writing about Darwinism for respectable publications is the following: you can poke as many holes into Darwin's theory as you want, as long as you don't make a gap wide enough for someone to drive intelligent design through it. A corollary follows. The more holes you poke, the more you must distance yourself from the intelligent design movement. Even showing sympathy for that movement could bring the wrath of the self-appointed boundary police (those who patrol the border between science and religion) down on your head. This is really unfortunate, because the current debates about Darwinism focus on the origin of human intelligence as well as the perplexing persistence of design in both the language of biologists and the evolutionary process itself. This book, which is at the cutting edge of this debate, is nonetheless a good example of this rule and its corollary in action.

On its face, process philosophy seems to have much in common with Darwinism. Both posit a dynamic account of nature and a subsequent ethics of interconnectedness. In reality, however, few philosophical schools have more at stake in rejecting Darwinism in order to insure their own survival. Process metaphysics posits some form of intelligence (what process terms 'subjectivity') throughout all the layers of nature, and it sees goal-directed activity in even the most micro of events. If evolution is a random staggering through unshaped biological space, then philosophy cannot explicate its underlying patterns as a coherent and rational process. A process, as opposed to a stumble, has a purpose that is the philosopher's job to conceptualize. Purposeless evolution puts process philosophy out of business.

Though I studied Whitehead and Hartshorne extensively in college and graduate school, I have neglected them ever since, in part because I thought process theology tended to mimic the analytic methods and nomenclature of the scientific worldview it was trying to critique. Process philosophy tries too hard to specify God's action in the world, I thought, and ended up substituting a strangely scientific sounding metaphysics for a deeply satisfying religious mystery. I now see that process philosophy's ambition to extend rational principles to the natural world in contrast to Darwinism's attempt to eliminate purpose in nature is a real strength, and I am very grateful to this book for giving me back my early passion for process thought.

Process philosophers and theologians have battled Darwinism before, but this is now the book to read to get the whole overview of what should become a real war. Darwinism has always been metaphysically weak, if not confused, and process thought has always been the

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most metaphysically robust and confident of modern philosophical systems. It was only a matter of time, then, that Whitehead and Darwin would go at it, and the result is a truly exciting intellectual engagement. Unlike most collections of essays, this book is not an exercise in 'parallel play'. There is real engagement among the authors and an impressive development of issues and arguments. That coherence is a product of the 2004 conference in Claremont, California, where this volume originated, but it is also a tribute to the work of the editor, John Cobb. He contributes two essays and prefaces for each of the four sections. Cobb keeps the discussion focused, especially by how he frames the contributions of Francisco Ayala, a Professor of Biology at the University of California. Ayala is the one contributor who sees no need to revise the staples of Darwinism. He thus stands out in this book, but Cobb handles his work appreciatively but firmly.

A book of this nature would be impossible to summarize were it not for Cobb's editorial labors. At times, Cobb speaks as if the problems of Darwinism are purely rhetorical, due to a bit of well-meaning exaggeration on the part of Darwin's defenders. 'The problems highlighted in this book', he writes in the preface, 'are certain assumptions and overstatements in the post-Darwin development of evolutionary theory' (p. viii). What Cobb calls neo-Darwinism, by which he means the synthesis of Darwin's original theory with modern genetics, is typically expressed, he argues, in 'tight and extreme formulations' (p. ix). Given the criticisms launched by most of the authors, this is gentle and polite language. Most of the contributors are working toward a reintegration of science and religion that would radically alter the Darwinian worldview by gutting its core assumption about the lack of purpose in nature. The consensus in these essays, with the exception of Ayala, is that Darwinism is beholden to a mechanistic metaphysics that cannot do justice to the way evolution really works. The result is a challenge not just to the metaphysical backing of Darwinism but also to 'much empirical evidence' (p. ix) that is neglected by Darwinism's extreme formulations.

All of these essays deserve careful attention, but due to space limitations I want to highlight the ones written by Jeffrey Schloss and David Ray Griffin. Jeffrey Schloss, Distinguished Professor of Biology at Westmont College, demonstrates how Darwinism has not only contributed to discussions of natural evil but also has employed this discussion in ways that are fundamental to its rejection of teleology. Darwinists harp on 'useless traits, clumsy design, or suboptimal function as a scientific argument against special design' (p. 113). Waste, destruction, and the superabundance of death are used against the doctrine of creation, with the assertion that 'surely we don't want to blame God for this carnage'. Schloss points out that the criteria intelligent design theorists use to infer design involves irreducibility, not optimality. Moreover, for the believer, with evolution 'not only do we end up with defective products, but in

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addition the very causal process appears deeply morally objectionable' (p. 115). Darwinism is committed to an exegesis of natural evil that is inherently theological and yet philosophically and scientifically incoherent. As Schloss points out, if natural evil is a warranted argument against God, then 'natural beneficence becomes an argument against neo-Darwinism, which cannot brook altruism' (p. 115).

In his second contribution to this volume, Schloss takes on the thorny topic of providence. He asks two questions: first, whether the empirical evidence actually supports claims to adirectionality, and second, whether the mechanisms posited by Darwinism provide an adequate causal explanation. He expertly surveys the problem of determining what directionality is and how alleged trends like complexity might even be measured. He then looks at size, energy expenditure, and life history trends (parental investment, for example) to argue that evolution shows evidence of 'contingency constrained by necessity [which] is what produces telos' (p. 348). He concludes that the cosmos is not empty but rather ambiguous, which frames religion in terms of hope rather than calculated certainties.

David Ray Griffin, emeritus Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Claremont School of Theology, returns to earth after writing several books debunking 9/11 to produce two essays that are as grounded as they are insightful and provocative (in a good way!). In the first, he draws out the religious implications of Darwinism, elaborating on a list that includes general scientific doctrines, metaphysical doctrines unique to Darwinism, derivative scientific doctrines, scientific doctrines unique to Darwinism, and moral and metaphysical implications. For readers of this brilliant theologian who might have wondered if he had lost his way in conspiracy theories about the 'true' cause of 9/11, these essays represent not only sound but also essential readings in the relationship of creation and evolution. He ends this chapter with a remarkably clear, balanced, and helpful reflection on the role of evolution in public schools. There is no conspiracy theory about either atheist biologists or right-wing religious fanatics, but there are some warnings about why evolution is harder to teach properly than one might have thought.

In his second essay, Griffin argues for the superiority of process thought to both Darwinian reductionism and intelligent design. Whitehead, he argues, can account for the emergence of novelty in evolution without appeals to the supernatural. This might be, but then Whiteheadians cause their own problems by appealing to a panexperientialism that is metaphysically plausible but a hard sell to most scientists and even most theologians. In this essay Griffin works through a subtle variety of forms of materialism and other metaphysical assumptions to demonstrate how process thought can provide a much need modification of Darwinian gradualism. This criticism of gradualism links Griffin's work with intelligent design theorist Michael Behe, and

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Griffin is brave enough to admit that. He is sensitive, however, to being targeted with guilt by association.

There are many other fine essays here. A. Y. Gunter looks at alternatives to ultra-Darwinism, Dorion Sagan uses thermodynamics to bridge Darwinism and process philosophy, Ian Barbour brings his exemplary wisdom and perspective to the problem of contingency and teleology, Philip Clayton continues to demonstrate why he is the outstanding thinker of emergence today, and perhaps most importantly of all, John Cobb uses Whitehead to show how organisms themselves are agents of evolutionary change, something that hyper-Darwinism is loathe to admit. These thinkers find agency, purpose, and meaning everywhere they look in nature, and most of all, they find the old boundaries that 'protected' science from religion to be at best obsolete and at worst an impediment to empirical research. It is time to stop beating up on intelligent design and admit that we have entered a new phase in exploring Darwinism's many limits.

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On Religious Liberty: Selections from the Works Of Roger Williams, James Calvin Davis (ed.), The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2008 (ISBN 9780674026858), 288 pp., pb $19.95

Professor Davis has produced a truly useful book both for the senior scholar and for the student. This collection of the significant writings of Roger Williams related to his development of ideas on the topic of religious liberty is most welcome. And as this is the first extensive collection Of Williams's work in nearly forty years, it is doubly welcome.

Davis has provided a thoughtful introductory essay which goes far in orienting the student new to this period with a sense of the issues as well as providing significant insights into the corpus of Williams's work. Because of the range of material provided, it is possible to not only appreciate but as well evaluate the claims which Davis makes for Williams. He has included not just the well-known *The Bloody Tenet of Persecution for Cause of Conscience*, but also *Christenings Make Not Christians*, *The Bloody Tenet Yet More Bloody, The Hireling Ministry None of Christ's*, and several other essays as well those letters in which Williams addresses this topic.

In addition to his lively introductory essay, Davis has prefaced each selection with a brief explanation of the context of its writing as well as

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a suggestion as to how a particular piece may fit into the arc of Williams's thought regarding religious liberty. The notes for each selection are particularly helpful for a fuller understanding of the particular circumstances in which Williams was writing the piece. Davis freely admits that Williams could sometimes wander from the topic at hand and thus has been required to edit certain pieces. However, for the most part, he has chosen to limit his editing to that which he takes to be required and to let this remarkable man speak for himself.

In the introductory essay, Davis makes several claims for the importance of a re-examination of Williams's writing regarding the need for civil society to support religious liberty. Most notably Davis is concerned that the theological underpinnings of Williams's writing be recognized. He suggests that this aspect has been ill-served by the catchy but fundamentally erroneous saying that Thomas Jefferson 'was trying to protect the state from the church while [Williams] was only interested in protecting the church from the state'. Instead, Davis asserts that 'Williams argued against religious compulsion as a requirement of the good society on the grounds that religious uniformity did not ensure social stability and peace'. Williams claimed that all human beings were endowed by God with a basic capacity for morality and often cited his experiences with Native peoples to support his assertions. While Williams deeply deplored the wrongheadedness of non-Christians regarding the intention of God for his creation, his plan for salvation through his son Jesus, he refused to deny them the rights of a civil society because of this 'misunderstanding'. It was his opinion that more harm would be done by trying to enforce conformity in matters of conscience than could be done by those who understanding of the requirements of God were at odds with 'true' Christians.

Davis directs the reader to a careful consideration of the ways in which Williams's 'theological understanding of the workings of conscience' formed the basis for his writing on the religious necessity for freedom of religion. As with many seventeenth century Puritans, and following in the Calvinist tradition regarding the 'moral faculty', Williams viewed the conscience as an 'internal moral compass' which gave each individual an intuitive sense of divine law. Williams claims that 'this conscience is found in all mankind, more or less, in Jews, Turks, Papists, Protestants, [and] Pagans'. While Williams did admit that the conscience could make mistakes, in contrast to many of his contemporaries – most notably, John Cotton – he attributed these errors to a misunderstanding of the appropriate moral or religious principle. Indeed, Williams claimed:

> The straining of men's consciences by civil power is so far from making men faithful to God or man that it is the ready way to render a man false to both. My ground is this: civil and corporal punishment do usually

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> cause men to play the hypocrite, and dissemble in their religion, to turn and return with the tide, as all experience in the nations of the world does testifying now . . . This binding and re-binding of conscience, contrary or without its own persuasion, so weakens defiles it that it (as all other faculties) loses its strength, and the very nature of a common honest conscience.

Davis also makes it clear to the reader that Williams had no easy task in trying to balance his theological understanding of freedom of religion with the administrative tasks he undertook for the fledgling colony of Rhode Island. While Williams often loathed the actions – as well as the theology – of the Quakers who flocked to the openness of the civil environment he helped to create in Rhode Island, but he did not retreat from his deeply held belief in freedom. He spent the length of his long service to the colony attempting to locate and articulate the point for a reasonable balance between the competing interests of freedom of religious thought and action on the one side and the need for civic harmony and virtue on the other. Williams was under no illusions as to the difficulty of the task. He also knew as a result of his personal experiences the very great importance of achieving a healthy and workable equilibrium between these goals.

As Davis suggests, the issues with which Williams and his contemporaries struggled seem to have a special resonance with those of the twenty-first century. The theological vocabulary which Williams employed may suggest a vocabulary and rich tradition which modern persons of faith might fruitfully use in considering the challenges of finding a contemporary version of a workable equilibrium between these worthy goals.

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The Soteriology of Leo the Great, Bernard Green, Oxford University Press, 2008 (ISBN 978-0-1995-3495-1), ix + 272 pp., hb £65.00

Bernard Green has produced a ground-breaking account of the Christological and soteriological teaching of Leo the Great (pope from 440 to 461, and most famous for his 'Tome', which was the decisive document at the Council of Chalcedon in 451).

Green devotes two excellent chapters to the historical background of Leo's theology, the first dealing with Rome and the papacy in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, the second showing how, as a minister

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of the church in Rome in the 420s and 430s, Leo honed his theological skills against the background of the Pelagian and Nestorian controversies, developing along the way a flawed understanding of Nestorius as an adoptionist which would pose problems later on. In this regard Green's discussion of Leo's reception of Ambrose, Augustine, Cassian, and Cyril is especially interesting.

In his third chapter, entitled 'Salvation and Civic Christianity', Green argues persuasively that, after the Origenist crisis of 399, 'it was not the conversion of the masses but monasticism that set the agenda for theological dispute' (p. 63), and notes that the protagonists in the Pelagian, Nestorian, and Eutychian controversies were all monastic figures. Leo, however, was a new kind of bishop who sought a soteriology which had less to do with illumination or divinization (both very much monastic concerns) and more to do with offering salvation to 'ordinary citizens' who were saved 'by participating in the liturgical cycle of the church and by taking home into daily life the patterns of behavior that Christ in the liturgy demanded of them' (p. 61). Leo, Green contends, 'offered a view of the church where Christ had won salvation for all by accepting human nature but where people had to accept that salvation by following the annual cycle of the church's commemoration of the saving events of his life and conforming themselves to the patterns that his life laid down' (p. 93). Green's insight that Leo's Christology and soteriology are shaped by this 'civic Christianity' is central to his narrative of Leo's theological development, and represents a major contribution to our understanding of Leo.

Drawing on the dating of the sermons provided by A. Chavasse in his critical edition, Green argues convincingly that the best way to read Leo is not to focus on a single sermon or on a single group of sermons on a particular fast or feast, but to look at a particular cycle of sermons – for example, the cycle of sermons from 440 to 441 – encompassing all the feasts and fasts on which Leo preached that year. By analyzing annual cycles of sermons rather than then series of sermons on a particular theme, Green shows how Leo's theology develops across an annual cycle with relation to each of the feasts and fasts which provide the foundation for his civic Christianity, and at the same time highlights the way in which his Christological and soteriological understanding evolves from cycle to cycle. Often this evolution takes place in response to unfolding events. For example, the appearance of Manichaeism in Rome led Leo to develop the Christological and soteriological content of the 441–443 cycles in the direction of a new emphasis on the humanity and suffering of Christ in the 443–444 cycle, and this in turn led him to explore the mysteries of the Ascension and Transfiguration in the light of his deepened understanding.

Green observes that 'Leo's Tome is much read but little understood' (p. 188). He argues that 'In a number of ways, it was atypical of the

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emphases of his theology and it was precisely where Leo was at his least characteristic that he was criticized at Chalcedon and later'. Leo directed the Tome (written in 451) as much against Nestorius as against Eutyches, with the result that it represented 'a major attempt to offer a new settlement of the Christological disputes of the previous twenty years, effectively replacing the Formula of Reunion which Eutyches had challenged'. Holding to his earlier understanding of Nestorius as an adoptionist who denied Christ's humanity just as Eutyches denied his divinity, 'Leo produced a statement that asserted the duality of the natures'. In fact, the critics of Nestorius in the East regarded his failure as lying not in denying the divine nature in Christ but in 'an inability to define the unity of the two natures'. The Tome did not properly address this, and in emphasizing the two natures without adequately defining the principle of unity, Leo appeared to many in the East to be replicating the errors of Nestorius.

Green regards Letter 124 written to the Monks of Palestine in 453 as 'far more successful in combining an account of the oneness of Christ with the duality of the natures'. Letter 124 'was more representative of Leo's thinking', and 'has a claim to be his best work and to be a far more significant contribution to the Christological disputes than his Tome'. Green also demonstrates the way in which the sermon cycle from 452 to 453 reflects Leo's concern both to defend the Tome and to address the legitimate concerns of groups such as the Palestinian monks. An analysis of these sermons shows Leo finally arriving at a true understanding of Nestorius, and developing a coherent Christology of the *una persona* as the principle of unity of the two natures.

Written primarily for historians of the church, of doctrine, and of Late Antiquity, *The Soteriology of Leo the Great* is a major achievement, and is essential reading for anyone seeking a good understanding of the fifth century debates concerning Christology and soteriology and their historical background.

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Beyond the God Delusion: How Radical Theology Harmonizes Science & Religion, Richard Grigg, Fortress Press, 2008 (ISBN 978-0-8006-6272-1), 150 pp., $16.00

The field of theology and science keeps growing at a good pace as new essays, books, and papers are being published, and the market still

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absorbs all these novelties. In other words, the subdiscipline is alive and attracts interest beyond the voices deeming it a failure. These voices proceed from the extremes: those who dismiss theology in the name of an ever stronger science, or those who claim that true faith does not need any validation or – let alone – engagement with science.

The abundance of new literature in the field of theology and science calls for each contribution to be placed within the existing frame where the different positions are relatively easy to recognize and establish. In my opinion, after the standard typology of Barbour a second parameter should be considered: one describing a spectrum between more naturalistic positions and more transcendent ones. At one extreme of this span should be placed those reducing to the minimal expression the reach of a transcendent or supernatural realm, and so leaning toward reductionism. At the opposite extreme will be those who try to keep the maximal possible levels of transcendence, leaning toward dualism. Obviously, the first party has an easier time when trying to link theology and science; perhaps the only problem is whether the first term may still be designated as a 'theology', at least in its etymological sense.

This new book by Grigg belongs clearly to the first group, perhaps to the most 'naturalistic' among them. It is not a new position, but it is nevertheless interesting to trace how the author makes his case, and how the interaction between science and this naturalistic theology can become fruitful for both parties.

The book is well-structured, synthetic, and schematic. The first part aims to dismantle the many preceding attempts to reconcile science with 'traditional theism'. One after another the proposals built in the last twenty years trying to approach the new science to some actualized forms of theism fall inexorably. The arguments of Polkinghorne, Murphy, and Haught, among others, collapse against the wall of hard science and the principle of conservation of mass and energy, which prevents any kind of 'externality' in the cosmic system, and excludes divine action. Neither quantum mechanics nor information theory can stand before the strict requirements of natural science, as being able to keep all the variables under check, and leaving no loose ends.

After this closure, some openness arrives at the hands of 'radical theology'. However, the pleading for this theology has – as a first step – to clear the ground of some ambiguities often attributed to its supporters. The second chapter tries to wash away this bad image that links radical theology to New Age ideas, Postmodernism, and Eco-theology. The author attempts at the same time to answer the hard question whether this theology has become a kind of 'capitulation' of faith to the requirements of scientific reason. Grigg tries to justify the possibility of such a theological enterprise, even if it is detached from traditional theism.

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His position becomes much clearer in the next chapters, as he seeks to build this new theology so as to be more akin to science. The third chapter looks for allies in Sallie McFague, Mary Daly, Gordon Kaufman, and Ursula Goodenough. The result of these dialogues points to a form of pantheism or a kind of religion identified with the 'last human concerns'. A sentence seems revealing of the program: '. . . the universe revealed to us by modern science is a fully legitimate candidate for our ultimate source of orientation in life' (p. 68). Somehow, Grigg declares that science is not an antagonist of religion, or a very external and detached realm of knowledge, but our best ally in recovering a spiritual sense by its providing a 'cosmocentric turn'. In this way, religion becomes a 'free enactment' of an attuned relationship with the cosmos.

The proposed program is pursued through an analysis of the unity of the universe. Spirituality becomes a way to harmonize and integrate the whole of reality, assigning an ultimate meaning, a kind of 'unifying instance'. In all this speculative manoeuvring the worst part is taken by the personal, conscious, and powerful Being, who was the protagonist of traditional theism. In that Being's place, the new image of universe provided by science seems a more reliable idea to focus our spiritual attention. Chapter five shows indeed how science contributes to give a sense of deepness and wholeness to reality, enabling a kind of new spiritual insight. In this way, science orients the spiritual quest as it promotes 'an attitude of *participatory understanding*' (p. 91) helping to upgrade our knowledge and awareness and nourishing a sense of connectedness with the universe. It is interesting that in these pages, science becomes no longer an instance of 'disenchantment', as the old Weberian view had contended, but rather of re-enchantment, obviously in a different mood. The ultimate sense of unity of ourselves with all the cosmos, provided by 'theories of everything', should help processes of self-transcendence. There are some Heideggerian echoes in the author's pleading for 'Being' as Unitarian instance, and for 'awareness' as the human answer.

Chapter 6 shows what radical theology can do for science: first, offer ethical vision; second, provide an ultimate framework; and third, cope better than traditional theologies with the challenges that will emerge from 'conscious machines' and 'complex personal identities'.

The concluding chapter makes a final appeal for this theology, as being more fitted to the contemporary scientific landscape, and at the same time still providing nourishment for those who are spiritually hungry. The last lines amount to a bet for this model among other available possibilities.

The book builds a good case for the naturalist position in the spectrum described at the outset. The question is whether – from a rather pragmatic point of view – it will be more fitted than other attempts to bring scientific and theological reasoning together. Not everybody will

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share its dismissal of traditional theism, and not all will be happy with the new scientific pantheism taking its place. From an empirical point of view, it is rather dubious that such a proposal could reach the minimal number of adherents, able to constitute a kind of 'church'. Indeed, rather a form of 'wishful thinking' is detectable in the attempt to render science an instrument of re-enchantment. Some of the proposed paths have been already been trodden by Heidegger and others, with ambiguous results.

Probably this position should be considered just an option coexisting with other possible ways to manage the inevitable tension between science and theology. In fact, the too-closed universe of science described in the first chapter is not shared by many scientists. At the end, the issue becomes rather metaphysical and entails an inescapable choice between this book's standpoint and that of an open universe, which renders possible the perception and real experience of transcendence.

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Medieval Jewish Philosophical Writings, Charles Manekin (ed.), Cambridge University Press, 2007 (ISBN 978-0-521-54951-6), xli + 256 pp., pb $29.99

This collection of eight excerpts from classic texts is a fine representation of the core questions that occupied the minds of Jewish philosophers in the Middle Ages: divine omnipotence, law, free will, knowledge, predestination, and a host of other topics directly bearing on Jewish faith and morals. The selections, spanning from Saadia Gaon (882–942) to Joseph Albo (1380–1444), are arranged chronologically and notably include the first published English translation of the Falaquera abridgement of Gabirol's *Source of Life*. The significance of these texts is all the more evident when we consider that, unlike the Greeks and Christians, Jewish philosophy assumed written form only in the Middle Ages. As Manekin notes, it is a wonder that these ideas were committed to writing at all given the Talmudic antipathy toward 'Greek wisdom'.

The book opens with a key passage from *The Book of the Beliefs and Convictions* by Saadia Gaon's, dean of the academy in Sura and influenced by 'Kalām'. Kalām, meaning 'speech' or 'discourse', was a moderate school of rationalist philosophy that took shape in the eighth

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century. It acknowledged the need to support theological doctrine with rational argumentation, but stopped short of holding that such arguments were absolutely necessary for one to have authentic faith. Saadia's underlying presumption is that ethical principles and imperatives are indeed discoverable, provided we learn to think clearly and rationally. Reason and revelation mutually reinforce each another such that any contradiction between them is only apparent. Thus, there is no intrinsic danger in using philosophy for theological purposes. Saadia even suggests that revelation is needed only because of the immense mental effort required to uncover moral truths.

Solomon ibn Gabirol's *The Source of Life*, an impressive specimen of the neoplatonism that ran rampant in northern Africa in the late ninth century, is familiar to Latinists as the highly influential *Fons Vitae.* This work traces the soul's journey from sensible being through simple substances to knowledge of First Substance. Gabirol makes two unique claims: all created existence, even simple substances, consists of matter and form, and the various composites of matter and form are always united with universal matter and universal form. This leads Gabirol to propose that matter is moved to receive form out of a love and desire for the source of form: that is, the divine will.

The enduring importance of Moses Maimonides's *The Guide of the Perplexed* is well attested to by its inclusion in many, if not most, introductions to medieval philosophy. The excerpt provided here draws attention to Maimonides's evolving conception of creation *ex nihilo.* Originally holding a position similar to al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), Maimonides ended up treading a path between these Muslim Aristotelians and the dogmatic theologians of Kalām.

The tide of Aristotelianism continued to swell into the next millennium. Students in southern France and northern Spain devoured Ibn Rushd's (Avveroës) commentaries on Aristotle, Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*, and of course al-Ghazālī's *Opinions of the Philosophers.* This reader includes a section of Isaac Albalag's only surviving work, *The Emendation of the 'Opinions'*, in which he tries to correct the latter's 'middle way' between philosophy and popular belief by bringing him into line with Avicennian determinism. Al-Ghazālī taught that God knows future events not because they are strictly determined, but because he understands the hierarchy of causes by which they are determined. Conversely, Albalag argues that God is not an 'omniscient predictor', but rather knows things insofar as they exist in his essence in some more perfect way.

Moses of Narbonne (Narboni), who wrote *The Treatise on Choice* around 1361, is not persuaded by the arguments of Albalag and others for a distinction between 'causal determinism' and sheer fatalism. Narboni emphasizes how God knows things neither as particulars, for that would require sense experience, nor as universals, for they are

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abstracted from sense particulars. God thinks all existing things simply by thinking himself.

This excerpt is followed by a sample taken from the most diverse Jewish philosopher, Rabbi Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides), who lived from 1288 to 1344. Though often labeled an Avveroist, Gersonides actually criticized practically every one of Ibn Rushd's doctrines. The selected passage of *The Wars of the Lord* – a work which took him twelve years to complete – demonstrates that for Gersonides, cosmology is the ultimate science because heavenly bodies and their movers are the most noble creatures of the universe. Insofar as the incorporeal intellects, the movers of the spheres, emanate from God, they capture something of the universal order that exists within the mind of God, and are perfectly coordinated by the Agent Intellect. For this reason, Gersonides, unlike Maimonides, does not believe in an unbridgeable disproportion between God and creatures, such that for him essential predication is indeed possible.

The last two chapters of the book present selections from Hasdai Crescas's (c. 1340–1412) *The Light of the Lord* and Joseph Albo's (c. 1380–1444) *Book of Principles,* through which we are given a taste of the conservative reaction occurring in the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries against the unbridled Aristotelianism of Provence and Spain. Recent scholarship has focused on the unmistakable parallels between Jewish and Christian philosophers of this period, who both elevated will over intellect, faith over reason, and a voluntaristic over deterministic conception of divine omnipotence.

In accord with the aims of the *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy*, this book will prove to be a valuable resource for students and teachers alike. The translations are rendered with extreme care and precision without sacrificing readability. A study of the texts as a whole reveals that Jewish philosophers were particularly concerned about the implications of philosophy for their faith, but were not afraid to wrestle with highly speculative questions of motion, eternity, the existence and knowledge of God, free will, and determinism. All of the represented authors were keenly aware of the difficulties in describing the relation of God to the world and the hierarchical ordering of the cosmos. Thus, the impeccable and engaging logic employed by these thinkers is of more than historical interest; it could very well be the means to introduce young, bright minds to the burning questions about God and our place in the universe.

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On the Ego and on God: Further Cartesian Questions, Jean-Luc Marion, translated by Christina H. Gschwandtner, Fordham University Press, 2008 (ISBN 978-0-8232-2755-6), xxx + 277 pp., hb $85.00, pb $30.00

No figure so predominates over the intellectual landscape of modernity as Renée Descartes, whose metaphysics and epistemology shaped the debates and advances of Enlightenment philosophy. Descartes may also be and often is blamed for modernity's failings: for its solipsism, reductionism, rationalism, and every other malady of the modern intellect. Descartes' work is both seminal and controversial and, at the beginning of his latest offering, noted French philosopher and theologian Jean-Luc Marion beautifully encapsulates Descartes' unique importance and difficulty for (post)modern thinkers: 'One must recognize in Descartes not only one of the rare founding moments of genius in the entire history of metaphysics, but also one of the privileged locations of the exercise, today and tomorrow, of philosophy as such, whatever form it may take' (pp. xxix–xxx).

Marion has chosen to engage Descartes on precisely the most salient and debatable points: God and the self. Indeed, Marion has dedicated much of his career to studying Descartes and this latest offering marks his fifth book on Cartesian thought. It follows *Descarte's Grey Ontology*, *Descartes' White Theology*, *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism*, and a collection of papers entitled *Cartesian Questions*. *On the Ego and on God: Further Cartesian Questions* is a second collection of papers from 1985 to 1996, portions of which assume familiarity with Marion's four prior books. This expectation, coupled with the book's dense and often subtle arguments, points to an intended audience with a high degree of ambient philosophical knowledge as well as familiarity with Descartes and Marion.

That being said, *On the Ego and on God* remains accessible and fascinating for other, more casual readers. Marion writes clearly and concisely and Christina Gschwandtner's translation is eminently readable, with a minimum of jargon. Gschwandtner has also filled out Marion's citations for clarity and used English translations for all quotations with original languages bracketed wherever helpful.

The first essay is emblematic of Marion's engagement with Descartes, and its argument is worth some attention. Marion effectively launches an assault on the 'canonical interpretation' of the Cartesian self through Descartes' famous dictum '*ego cogito ergo sum*'. This interpretation (valid for the *cogito*) claims that the ego is proved by a tautology which leads to a 'scission' and a 'closure' whereby the *ego* as basis of experience is excluded from among the objects of experience (pp. 3–4). Marion states 'Our hypothesis will be the following: while the formula privileged by the canonical interpretation leads necessarily to solipsism, the second brings out an originary otherness of the ego' (p. 12). This 'second'

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formulation, appearing only once, runs '*ego existo, ego sum*'. Marion examines its context in incredible detail to conclude that 'Existence does not follow from a syllogism, from an intuition, from an autonomous performance . . . but from my being acted on . . . by an other [*sic*] than me' (p. 17). That is, Marion posits that Descartes' 'hyperbolic doubt', which assumes a deceiver or a persuader, has created 'an originarily dialogical space', a relationship between the *ego* and 'an other . . . of whom it knows only this: that the other assaults it and so addresses it' (p. 18). In a few pages Marion all but demolishes the grounds of the usual critique of Descartes, offering instead an hypothesis of the *ego* in relationship. Marion's reading is subtle, thorough, and profound; his ability to scan the history of interpretation is remarkable.

Chapter 2 is an historical survey with Marion contending that Descartes wrote the *Meditations on First Philosophy* as part of ongoing debates with contemporaries. Chapter 3, on the Cartesian principle that whatever is 'clearly and distinctly presented' to the *ego* is true, returns to a more thoroughly philosophical subject, with Marion discerning in the ego both epistemological and metaphysical principles. The fourth chapter actually concerns Pascal. Marion argues that Pascal recognized more types of evidence but never departed from a principle of evidence analogous to Descartes'. Marion asks in Chapter 5 why Descartes marginalizes 'substance' from its position in Medieval thought, contextualizing the issue through a lengthy reading of Francisco Suárez, to demonstrate the radical metaphysical change Descartes effects.

The second section, ostensibly about God, usually regards metaphysics. Chapter 6 defends Descartes' poetic knowledge and sensibility, which he deployed to help prove that the 'eternal turths' are created by God. The theme of the 'eternal truths' is of prime metaphysical importance for Marion, and Chapter 7 elaborates reception (and rejection) of Descartes' ideas by his successors. Descartes contended that 'eternal truths' – mathematical, physical, logical truths – are created by God. For Marion, this contention opens 'the unconditioned distance of the infinite' (p. 137) which in turn opens Cartesian metaphysics and safeguards divine transcendence. Marion traces reactions to this thesis in Spinoza, Malebranche, and Leibniz, each of whom gives eternal truths an 'uncreated' status conditioning God, thus subjecting even the divine to philosophical interrogation while 'closing' metaphysics (no more unique space for the infinite) for the sake of univocal knowledge. Marion argues that only Leibniz accomplishes this reversal, precisely because he counter-posits the rigorous application of 'sufficient reason' (p. 137) as metaphysical principle in place of divine will (as in Descartes).

Chapter 8, on the '*causa sui*', continues Marion's discussion of Cartesian metaphysics. He argues that the *causa sui* represents a development in Cartesian thought in service of an *a priori* proof for God's existence. Marion argues that Descartes' is the first such proof, while all

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others were taken, *a posteriori*, from natural evidence. Marion concludes with the evocative suggestion that medieval thinkers could be exonerated of the Heideggerian charge of 'onto-theology' (p. 160), which could have radical ramifications for the postmodern retrospection on Western theological traditions.

Two criticisms are necessary. First, the book is somewhat unfocused. In part, this irregularity arises from the variable subject matter and simple fact that it is an edited collection. But there is also a deeper discontinuity: Marion has not attempted to relate arguments among chapters. In Chapter 3 Marion argues only from the *cogito* and so takes no account of Chapter 1, where he has so brilliantly questioned its 'canonical' status. The same occurs regarding 'sufficient reason': first presented as a Leibnizian principle countering Cartesian metaphysics in Chapter 7, but then in Chapter 8 as Descartes' own. Arguments made in one place are ignored in others, and one wonders if these essays contribute to a coherent reading, or are symptoms of contradictory interpretations.

Second, there is Marion's critical distance. In Chapter 1, although his argument is masterful, it rests on privileging a formulation used only once in the whole Cartesian corpus. Yet, in Chapter 7, Marion criticizes Spinoza, Malebranche, and Leibniz for privileging a unique formulation of a thematic Cartesian concept (p. 125). The reason for this minor inconsistency, one suspects, lies with Marion's own philosophical and theological commitments. His mention of an 'onto-theological . . . idolatrous interpretation of God' (p. 162), for example, betrays the fact that his own ideas and concerns are operative in his reading of Descartes. Consequently, it is sometimes difficult to know where Descartes ends and Marion begins, and a greater explanation of methodology or even acknowledgment of subjectivity would have been helpful.

Nevertheless, this book is excellent reading for those who know Descartes and for the many (like me) who think they do. It undermines our preconceptions, our 'canonical interpretations', not only of Descartes but of Pascal, Leibniz, and the foundations of modernity. If we are, as children of modernity, also children of Descartes, Marion has ably shown that, as so often happens, we have not really known our father. He has, in questioning the reigning orthodoxy, brilliantly demonstrated Descartes' enduring value and unexplored possibilities for us as (post)moderns.

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The Roman Self in Late Antiquity: Prudentius and the Poetics of the Soul, Marc Mastrangelo, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008 (ISBN 978-0-8018-8722-2), viii + 259 pp., hb $65.00

In recent years, systematic and historical theologians have entered into merger discussions over a shared interest in the plain reading of scripture. The hope is that common ground can be found in the relationship between doctrinal development and common sense (or narrative) strategies of reading the Bible. Proposals in this area often focus on the fourth century as the key to understanding the emergence of a theological culture that both licensed and limited doctrinal debate on the basis of a reliable hermeneutical consensus. This is all well and good, but how different would the historiography of the fourth century look if Prudentius were given his due? This period was so important for the development of doctrine it is easy to overlook an equally important cultural achievement – Prudentius' location of Christian writing in the tradition of Vergil, which made possible the achievement of Dante.

Augustine gets blamed for a lot of bad things these days, so we might as well throw one more complaint at him by laying the neglect of Prudentius at his feet. In studies of the protracted negotiation among the church Fathers over the extent to which the Christian faith should appropriate pagan culture, Augustine's prose always trumps (and for systematic as well as many historical theologians, overshadows) Prudentius' poetry. Prudentius' more optimistic and assimilative view of the doctrine of providence, for example, was surely as influential in its own way as Augustine's – and is surely just as relevant today – yet *Contra Symmachum* is rarely read as a complement (let alone an alternative) to *City of God*. Moreover, just as Prudentius was more constructive about a providential reading of Roman history than Augustine, he was also more eager to bring the Bible into the mainstream of pagan literary appreciation. Thus, the *Psychomachia*, with its allegorical temple imagery that straddles mystical interpretations of the Old Testament and Plato's political insight into integrating the soul into the life of the city, might profitably be read in conjunction with Book 4 of Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, which recommends the practice of a subdued rhetorical style based on biblical, rather than pagan, models. These comparisons, however, are rarely made, because Prudentius is held captive by classical scholars, who are trained to appreciate his literary style but have little interest in setting him in a theological context.

Marc Mastrangelo, an Associate Professor of Classical Studies at Dickinson College, fits this profile. He shares his passion for Prudentius in an accessible and informative way in this fine book, even if he sometimes gets carried away by his penchant for trendy literary

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theory and speculative sociological categories. If Mastrangelo has a weakness, it is in dabbling in postmodern talk about the poetic construction of personal identity. Fortunately, metaphysically tinged assertions about how 'typological thinking points to a concept of self that has both relational and individual characteristics' (p. 12) are kept to a minimum, and he sticks more frequently with fairly straightforward and noncontroversial arguments about how Prudentius continues the epic tradition's attention to the intermingling of personal and collective identity: 'My claim is that through the manipulation of salvation history, Prudentius transforms Roman historical narratives and notions of Roman identity inherited from epic tradition into a discourse of the Roman Catholic self' (p. 42). That point is well documented by this book, but not the grander claim, that Prudentius' poetry reflects 'the most important contribution of early thought to Western intellectual history – namely, that the individual himself has the freedom and the will to act as he sees fit, for good or ill and independently of a preordained fate' (p. 12). One need not go so far in making Prudentius the anti-Augustine *par excellence* in order to draw attention to his work. Nor does one need to exhibit an anti-Catholic bias by identifying Prudentius' intellectual influence with an 'autonomy unprecedented in Greco-Roman thought' that periodically bursts 'forth in subsequent intellectual history' to counter 'Christianity's monarchic' tendencies (pp. 12–13). Prudentius is a more constructively civic thinker than Augustine, but he is hardly a forerunner of the Protestant Reformation.

Some scholars have portrayed Prudentius' appropriation of pagan literature as ambivalent, complex, and, at times, paradoxical, but Mastrangelo offers a robustly positive portrait of the relation of his work to, especially, Vergil. Like Vergil, Prudentius set himself the task of 'establishing a master narrative for his people' (p. 3). Prudentius thus gave poetry a crucial mission just at the time when the Roman literary tradition had reached a political impasse with the intellectual crisis precipitated by Christianity's triumph. He did this mainly through the use of typology, which allowed him to unify the events of salvation and Roman history. Nonetheless, and this is where Mastrangelo is at his best and truly a helpful guide, Prudentius was not a mere mouthpiece for Christian triumphalism. On the contrary, he was exceedingly sensitive to the limits of God's knowability. According to Mastrangelo, he used allegory in the service of an apophatic challenge to the reader to ascend to communion with God by seeing the deeper meaning of the pagan virtues. In the end, he united the concept of Roman citizenship and Christian salvation in a way that kept alive the Christian confidence in history and served to guide a distinctively Christian view of the inspirational potential of poetry.

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Most of this book focuses on the *Psychomachia*. Chapter 1 depicts Prudentius as an epic successor to Vergil. Prudentius internalized the battles and wanderings of the Trojans, and thus developed Vergil just as Vergil developed Homer. With Christianity, each soul plays out the epic, now spiritual, adventure that in the *Aeneid* is left to the representative function of Aeneas alone. In Chapter 2, Mastrangelo argues that Prudentius should be considered just as important as Eusebius for constructing a new Christian historiography. Poetry, by means of typology, can establish the ground rules for interpreting history as well or better than patristic commentaries. Chapter 3 makes the case that Prudentius' poetic originality can be found in his apophatic version of allegory. Chapter 4 demonstrates the continuities between Prudentius' allegory and Platonist and Epicurean traditions. Finally, the Epilogue returns to the relational effects of allegory as well as Mastrangelo's repeated and unsubstantiated claim that typology requires what amounts to a libertarian view of freedom (wherein the reader chooses between a series of typological options). The Epilogue also presents a rather thin theological comparison of the *Psychomachia* and Augustine's *Confessions* – after showing the central and similar role of memory in each, he remarks, laconically, 'The crucial difference in this comparison, though, lies in the fact that Prudentius is writing poetry and Augustine prose' (p. 170). Mastrangelo concludes the book with a plea for a better appreciation of Prudentius and is helpful in showing how Prudentius anticipates Erich Auerbach's distinction between *figura* and allegory by which Auerbach invested so much significance in Dante's figural realism. Dante's achievement, Mastrangelo argues, can only be understood fully in the light cast by Prudentius.

Throughout this book, Mastrangelo emphasizes the extent to which Prudentius valued poetry as a source of knowledge and a means to salvation, and how he deftly combined these two sets of reflections. Prudentius represents the triumph of sensuous sound over the inspecting intellect: 'While I write or speak of these things, how I wish to break free from the chains of my body to the place where my nimble tongue's last sound carries me!' (*Praefatio*, 43–5) And he can sound surprisingly contemporary: 'What we all are is story' (*Apoth.* 1017–18). Such sentiments place him in a theological tradition that anticipates Erasmus, who also envisioned poetry as a 'speech act parallel to the way Christians imagined the world to be created by the Word' (p. 5), and, in our own time, someone like David Tracy, whose ear for spiritual trajectories and theological patterns is second to none. As Mastrangelo writes, 'Prudentius, unlike any fourth- and fifth-century Christian poets, comes as close as possible to establishing programmatically that literary storytelling (*fabula*) is the primary unit for the expression of salvation history' (p. 47). Comments like that should lead more theologians to

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follow their classical studies colleagues in examining this much neglected poet.

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God is not a Story: Realism Revisited, Francesca Aran Murphy, Oxford University Press, 2007 (ISBN 978-0-19-921928-5), viii + 356 pp., hb £65.00

Murphy's thesis is that narrative theology replaces the content of theology with a particular method; rather than dealing with stories about God, it treats God as a story. In her introductory chapter Murphy identifies the culprits. First, the Story Barthians, such as Hans Frei, who have taken from Barth's work the conviction that the biblical narrative provides a complete structure of meaning for Christians. Second, the Grammatical Thomists, such as Herbert McCabe. Murphy traces this school of thought back to the 'transcendental Thomism' of Bernard Lonergan, with its focus on the need to 'understand what it is to understand' (p. 14). Finally, we have Robert Jenson, whom Murphy labels a Story Thomist. In the rest of the book Murphy carries out a critique of these authors, supported by analogies drawn from melodrama and the movies. Her criticism is sharpened by contrasting narrative theology's 'movieish' approach (p. 4), which fails to recognize that theology refers to real existent things and persons, with the theodrama of Hans Urs Von Balthasar.

In her second chapter, Murphy argues that Story Barthianism is foundationalist; it is preoccupied with 'knowing that it knows, or believing it believes' (p. 33). Here, Frei is criticized for taking up the Barthian idea that Jesus is the complete self-disclosure of God and citing the resurrection narrative as a supreme instance of this. In common with Frei: 'All of the narrative theologians affirm that the resurrection renders God's identity . . . A direct intuition of God's identity . . . thus becomes the *foundation* of Christian theology' (p. 63). This focus on God's identity fails to take account of Jesus as a real individual. Christ becomes more like a type-cast movie star: God playing Godself. Just as the only Humphrey Bogart we know is the hard-boiled misanthrope of his films, so Murphy believes that Story Barthians limit the presence of God to an identity rendered through an action in a narrative. The relationship between Christ and the church in this theology is less like 'an adventurous dialogue' between

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persons (p. 28) and more like that of an audience watching God the movie star.

Murphy's third chapter tackles the narrative theologians' resistance to viewing Thomas Aquinas' Five Ways as proofs of God's existence. Herbert McCabe comes under scrutiny for his reduction of Thomas' five questions to the single query: 'why is there something rather than nothing?' (p. 96). Murphy sees this as a manifestation of a 'movieish' tendency to focus on what will happen next. In fact, like the movie director, McCabe already knows what happens next; he knows that there *is* something rather than nothing. McCabe's form of questioning cannot lead us to God, since it is *plot*-driven rather than *character*-driven. Murphy unites this exploration of Grammatical Thomism with the themes of the previous chapter to show that the focus on God's identity, on '*how* he is known', is in accord with the Thomist's 'what next' approach (p. 129). Both fail to acknowledge God's being and focus instead on the method by which God may be identified.

According to Murphy's fourth chapter, a theology which does not begin with knowledge of God's existence will inevitably find itself trapped by one form of the problem of evil: that God is all-powerful and all good, yet there is evil in the world. The solution to this problem has to begin with God's existence: 'Once God is a given, the empirical existence of evil still forces us to *wrestle* with God; but the givenness of a transcendent God ensures that good and evil can't spill into one another' (p. 135). Murphy's analogies here are drawn from *Star Wars* and from Victorian melodrama. Both exemplify worlds within which Good and Evil must battle it out. They also indicate that it is impossible to deal convincingly with evil in these worlds. Evil is captivating; it generates such excitement and horror that even 'Poetic Justice' cannot produce a stable 'this-worldly' resolution (pp. 144–6). Murphy argues that the narrative theologians perpetuate the idea that Good and Evil inhabit the same space, and thereby reduce God's sending of his only Son to an unsatisfactory 'logical necessity' (p. 158).

Murphy's fifth chapter is about bodies. McCabe's Eucharistic theology is criticized for prioritizing language over particular existent bodies, including the body of Christ. There follows an exploration of Robert Jenson's struggle with God's relationship to time, where human mortality is understood as the defining marker of time. Jenson ends by implying that the narrative of Christ's death and resurrection are definitive of God. The death-resurrection denouement becomes necessary for the story to function as the means of identifying God. Murphy seeks to counter these deathly and disembodied theologies with an exploration of Von Balthasar's argument for the existence of God which operates through the 'Analogy of Natality'

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(p. 205), beginning with the reality of a child's relationship to its mother.

Finally, Murphy tackles narrative theologians' 'Descriptive Trintarianism' (p. 255). This approach sees God's Trinitarian identity as revealed in the biblical narrative through descriptions of God 'doing' three relationships. Murphy argues that this confuses the way in which we know God with the way God is; we know God as Trinity in the biblical narrative of relationships of three persons, therefore God is these relationships. Further, the persons of the Trinity are not distinguished as persons; they appear rather to be one God 'doing' God in three ways. The cinematic parallel here is God as a reel of film run off the projector to give an appearance of a temporal narrative. Murphy points instead to Von Balthasar's theology in which the Trinity are persons whose personhood is enriched by the loving relationship between them, which is their unity. Murphy concludes her work by further underlining the failure of the narrative theologians to pay sufficient attention to history, personhood, truth and love.

This work is a testament to Murphy's comprehensive scholarship. The breadth of knowledge demonstrated is impressive; the argument is often highly complex and Murphy is creative in her use of film and drama theory. However, it is precisely this breadth which will cause even the experienced academic reader to struggle with Murphy's work. If movie-goers willingly suspend their disbelief in their viewing (p. 105) so too readers of this book are called upon to accept unquestioningly allusions to theories which do not normally fall within the expertise of the academic theologian. We have to assume with Murphy, for instance, that 'Picture recognition is a transparent intellectual process' and therefore: 'Making Gospel reading analogous to looking at a work of visual art is to liken it to a process in which we immediately achieve a clear and distinct idea' (p. 37). The text is peppered with definitions of concepts (not least melodrama and the movie) which, in raising questions of their own, may detract from rather than bolster Murphy's theological claims. As to those claims, to fully engage with Murphy's densely constructed thesis would require a treatment of similar length to the book itself. Murphy's work is seriously challenging enough to generate such a response. Let us hope, however, that any reply to Murphy will go easier on the reader than she does in this provocative but occasionally intractable work.

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Beyond Liberation Theology: A Polemic, Ivan Petrella, SCM Press, 2008 (ISBN 978-0-334-04134-4), x + 176 pp., pb $29.99

Ivan Petrella, author of *The Future of Liberation Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2006) and a proponent of liberation theology's emphasis on historical projects, has written a new book in which he offers a reinterpretation of liberation theology for the next generation of liberation theologians. It is the third volume in the Reclaiming Liberation Theology series from SCM Press, and while his work is tightly researched and well-written, he might not have pushed liberation theology as hard as he could have. In an era of continuing human suffering, Petrella could have been more forceful in his indictment of wanton waste and conspicuous consumption. However, even with that criticism, this book is likely to be a solid contribution to the continuing literature on liberation theology.

Petrella begins the first chapter with several examples from significant theologians and philosophers (Barth, Bataille, Heidegger, Weber, and Foucalt), depicting the origin of knowledge, the mechanization of food, and, generally, human suffering. He concludes, 'These thinkers come from a context of affluence; the suffering they speak to is real and painful, yet rarely life threatening' (p. 8). Petrella then offers a contrapuntal image of suffering from Vita, 'a zone of social abandonment' in Southern Brazil. Vita 'carries the objectivization of human beings to the extreme' (p. 9) and Petrella uses it to illustrate the role of idolatry in the process of objectification, and he writes, 'The institutions that govern the global order are the incarnation of the idolatrous logic at Vita's root' (p. 10). He concludes the chapter that the suffering in the world functions as a social abandonment zone on a massive scale.

In Chapter 2, Petrella situates liberation theology in the United States, outlining the problems and possibilities of 'Poverty in the Midst of Plenty'. He begins with the two sides of Miami, one rich and one poor. These two sides provide him with a point of departure for an analysis of poverty measurements in the United States. He looks at geographical poverty (some states are poorer than others), racial poverty (e.g. African-Americans and Hispanic/Latino(as) make up a disproportionally high percentage of Americans living in poverty), and gender (women fare worse than men). Petrella concludes the chapter with the 'Primacy of Class', suggesting a class-based affirmative action might be more liberative than gender- or race-based affirmative action. However, he concludes with a practical and sobering note, 'Class-based affirmative action falls outside the realm of what is possible within U. S. politics' (p. 77).

The following chapter explores different failures within liberation theology. Petrella explores the role of perception in understanding poverty, and he insightfully draws on the misinforming role that the

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Mercator projection world maps have played in shaping many people's perception of the world because it suggests Greenland is similar in size to Africa (Africa is actually almost three times as large). The role of perception, or misperception, is central to the four criticisms he levies against contemporary liberation theologians. He argues that the first criticism, monochromatism, effects every brand of liberation theology because they too often limit 'the pool of resources they can draw upon to actually engage their tasks' (p. 85). His second criticism is amnesia, in which liberation theologians 'forget the problems they seek to tackle and the goals they want to pursue' (p. 93). Gigantism, Petrella's fourth criticism, means many liberation theologians view the problems of oppression as insurmountable and they 'see capitalism everywhere and as responsible for everything' (p. 104). His final critique, on liberation theologians' naïveté, is that even the most accomplished theologians can be susceptible to falling into the three previous critiques at the expense of a wider prospective. When this happens, Petrella believes a theologian can move 'from an incisive analysis of suffering to mere rhetoric' (p. 107). His analysis is critical but not personal, and the chapter highlights potential problems that anyone engaging with liberation discourse must guard against.

The final chapter tries to take the themes of the first three chapters and use the ideas in them to move beyond liberation theology. The primary method Petrella uses for moving beyond traditional liberation theology is comparison. He begins by comparing liberation theology and outrage, and in the section 'On Liberation Theology and the Two Thirds World', he compares liberation theology with contextual theologies, social sciences, and identity. Each comparison draws out the central theme of the chapter: all liberation theologies point out that 'theology has traditionally been done from a standpoint of privilege' (p. 134). He writes, 'Recovering the history of common struggles is the basis for envisioning a future where struggles for emancipation not only bring identities together, but forge new ones as well' (p. 146).

Petrella concludes his book with a 'Coda' and an Afterward. Coda is a musical term, meaning an independent passage that is introduced after the completion of the essential parts of a movement, so as to form a more definite and satisfactory conclusion. In the Coda, he looks ahead to the future of liberation theology and suggests the possible solution for liberation theologians might be to dissolve itself as an independent field and reform 'undercover as an economist or legal theorist and work from within to transform the discipline's presuppositions' (p. 148). His Coda does provide a definite ending and, perhaps, his most innovative suggestion. However, it does not provide a satisfactory explication of the new ideas. It is less conclusive than it is a point of departure for future research. In the Afterward, he looks briefly at the cover art, offering his interpretation of Karina and Marcelo Chechik's

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The Promised Land and Petrella suggests the ideas in this book respond to Dwight N. Hopkins' call for a new approach in his paper 'Theological Education in the New Global Reality' (p. 151).

Beyond Liberation Theology is definitely a must-read for anyone interested in the contemporary state of liberation theology, and it could serve as a useful textbook in a college or seminary course on the subject. Petrella avoids overly technical theological jargon and provides sources and more detailed explanations in his copious footnotes. I would recommend this book as a useful contribution to modern theology.

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Ratzinger's Faith. The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI, Tracey Rowland, Oxford University Press, 2008 (ISBN 978-019-9207-404), 214 pp., hb $24.95

Rowland's previous book, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition: After Vatican II* (2003) established Rowland as an astute, theologically rigorous critic of the easy assimilation to modernity found in the Roman Catholic Church. She explored the ways in which culture had been under-theoretized in the Council leading to the modernizing of theology and liturgy in a way that would drive it into extinction if it did not reclaim its unique character. And from whence this unique character? The answer is simple: shaping the world in the image of God; which meant from the Gospel, traditions of the church, and the Magisterium, and foremost for Rowland, through a Thomist understanding. That book allowed Rowland to show how varieties of Thomism had developed, and how certain robust strands might contribute to a revival of Christian Catholic culture. She drew heavily upon MacIntyre, writers from the *Communio* journal, mainly Balthasar and Ratzinger, and the Radical Orthodoxy circle. Like many Catholics who have been initially bred in that latter stable (Rowland's doctoral work) and Hemming and Hanvey come to mind, they seem to eventually move into a more firmly established Catholic trajectory. Rowland's present book continues that exploration, but this time through a passionate and intelligent exposition of the theology of Pope Benedict, drawing mainly from his writings prior to his pontificate. (There are two helpful appendices that mark the themes of his pontificate: the Subiaco Address, and the Regensburg Address. It is a shame that his two encyclicals were not included, as they are equally important

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although less media-engaging.) If Rowland was not so reliable, one might almost think that Ratzinger's theology is precisely a statement of her own concerns and reflect the arguments from her previous book. This might well be why Cardinal Pell, in his introduction, suggests she is on the way to becoming Australia's leading theologian (and he closes by particularly praising the fact that she is a young married woman). He could have added that her style is witty, learned, and very provocative.

There are seven chapters and an introduction. First, Rowland locates Ratzinger in his theological-cultural milieu, rightly tracing his major inspiration to the works of Augustine, Bonaventure, Newman, von Balthasar, Guardini, de Lubac and Piper (the last least demonstrated by her), among others. Aquinas is conspicuously missing from this list but Rowland's form of Thomism seems less reliant on the master, and deeply chastened by Augustine. She also usefully dwells on differences between John Paul II and Benedict, an issue that needs greater research, and shows Benedict's major difference to be in his concern for ecclesiology, liturgy, and revelation rather than human sexuality and dignity. The latter derive from the former in Benedict's view.

In Chapter 2, a key to prepare us for Ratzinger's major contribution, she turns to culture. She thoughtfully draws on Ratzinger's analysis of article 22 of *Gaudium et spes* as the interpretative key to the entire document. Christology is the prerequisite to anthropology, and thus to a proper understanding of culture, which contrary to the misreading of article 36, does not possess a total autonomy. Both Rowland and Ratzinger hold that it is this dislodging of culture and reason from faith that has precipitated the current stagnation of Catholicism. Thus, articles 15–17 which explicated human spirituality under the aspects of intellect, conscience, and freedom are analyzed as key to Benedict's first encyclical: *Deus Caritas Est*. These themes place him between the premoderns and the postmoderns and Rowland borrows Adam Webb's characterization of Ratzinger as a 'cosmopolitan anti-liberal', one who draws on the huge range of human culture to both show the impoverishment of human culture without Christ, and its truth, goodness, and beauty in Christ.

Tracey then treats Ratzinger's contribution to the debate on revelation, scripture, and tradition. She is excellent in tracing Ratzinger's role in the Council on these matters and his difference from Rahner, even though they coauthored a book on revelation and served together as theological advisors. What is not brought out clearly enough in this chapter is Ratzinger's growing reservations about the role of the historical-critical tradition in biblical interpretation and his concern to critically recover pre-modern exegetical forms of reading. Although he chaired the Pontifical Biblical Commission he seems to have been in the

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minority in this group's approach to the Bible. Rowland also minimizes Ratzinger's later writings that locate revelation and scripture as intrinsically related to liturgy, which nevertheless prefigure Rowland's excellent final chapter on the liturgy. This last chapter is the crown of the book in terms of interpreting Benedict's deep concerns with the liturgy. It will allow readers to understand Ratzinger's intelligent theological concerns with what to many seem simply outdated modes of liturgical worship. He is not simply 'conservative' in taste, but emphatic that beauty and transcendence mark liturgical action and like Balthasar, finds it difficult to find these aesthetic qualities in much that is modern. But here, he is also not unlike the renowned literary critic, George Steiner, who argues that modern culture is incapable of the transcendent, in part because it comes out of a secularized sensibility. Rowland is able to show that Ratzinger is able to take the debate into the sphere of cultural theory for theology is really irreducibly cultural when culture is open to the transcendent. Rowland notes that Ratzinger has 'stopped short of saying that his predecessor made a gross pastoral error in his attempted suppression of what is popularly called the Tridentine Mass' (p. 128).

The three intervening chapters are about morality, ecclesiology, and politics. If I have a criticism of Rowland's work, it is about her title and in the ordering of her chapters. There is an awkward individualism implied in 'Ratzinger's faith', simply because he is utterly concerned with the church's faith and the transmission of this. Further, it would be better to place liturgy, revelation, and ecclesiology at the beginning of the book, for only out of these do Ratzinger's moral and political vision emerge (as Rowland's herself acknowledges). These three chapters contain profound insights: the nature of the church explaining many of Ratzinger's concerns during his period as Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and demonstrating his love of internal plurality, symphonic and organic developments, but never if these contradict reason or genuine authentic tradition. The political chapter shows Benedict as a remarkably astute critic of secular modernism, like his predecessor, and also like his predecessor, with a strong faith in the role of reason to both defend Christianity as well as to develop modern political institutions to serve the human person in their full and proper dimensions. He is a missionary to Europe, the heartland of ancient Christianity that has lost its way, and his judgements on Islam are repeated by Rowland without really pursuing the question of their adequacy. Has that tradition really never grasped the importance of the relationship between faith and reason? In Ratzinger's actual speech, it would appear that he is criticizing voluntarism in both traditions, not in Islam alone.

Aidan Nichol's study of Ratzinger stands as the only important competitor. They are both of the highest intellectual quality, although

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Rowland's is aimed at a wider reading public and may be more successful in reaching them.

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Cosmology: From Alpha to Omega – The Creative Mutual Interaction of Theology and Science, Robert John Russell, Fortress, 2008 (ISBN 978-0-8006-6273-8), xi + 344 pp., $29.00

Robert John Russell is professor of theology and science at Graduate Theological Union, in Berkeley, California, and is the founding director of the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences. For Russell, this book represents the pinnacle of twenty-five years of research and scholarship regarding the relation of science and religion. He has sought over these years to construct a 'bridge' between the two disciplines, and this book is the fruit of his collective labors. The chapters of the book are arranged according to their theological focus, which arrangement parallels the standard layout in systematic theology textbooks. Thus, Chapters 1 through 3 deal with God and creation, whereas Chapters 4 through 6 deal with divine action in nature. Further, Chapters 7 and 8 treat moral and natural evil, respectively. Chapters 9 and 10 shift the focus upon the new creation at the eschaton.

Generally speaking, *at least* five themes can be discerned from Russell's writings that are contained herein. For example, Russell argues for the historicity of the *Big Bang*, and thus the finitude of time. Seen in this way, the universe is completely dependent upon God, irrespective of the time parameters that one may posit for its origination. Second, Russell argues for divine action to occur at the *quantum* level. He posits that quantum-based divine action would not rupture any laws of nature, since quantum theory states that quantum events are intrinsically indeterminate. Thus, Russell sees quantum divine action to be noninterventionist. He favors quantum-based divine action over and above competing theories that may entail God to work in chaotic systems, or in a top-down manner, as with the metaphorical picture of the world as the *body* of God.

The third main theme found within this text is that the *problem of evil* is not truly a problem at all, but merely an avenue of possibility-exploration instead. He argues that amoral entities cannot be judged by moral categories, and as such, 'natural evil' (consisting of the plentiful amounts of 'violence', e.g. in nature) is not really *evil* at all; it just *is* (i.e.

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it is normal). The fourth prevailing theme is that in the *resurrection of Christ*, humanity is given hope for God's radical new creation. One should note, especially in view of the prevailing thinking today, especially regarding the future of the world to be either a freeze or fry scenario, that in the resurrection of Jesus, there was both *continuity* and *discontinuity* in his post-resurrection body. This fact gives credence to the notion that our resurrection bodies – and the new creation – might hold a *semblance* of what we have known, but they will be radically different as well.

A fifth and final theme running throughout is a derivative of Process Theology, though Russell is not a full-fledged Process Theologian. He notes that science and theology should be a in a *creative mutual interaction*, which necessarily means that both sides of the 'equation' are altered. Science is seen to be a check, of sorts, upon theology in Russell's model. Moreover, Russell contends that theology can suggest creative questions, topics, or conceptions of nature that scientists might find helpful in their research quests. In sum, this volume by Russell provides the interested reader with foundational insights into the perpetually ongoing discussion between the disciplines of science and theology. Herein, one finds that Russell posits not only that the two dialogue with one another, but also that they *mutually interact* and form one another, which is a new perspective. I heartily recommend this title for graduate and postgraduate level students of philosophy, science, or religion.

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Radical Orthodoxy: A Critical Introduction, Steven Shakespeare, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2007 (ISBN 978-0-281-05837-2), x + 192 pp., pb £14.99

Shakespeare has sympathy for those who find Radical Orthodoxy's literature arcane. He is equally convinced that it is a theology with something to say. This book is an attempt to restate Radical Orthodoxy's (RO) message for the nonspecialist and to facilitate a critical examination of its themes. RO is based on the bold assumption that 'only by telling the Christian story can we rediscover our true end' (pp. 1–2). It is thus 'radical' in two ways. First, it appeals to the 'roots' (*radices*) of the Christian tradition in order to carry out a frontal attack against secularism. Second, it seeks to restate the Christian tradition using the language of postmodern philosophy so as to 'restore depth and worth

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to material, embodied life' (p. 36). This commitment to both the unicity and concreteness of Christianity guides RO in its attempt to overcome all forms of dualism: God and humanity, immanence and transcendence, presence and absence, spirit and body, faith and reason. The book opens with a general introduction followed by three chapters exploring RO's central themes (language, community, and desire), and ends with a chapter summarizing and responding to the critiques made against RO. Shakespeare draws from a range of authors associated with RO, though he naturally relies most heavily on its main protagonists: John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward.

Radical Orthodoxy seeks to diagnose the 'sickness' of postmodern culture and prescribe an effective medicine. Modernity's illness stems from the Enlightenment idea that the 'secular' is an autonomous 'given'. RO conversely proposes that there is no distinction, strictly speaking, between the 'natural' and the 'supernatural'. Human beings have concocted the idea of a 'natural' order so as to justify power and the pursuit of individual interest. Even conservative theologies, which uphold the 'primacy' of the Bible and the existence of 'eternal truths', cave into the modern mindset inasmuch as they neatly separate 'time and history' from the 'eternal and unchanging'. In the end, the only way to cure this dualism is to 'tell the Christian story' and abandon the attempt to lay down abstract preconditions to justify its truth. RO decries every 'quack medicine' proposed to cure secularism, including Karl Rahner's transcendentalism, liberation theology, feminist theology, and eco-theology. All of these wrongly assume that prior to the Enlightenment, 'Christians believed in a caricatured, Aunt Sally God – a horrible cosmic dictator, or distant Father' (p. 21). To the contrary, there is an inherent goodness to creation and an 'affinity' of the world to God which is expressed in the primordial harmony of the human family, or what John Milbank calls the 'ontological priority of peace over conflict' (p. 27).

This positive worldview is based on RO's penchant for the philosophy of participation, according to which 'we can only understand the being of the world in relation to God' (p. 22). Participation accepts the premise that God's being is different from our own, but it is firmly convinced of the dynamism of analogical language which inexorably leads us to participate in the very life of God. Despite appearances to the contrary, RO bases itself on a perfect harmony between faith and reason, though it asserts that the latter can be adequately directed to the truth only when illuminated by the former. The characteristic fideism of neo-orthodoxy fails to appreciate that it is Christian theology alone that renders reason truly reasonable. Misguided too is the idea of a 'Christian morality' since, strictly speaking, such a notion depends on the prior idea that there is some evil force 'out there', separate from God, which must be combated and overcome. RO never tires of repeating that all creation flows from the one and perfect God and is therefore inherently good.

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The first objection to be raised against such an optimistic view regards the necessity of the incarnation. If creation is inherently and perfectly good, why would God become incarnate? From what does man need to be saved? According to John Milbank, such questions are entirely misplaced. They assume that one can prove the theological necessity and/or historical fact of the incarnation, when it is actually the historical experience of being affected by and drawn to Christ that initially gives rise to the idea of the incarnation. Consequently, divine redemption, according to John Milbank, is not about God forgiving us, but rather 'his giving us the gift of the capacity for forgiveness' (p. 29). We receive this capacity in no other way than in the person of Jesus Christ, who not only teaches us about forgiveness, but, through his incarnation, death, and resurrection, makes it possible for men and women to share a spiritual experience of forgiveness.

A particular advantage of this book is that Shakespeare constantly poses questions to RO during the course of his analysis. The fact that he is a disciple of the school does not prevent him from probing its weaker points. He acknowledges that RO interprets classical theological sources in a new and controversial way. He confesses that there are tensions that arise from RO's unmitigated commitment to the totality of the Christian message and its simultaneous attempt to dialogue with 'the world'. He admits that the 'weight and urgency' of RO which were so evident in the early volumes of the *Radical Orthodoxy* series seem to have 'dissipated' (p. 37). He wrestles with the question of how a Christian worldview that is ultimately only accessible from the inside can be communicated to people on the outside.

From Shakespeare's point of view, there are ways of addressing these weaknesses in a way that benefits the long-term staying power of RO. First of all, he recalls that dialogue is not a tool, but rather an inevitable, fundamental part of our reality. 'Language always comes before me, and it is through signs that any identity I have is developed and secured' (p. 175). The sacraments, especially the Eucharist, stand at the center of this dialogue. Shakespeare is fond of Elizabeth Pickstock's principle that the words ' "this is my body" . . . are the only words which certainly have meaning, and lend this meaning to all other words' (p. 41). The radicalism of Jesus's statement at the Last Supper makes it possible for Christianity to 'out-narrate' the story of secularism since, as Milbank writes, 'Christianity offers a much better story' (p. 57). Shakespeare also exhorts RO never to lose sight of the 'community in compassion' which lies at the heart of the Christian narrative. Because the Trinity is essentially a giving and receiving of love, one could say that 'compassion' has its primacy locus in the inner-life of God himself. Finally, Shakespeare urges RO to temper its characteristically self-confident tone with its own conviction that 'all our knowing and speaking is contextual' (p. 179). RO's methodology

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should reflect the inescapable need to interpret the world at every epistemic level.

This book boasts a high level of readability from cover to cover, though the introduction and first chapter are more digestible that the other three. Shakespeare's clear, crisp prose would make this a fine introduction for an undergraduate course. Because Shakespeare neither gushes with praise for RO nor slashes it to threads, his presentation of it rightly respects the inherent tensions within it: tensions which 'can never be resolved' and therefore signal the 'coming of a strange God, an Other for our wondering' (p. 180).

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Justification and Participation in Christ: The Development of the Lutheran Doctrine of Justification from Luther to the Formula of Concord, Olli-Pekka Vainio, Brill, 2008 (ISBN 978-90-04-16526-7), ix + 256 pp., hb $129.00

Olli-Pekka Vaino's book on the history of the development of the Lutheran doctrine of justification is meticulously researched and well argued. The book is one of the very few book length works of the 'Finnish School' of Luther research in English. Tuomo Mannermaa, Vanio's mentor, began this school of interpretation from work emerging from Finland's Lutheran-Orthodox dialogues. The book builds and advances the Finnish school in a variety of ways. One example the long footnote (p. 12) about the use of the philosophical terminology of 'ontic' and 'ontology' in earlier works shows the continuing maturation of the Finnish school.

Vanio, like the rest of the Finnish school, argues that Christ's indwelling in the heart of the believer was an essential part of Luther's understanding of justification. Hence, justification was not 'forensically imputed'. On Vanio's reading Luther's concept of 'indwelling' resembles, but is not identical to the orthodox notion of 'theosis' a similarity forensic readings of Luther would not allow. Most of the early research of the Finnish school found this notion of indwelling in the 'Early Luther'. Leading the opponents of the reading to claim that Luther's mature position rejected such language. Vanio shows that the concept is also found in later works, a key finding since most Finnish scholarship relies on Luther's early works. This teaching on justification obscured in part by later streams of Lutheran theology

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(Melanchthon during the Reformation) and in later work on both the theological (Gerhard Ebeling in mid-twentieth century Germany). This book uses the locus of the 'indwelling Christ' to trace the development of the Lutheran doctrine of Justifications from Luther's day through the dogmatic pronouncement of later Lutheran theology, the last document in the *Book of Concord* the *Formula of Concord.*

The book begins by emphasizing Early Lutheranism's theological diversity. Theologians in the generation after Luther explained and expanded his teaching in a host of ways. Vainio stresses that Luther always maintained a certain humility about explaining how God justified believers, claiming that such action while they occurred were 'shrouded in darkness'. Luther rejected the Roman Catholic teaching that love was the 'form of faith' arguing that Christ himself was the form of faith. This notion is Aristotelian, but Vanio notes that it is based on an 'original' interpretation of Aristotle. This interpretation allows the believer to not only 'apprehend' knowledge about Christ but it allows Christ to become the form of the believer's faith. Thus, justification leads to a renewal of the believer as Christ's life takes hold in the believer. Justification does not lead to 'good works' in this theory as much as it does to participation in God's life through the presence of Christ in the believer. This enables the believer to participate in Christ's righteousness. This view of justification was held by Bugenhagen and Brenz, two other important reformers.

The next chapter explores how Melanchthon's *Loci Communes* changed the understanding of Justification. Vanio argues that for Melanchthon 'The connection with Christ is not ontological participation in Christ's nature but correct information (*notitia*) and correct relation to it, that is, trust (*fiducia*) God justifies the believer for the sake of this faith and trust. Faith does allow the believer to perform good works through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Hence, a believer has a primary relationship with the Holy Spirit. Vanio is right to note that this notion is different than that of the 'indwelling Christ'. The believer is called to trust in Christ and Christ's works but is changed through a relationship with the Holy Spirit, not Christ.

In response to Melanchthon's teaching, Andreas Osiander proposed another 'interpretation' of Luther. For Osiander, Christ himself, not Christ's works as related to his person dwelled in the believer's heart. This strong emphasis on the notion of Christ as God separate from his works making justification occur marginalized the forgiveness of sins, important to Luther, as an important part of justification.

Vanio then surveys the writings of Flacus Illyricus who believed that justification was a sequential process, but like Melanchthon, believed it was extrinsic. The preaching of the law made believers contrite, but they then came to faith through the Gospel's promises. Finally, they were justified by a donation of the Holy Spirit, leading to individual renewal.

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For Flacus, imputed righteousness is based on Christ's obedience to God, not the atonement. Hence, Christ's work and not his person save.

Chapter 6 sets out the doctrines of justification present in those who contributed to the development of the *Formula of Concord*. While the thinkers mentioned in this chapter are too numerous to survey in this review, Vanio shows how earlier debates shaped the continuing development of thinking on Justification.

Vanio argues that the *Formula of Concord* should be read not as an abstract systematic theology, but as a historical document designed to unify the diverse doctrinal factions within early Lutheranism. Understood as such the Formula does not present a complete 'statement' of Lutheran teaching despite the *Book of Concord* is authority contemporary Lutheranism. The final chapter sets out five helpful 'models' of justification which survey and carefully outline what Vanio has surveyed in earlier chapters. This final chapter brings a lot of clarity to the work and is a helpful guide to the work.

Vanio's carefully researched, well-argued, and insightful book makes an important contribution to understanding how early Lutheran debates shaped the *Formula of Concord*. His careful argument is a 'must-read' for Luther scholars and historical theologians alike. Because it deliberately sets out to advance of the 'Finnish' school of interpretation, one could question if the book ignores passages within authors that lend themselves to a forensic reading. However, there is no reason to assume that he has done so. Vanio recognizes 'forensic' notions of justification are present in the writings of Luther in his followers these do not, in his view, constitute the only understanding. Vanio's exploration of 'union with Christ' is also as it helps Lutherans find common theological ground with other tradition ecumenically useful.

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Who Gets to Narrate the World? Contending for the Christian Story in an Age of Rivals, Robert E. Webber, InterVarsity Press, 2008 (ISBN 978-0-8308-3481-5), 137 pp., pb $15.00

In this short, posthumously published work, Robert E. Webber raises an essential question, but assistance he might provide for introducing undergraduate readers to narrative theology is overshadowed by captivity to a national fixation with the destruction of two New York City skyscrapers in the early part of the century. Over seven chapters, he

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takes readers through the rise and decline of the dominant Christian narrative, addressing the internal threat of accommodation to consumer culture and the external threat of double-capitalized 'Radical Islam'. He utilizes the collaboratively produced *A Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future* to remind readers of the priority of the biblical narrative and challenge them to narrate the world 'Christianly'.

Webber shines best when articulating a cohesive account the ancient Christian narrative and autobiographically relating how his own views of Roman Catholicism were transformed as he developed relationships with devout Catholics and spent more time reading their great spiritual writings. His categories for making sense of how the Christian way of narrating the world contributed to Western culture in significant ways provides a good framework for those beginning to read authors treating the periods in more sophisticated ways. He is simultaneously blunt and eloquent in declaring that churches need to reject privatism and consumerism, admirably challenging the poverty of a modern approach to incarnation in which Christ steps briefly into history to save *souls* rather than *the world*. Another insightful passage praises the narrative turn for its concern with God as fellow subject within a shared story rather than a mere object of inquiry. Similarly deserving of note is the concise summary of the role of a 'chosen nation' narrative in the development of 'an American messianic consciousness'.

Such passages are marred, however, by reductionist caricatures of Islam drawn from critics and ex-Muslim converts. While Christians are excused from responsibility for actions of the United States, in several instances Webber appears to imply that all Muslims are complicit in any act of violence invoking the name of Allah. He discusses humanism and democracy as contenders against 'Radical Islam' but ignores mainstream Muslim practice and responses such as *A Common Word between Us and You*. The distorted conclusion that 'it is perfectly appropriate for Christians to support America's agenda to form democratic states within the context of totalitarian states' (p. 127) appears to parrot precisely the kind of American political ideology to which at least this contributor to *A Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future* understood the phrases following 'external threat' to refer. It is tragic that a book that places such a high priority on exploring the role of various narratives in the history of Christianity extends so little charity to Muslims and ignores the role of the military–industrial complex in valorizing war. The apparent implication that Muslims have little theology beyond an imperative to violence and that all non-Christian narratives may be reduced to a logic of works-righteousness belies the real potential of narrative discourse to address the salient questions of Muslim-Christian relations.

A more constructive approach might begin by asking *vis-a-vis* Marc Gopin, 'Who gets to narrate Islam?' It would explore the different ways of narrating the lives of Jesus and the prophets and compare strategies

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for appropriate imitation. It would postpone treatment of *the* story of God to discuss divergent Christian narrative*s* and examine various expressions of Islam through the eyes of devout Muslims to paint a vivid picture of the kind of ongoing discussion Alasdair MacIntyre means by 'tradition'. It might sample utopic and dystopic literature as a lens for imagining common futures. It might press further to give some account of Muslim attempts to combat consumerism and privatism – like women who wear the *hijab* in response to the hyper-sexualization of Western culture – or explore possibilities for shared social entrepreneurism. For Christians, no less than the world so variously narrated, such approaches are sorely needed.

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