

Book notes

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Gerald R. McDermott *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Pp. xii + 245. £35.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0195132742.

Professor McDermott, who has previously written on Edwards's social theology, turns in this work to another neglected aspect of the thought of the great colonial American philosopher-theologian. He presents considerable evidence concerning Edwards's knowledge of non-Christian religions, and demonstrates Edwards's intention of shaping what he knew into a response to deistic challenges to Christianity. The central point at issue was the 'scandal of particularity', the insistence that the world can only be properly understood through the particular story of the Jewish man, Jesus Christ. The thesis that the fight against Deism was central to Edwards's writing is perhaps more difficult to sustain than McDermott believes, as Deism was largely an attack on specifically Christian positions, and so any consideration or defence of such positions can be read as an anti-Deist apologetic. Equally, I am not sure that the news that Edwards shared the general eighteenth-century fascination with non-Christian religions will be as much of a surprise to scholars in the field as McDermott seems to suggest, although no-one has written on the subject before, to the best of my knowledge. Nonetheless, this is a useful addition to the literature on Edwards, highlighting and collating material on a neglected area of his writings, and helpfully setting it in the eighteenth-century intellectual context.

[S.R.H.]

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Timothy J. Gianotti *Al'Ghazali's Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul: Unveiling the Esoteric Psychology and Eschatology of the IHYA*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001) Pp. v + 205. £59.00 (Hbk). ISBN 9004120831.

Gianotti's book presents a balanced interpretation of the writings of al'Ghazali (d. 1111) that address the concepts of the soul and immortality. Concen-

trating on the philosopher's *Reviving Religious Knowledge* (*Ihya' 'ulum al-din*), the book pays close attention to the literary genre of that work and attempts to resolve its many ambiguities. Beginning with al'Ghazali's theory of 'multi-level', multi-genre writing (that is, his treatment of esoteric doctrines intended for philosophers), and working through his theological, philosophical, and mystical positions on the soul's true nature, Gianotti's study culminates in a sustained examination of al'Ghazali's mystical 'psycho-cosmology', where most of the philosopher's psychological thought is to be found. Meticulously researched, Gianotti's study manages to convey the distinctive nature of al'Ghazali's theory of the soul, and presents the reader with an appealing portrait of a neglected thinker. Given the fact that many of al-Ghazali's statements on the soul are not at first glance perspicuous or easy to interpret, it is helpful to have to hand an accessible commentary on this aspect of his work. Gianotti's book will be welcomed by students and scholars alike.

[M.W.F.S.]

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J. Samuel Preus *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority*.
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Pp. xv + 228. £37.50
(Hbk). ISBN 521 800137.

It is thought that Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670) is a watershed both in political theory and in the history of biblical exegesis. Furthermore, it is claimed that Spinoza championed freedom of thought, speech, and writing by discrediting the Bible as the standard for truth and a source of public law. Applying a new historical criticism, he showed that biblical teaching and law were irrelevant for a modern pluralistic state and its intellectual life. The purpose of Preus's book is to defend this view and to highlight Spinoza's putative achievement by reading the *Treatise* in the context of a literary conflict among his contemporaries about biblical interpretation, a conflict fraught with political implications. Attending to some neglected primary sources, Preus aims to present new evidence regarding Spinoza's rhetorical strategy and intent in the *Treatise*. While some of Preus's arguments invite further scrutiny (see in particular his one-sided use of several important sources and its insistence on a traditional view of Spinoza's intentions in writings the *Treatise*), his conclusions are poised and based on firm evidence. The book is well written and covers much interesting ground. It will repay further study.

[M.W.F.S.]