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REVIEWS

Paul Edwards. *Reincarnation: A Critical Examination*. Pp. 313. (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1996.)

In this hard-hitting book Paul Edwards dons the mantle of a warrior in the battle against what he considers to be a dangerous and often immoral irrationality, much of it encouraged by 'Eastern religions'. His adversaries are those who espouse reincarnation and related doctrines, such as karma. Typically Edwards directs his attacks at credulous non-philosophers who have embedded their beliefs in elaborate world-views, which they explain incautiously. Edwards takes advantage to inflict some heavy blows, often delivered with great bravado. As the chapters roll by, battle after battle is won, foe after foe vanquished. All good fun, no doubt, and one is tempted to accept it in that spirit. Many who share Edwards' point of view will find his critiques more than sufficient. However, since Edwards rarely considers ways in which the views under examination could be reformulated so as to avoid his objections, some may be left wondering how he would have fared had he done so.

Consider, for instance, Edwards' critique of astral-body theory, clearly one of his easier targets. 'On examination,' he says, 'the theory turns out to be just as hopelessly absurd as it seems at first sight to all sane people' (p. 110). However, Edwards never actually says what the theory is. Judging from his discussion, a core component of it is the claim that some people have (perhaps that everybody has) a nonphysical body that, except for its being nonphysical (and whatever else that difference may entail), is a duplicate of his or her physical body. Edwards mentions two sources of evidence for the theory: out-of-body experiences; and reports from third parties, which, if accepted, imply that someone who supposedly astral-body travelled was in two different places at the same time ('bilocations'). Edwards accepts that some people have had out-of-body experiences but denies that the most reasonable explanation of these experiences implies that these people had astral bodies. He takes a harder line against evidence for bilocations, denying not only what the evidence is said to show but also that it is as extensive as has been claimed. In addition, Edwards lists five objections to astral-body theory. First, in reports of apparent bilocations which speak to the issue of clothing, both the physical person and his or her astral body are always reported to

be clothed similarly. Second, people seem to remember the experiences had by their astral bodies even though their physical brains were not at the right locations (that is, where their astral bodies were) to record what their astral bodies experienced. Third, to secure synchronization between the physical person and his or her astral body we would have to postulate that for every act and movement of the physical person there is a corresponding act and movement of the astral body. Fourth, it is questionable whether the astral body is the person whose astral body it is and who is said to survive the death of his or her current physical body. Fifth, since the astral body is an exact duplicate of the regular body it must die along with the regular body.

For the sake of argument, I am going to suppose that I subscribe to some version of astral-body theory or other and that my reason for doing so is that I think I personally have astral-body travelled under circumstances that entitle me to believe in astral-body theory without relying on evidence for it provided by the reports of others (e.g., based on my own experience I think I have adequate evidence that apparently while astral-body travelling I acquired new information I could not have acquired normally and/or intervened in what was going on – possibilities Edwards does not consider). How much should I be bothered by Edwards' objections? In my opinion, not much.

Edwards' first three objections show, in effect, that if astral bodies exist, the world is very different from what people whose beliefs are based only on science and common sense suppose it to be. But since (I'm now imagining) I already accept this about the world and believe that I have sufficient evidence to back up my accepting it, evidence of a sort Edwards never addresses, there is no reason I can think of why I should regard Edwards' first three objections as problems for my view. The fourth objection, the identity objection, is genuinely interesting. However, it is not an objection that can be answered briefly (I have answered it in an article in *Religious Studies*, 28 (1992) 165–84). For his part, Edwards merely asserts this objection, at greatest length not in the chapter on astral-body theory but in a subsequent chapter on 'commonsense and scientific objections' to reincarnation (p. 237). In a footnote, Edwards (to his credit) admits that many contemporary personal identity theorists, including some of the most influential, might not agree with him about the seriousness of this objection. He says that 'it would lead too far' to consider whether their views 'could help a reincarnationist avoid the difficulties mentioned in the text' (p. 237n). Fair enough. One cannot consider everything. But since there is such a strong prima-facie case that some of their views indeed would help the reincarnationist avoid Edward's objections (in the article cited I explain how; for more on the underlying theory see my, *Self-Concern*, Cambridge University Press, 1997), surely, pending further investigation, a believer in astral-body theory would be entitled to suspend judgment about the seriousness of Edwards'

'identity objection'. The fifth objection, the death problem, is a non-starter. There are a whole family of astral-body theories, according to which astral bodies are not *exactly* like physical bodies but differ from them in that whereas physical bodies die astral bodies do not, to which this so-called objection is no objection at all.

There is a sixth objection, which Edwards does not mention in the chapter on astral-body theory but to which he devotes a separate chapter: the apparent dependence of consciousness on the brain. The key issue with respect to this genuinely interesting objection is whether it makes sense to regard the brain as an instrument of the mind, rather than as identical with the mind or as the mind's casually necessary substratum. To the philosopher McTaggert's claim that 'the fact that an abnormal state of the brain may affect our thought does not prove that the normal states of the brain are necessary for thought' Edwards replies, 'This is fatuous nonsense. If we are investigating the necessary conditions of our physiological or our mental states, a study of disturbances in the relevant function can teach us a great deal. This is true of digestion, respiration, and circulation; and it is equally true of consciousness. By discovering the brain cause of Alzheimer's we automatically discovered one of the necessary conditions for an undisturbed memory … a study of illness can disclose the necessary conditions for health' (pp. 287–8). But the issue is not whether we can learn anything from medical research – obviously we can – but what we can learn. Edwards asserts but does not show that we can learn that various brain functions are necessary for their corresponding mental functions and not just necessary for the normal bodily expression of these mental functions. But that is precisely the question at issue.

Perhaps, one may think, I have made things too easy for astral-body theorists. So, to make things easier for Edwards, suppose that while I do not have direct evidence of my own that some people have astral bodies I am a life-long student of the Dalai Lama, who does claim to have such direct evidence. Suppose, though, that I have what I take to be an enormous amount of indirect, inductive evidence that when the Dalai Lama subscribes to a theory, such as astral-body theory, he does so not lightly but, rather, only on the basis of personal experiences of his own which are such that were I to have similar experiences I would regard them as sufficient evidence for the theory in question. (Many Tibetan Buddhist monks probably feel they are in this evidential situation. Many who believe in reincarnation probably feel they are in an analogous evidential situation.) On such suppositions, would it be 'insane' of me (as Edwards implies) to accept a version of astral-body theory not on the basis of my direct personal evidence of what I take to be astral bodies but on the basis of this sort of indirect evidence of the theory's truth? Edwards does not directly consider such a question. So far as I can tell, nothing he says warrants his concluding that I would not be

rationally entitled under such circumstances to accept astral-body theory. So, once again, in my view, his claimed refutation falls short.

Whether or not Edwards critique of the views he considers is sufficient, he has surveyed many of the major arguments and sources of evidence for reincarnation and related doctrines, much of it in obscure places, and, thus, has made the task of people who want to think philosophically about reincarnation a great deal easier. He has provided clear, uncompromising arguments from a point of view that, while it may (or may not) be overly dismissive, is quite prevalent among contemporary philosophers, particularly in the analytic tradition. And, finally, because he writes so clearly and engagingly, and even partly because he tends sometimes to be so outrageously smug, many, such as myself, will find that his book is not only useful but also enjoyable.

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Bryan S. Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion*. Pp. xii + 293. (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996.) $19.95.

Has Eliade been grossly misunderstood? Can his critics be silenced? Is he still today invaluable for 'making sense of religion'? These are the concerns Bryan Rennie addresses in *Reconstructing Eliade*.

Rennie has a superb mastery of Eliade's vast writings. He shows exceptional insight into and understanding of one of the most complex scholars in the history of religion. Further, he has an extremely persuasive grasp of Eliade's critics. In this sense, Rennie raises Eliade scholarship to a new standard.

Eliade has perplexed scholars for almost half a century. Many regard his unique approach to uncovering the meaning of religion as unconventional and unsystematic. As a result not a few conclude that he imposes his own views – his own terms and concepts – upon the various traditions he analyses. Some dismiss his insights altogether.

Rennie, the apologist, sets out to defend ('reconstruct') Eliade. 'Deliberately seeking consistency rather than disclosing inconsistency' (4), he elucidates what Eliade says 'confusedly or opaquely'. He argues convincingly that critics largely misunderstand or fail to understand what he presents. Concerned with his potential abandonment under increasingly hostile criticism, Rennie presents Eliade as a scholar who, far from passe, is still relevant to uncovering the meaning of religion today. He sees in Eliade one able to throw continued light on the meaning of religion, even in the postmodern era.

In Part One ('The Implicit Meaning of Religion') Rennie uncovers

coherence in Eliade's thought. In each of the chapter themes – hierophany, sacred, dialectic, coincidentia oppositorum, *homo religiosus*, etc. – he finds the systematic thread woven through Eliade's writings that others find missing or wanting.

In Part Two ('Previous and Potential Criticism') Rennie meets Eliade's critics head on. In each major area of concern – relativism, retreat to commitment, political involvement, etc. – Rennie presents Eliade virtually unscathed. The chapter on his political involvements in his earlier years in Romania is a revealing case in point. Rennie convincingly shows that much of the criticism hurled at Eliade stands on rather shaky ground, due largely to a lack of critical thoroughness.

In Part Three ('Beyond Eliade') Rennie asserts the value of Eliade for 'making sense of religion' in the present. He feels Eliade's unique insight sheds helpful light on the sacred in the modern period. Eliade declares that modern humanity too is religious: 'modern secularized humanity still occupies a sacred dimension' (227). And no less with postmodern humanity. Rennie sees in Eliade postmodernist tendencies, and affinities with postmodern thinkers (238).

Reconstructing Eliade is a well written and researched defence of a prolific and preeminent scholar in the history of religion. It has shed new light on Eliade, but how much new sense does it in turn make of religion? Three reservations surface.

One, in places we bump up against limitations in Eliade's understanding of religion. Further insight regarding, for example, the 'independent ontological status of the sacred' and the 'intentional object of the believers devotion', is curtailed (bracketed?). Discussion, while helpful, reduces to the 'expressions of the sacred, never the sacred itself' (204): 'the sacred is not to be conceived independent of experience' (217). The meaning of religious beliefs is limited to the 'phenomena of the belief, not the ontological status of the belief' (207).

Two, is it possible that 'reducing the study of religion to the categories of the sacred and to meaning, in no way "reduces" its ontological significance' (224)? Rennie recognizes that Eliade make claims regarding the ontological status of the sacred. But, he asserts, if these concerns are 'held in abeyance as a problem for theology or the philosophy of religion, then these ontological claims which Eliade does undoubtedly make do not seem excessive' (201). Yet when a claim to truth regarding the sacred is made by theology, Rennie's Eliade argues for the 'relativity of truths' (247), and insists on 'the need to adopt a humanist approach' (259).

Hence Eliade's difficulty with exclusivism and fundamentalism. But does his stance not turn on itself? Is relativism not itself an exclusive claim, making exclusivism itself virtually unavoidable? Perhaps the exclusivism of different religious traditions is not something to be rejected as much as simply ac-

cepted. Who is able to rise above the various religious claims and simply declare (from the mountain top) that they are all relative? The historian of religion?

Rennie does point out that Eliade makes a helpful distinction between 'culturally conditioned and culturally determined' (130) affirmations. Yet Rennie asserts that the 'conclusion of any argument is a position of faith since no argument is the source of apodictic knowledge' (141). He recognizes that 'Eliade cannot finally escape being "reductionist" himself' (254). The meaning of religion is to be found in (reduced to?) the phenomena, and Eliade exhorts the scholar to seek for meanings 'even if they aren't there' (256).

Three, Rennie states that a 'religious tradition whose significance is seen to reside in historical events of the distant past will suffer a loss of credibility', and that 'restricting significance to the realm of the historical [is] to commit the historicist error of grounding faith in a presumption of historical factuality' (252). But do not some religions do this very thing, with Christianity a clear case in point? Does Christianity 'suffer a loss of credibility' when its theologians insist on the central significance of the historicity of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus? Ironic then, especially regarding the latter, are the words of the apostle Paul: 'if Christ's resurrection did not occur Christians are to be the most pitied' (I Cor. 15: 12–19).

Rennie succeeds in presenting tremendous insight into a scholar who is complex and seemingly unsystematic. He is also very helpful in silencing many of Eliade's most vocal critics. Rennie has succeeded in raising Eliade's scholarship to a new height. Certain reservations aside, this book is invaluable for those seeking to understand Eliade.

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L. E. Goodman. *God of Abraham*. Pp. 364 (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.)

One of the fundamental questions asked in philosophy since the dawn of its history concerns the relationship between God and the complex of values – whether and in what sense are these values contingent on, or related to, God. Goodman wishes to establish a thesis claiming that, in a monotheistic approach, God is the source of all values.

The basic question is: Is God the 'source of all values' in the sense that without God there would be no good and evil, or right and wrong? Even if this is the meaning ascribed to the term 'source', more than one understanding is still possible.[1] Goodman, however, completely overlooks the various

[1] On this issue, see Avi Sagi and Daniel Statman, *Religion and Morality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 19–38.

possibilities considered in the philosophical literature, and even makes the far reaching claim that 'the question of whether right is right because God wills it, or God wills it because it is right [is] a pseudo-question. For in monotheism, normatively, God's will means what is right, and what is right is God's will' (p. 81).

The issue that Goodman dismisses as a pseudo question first emerged in philosophical literature in the formulation that came to be known as the Euthyphro Dilemma. The first option in this dilemma – is an act right because God wanted it – suggests a theory whereby morality depends on religion, known as divine command morality, whereas the second option – did God want it because it is right – argues that morality is independently valid. Goodman argues that, as such, this is not a reasonable dilemma within monotheism, a *Weltanshauung* where both options are identical. Hence, Goodman claims that 'to say of an act that it is right and that it is God's will becomes two different ways of saying the same thing' (*ibid.*).

But the key question remains open. If the idea of God as a perfect entity is anchored in the idea of the good, then God is a perfect entity because he meets the criterion of the good. The claim that God is identical with the good, therefore, means that God acts according to the good but does not determine it. In other words, God is not the 'source' of values in any sense that we ascribe to this term.

This thesis is obviously unacceptable to Goodman, whose concern is to establish a thesis of dependence. In his attempt to substantiate a thesis of strong dependence, Goodman claims that it is only because God, the universal lawgiver, commands certain acts, that these values are universal and override all others. But what does 'universal' mean in this context? Usually, universal means that moral norms are not dependent on any subjective factor, not even on God. Furthermore, if we assume that God is good in the sense that he acts according to some objective good, then the source of universality is in the objective value of the good itself rather than in God.

Relying on a weaker theory of morality's dependence on religion, Goodman argues that our values do not depend on God but that, in some way, God 'purifies' them. This claim appears elusive, however, nor can it be used to substantiate the statement that God is the source of our values.

Goodman's central claim is that only through God do we integrate our experience and our values, because God is 'the Primal Cause and the Ultimate Good' (p. 79). This statement, however, relies on the perception of God as a model of perfection deserving imitation rather than on the ontological consideration he raises here. Goodman argues that ethical monism is preferable to an approach claiming that our values rely on a variety of sources. Hence, he also assumes that monotheism, which in his view supports ethical monism, lends credence to the hope of resolving moral dilemmas (p. 13).

It is unclear, however, how Goodman buttresses his claims about values. The claim that all values could and must be united within one framework must be decided on standard epistemological and ethical grounds. How else could a critical monotheist, like Goodman himself, defend monism? Goodman fails to answer the question of why we should assume one normative source for the whole complex of religious, moral, and aesthetic values shaping our life. Believers could actually assume that, if God is good and his will is determined by the good, then moral values, unlike religious ones, are not dependent on God's will. Similarly, the question of whether dilemmas can be resolved will be decided on substantive grounds rather than as a conclusion following from a monotheistic *Weltanshauung*.

Furthermore, it is not clear what Goodman means when he speaks of a monotheistic *Weltanshauung*. Is it at all possible to point to a 'pure' monotheistic approach shared by all monotheistic religions, or is the case that various monotheistic religions offer, in Wittgensteinian terms, different 'language games'?

This basic flaw recurs in Goodman's assumption regarding Jewish tradition, when he states that, contrary to Pascal's claim, the God of Abraham is the God of the philosophers. In this regard too, we miss the discussion of a basic issue. What is Jewish tradition and what is included in it? There certainly have been Jewish thinkers who had assumed Pascal's dichotomy, be it Judah Halevi in the Middle Ages, or modern thinkers like Abraham Joshuah Heschel, Joseph Soloveitchik, Franz Rosenzweig, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, and others. The question of who is the Jewish God requires us to look beyond philosophy and explore the Jewish prayerbook, halakhic and aggadic literature, and actual behavioural practices. The God of Jewish tradition is, first and foremost, the 'Thou' addressed in prayer, an entity both transcendent and immanent, a commanding God who both pains and protects humanity. This is not a God about whom we philosophize or to whom we ascribe a variety of attributes, but an entity we address, trust, and whose presence we feel constantly, as embodied in the religious way of life. Goodman's assumption regarding Maimonidean theology as representing Jewish tradition is therefore misdirected, and his discussion reflects his own philosophical approach. This is an obviously acceptable concern, but one that leaves open the question of whether Goodman's God is indeed the 'God of Abraham'.

The book contains several interesting analyses that a critical reader may find useful, and is unquestionably successful in reawakening the problem of the relationship between God and the good, although less so in suggesting solutions and in his analysis of Jewish tradition.

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Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro, eds., *A Companion to the Philosophy of Religion*. Pp. 639 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.) £65.00.

This is a blockbuster of a reference work in the philosophy of religion. It consists of 78 essays of around 3000 to 4000 words each on aspects of the subject. They are grouped in 11 sections.

The first is on philosophical issues in the religions of the world. This consists of essays on issues arising out of Buddhism, Hinduism, Chinese religions, African religions, Judaism and Islam as well as Christianity. The second part has 6 pieces on the history of philosophy of religion in the Western world. The third surveys currents in twentieth-century philosophy of religion, such as Personalism, Pragmatism and Existentialism. This section has valuable pieces on the philosophical contributions from thinkers of different parts of the Christian church and from Judaism. Section 4 consists of just 3 essays on 'Theism and the Linguistic Turn', treating of religious language, verificationism and realism/antirealism. The fifth part has 14 essays on the divine attributes. The sixth focuses on religious epistemology, including the theistic proofs. Part 7 has three essays on facets of the atheistic critique of theism. Part 8 has 4 essays on theism and science. The ninth section has no less than 9 essays on theism and morality. There then follows a section with 10 essays on the application of philosophy to the specifics of Christianity (Trinity, incarnation, providence, etc.). The eleventh and final part contains 3 papers on 'new directions' in the philosophy of religion: feminism, religious pluralism and the comparative philosophy of religion.

Teachers and students will welcome the broad coverage of the subject in the volume and the generally high standard of the individual essays (each of which has a bibliography attached). The editors are to be particularly congratulated on the breadth of the first 3 parts of the *Companion*'s historical coverage, and the space devoted therein to Jewish and Islamic philosophy and to varying strands in Anglo-American thought. The section on ethics is very helpful too in giving readers an idea of the links between philosophy of religion and allied fields. All this still leaves over half of the essays devoted to topics in traditional philosophical or Christian theism. Despite the massive length of the volume, some aspects of the subject are neglected. For example, all the philosophical work on the nature of religion arising out of the borderlands between philosophy of religion and the sciences of religion has but a brief appearance in Kai Neilsen's essay on naturalistic explanations of theistic belief and Griffiths' essay on comparative philosophy of religion.

In a volume with so many contributions there are inevitably lows as well as highs. Some papers are eccentric. For example, Clement Dore on the ontological argument writes about his own version of the proof while ignoring the classic versions students are likely to be more interested in. Some authors write about topics without any sense of an obligation to introduce students

to a debate. Thus neither the text nor the bibliography of Platinga's essay on Reformed Epistemology give the reader any awareness that its fundamental claim that belief in God is properly basic has been the object of a great deal of criticism. There are other papers used by authors to grind an axe, rather than introduce readers to a broad debate (see for example Williams' paper on being and God). Given the great weight of papers on traditional philosophical theology, it is a pity that John Hyman's paper on 'Wittgensteinianism' could not have given a fuller and more sympathetic treatment of its theme. As it stands it boarders on the dismissive.

Keeping so many contributors on their toes is no easy matter. As well as the odd weak paper, there are notable omissions in others (how can someone write an essay on divine command theory of ethics and not mention Alston's vital paper 'Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists'?) and some confusing overlaps between essays.

Despite the above moans, it must be said that, overall, Wainwright and Taliaferro have been well served by their team and are to be congratulated on producing a volume which will be of great help to students. Teachers of the subject will also find it valuable (not just for the purpose of cribbing lecture notes): seeing an able attempt to survey the subject in one volume challenges thought about what really is central in it and where its proper boundaries lie.

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Keith Ward. *Religion and Creation*. Pp. 351 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996.) £12.99.

Having established his method and explored the concept of revelation in *Religion and Revelation*, Ward moves on in this volume to examine the nature of the creator God as formulated in four scriptural traditions. These are: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. Buddhism, which was always an awkward conversation partner in the first volume, is now so awkward that it disappears from view. The method is the same: he is a Christian who wants to listen to the insights of those in other religions and then revisit his Christian understanding. This is comparative theology. So he starts with four twentieth-century representatives of each tradition: Abraham Heschel (Judaism), Mohammed Iqbal (Islam), Aurobindo Ghose (Hinduism), and Karl Barth (Christianity). He finds, to a lesser or greater extent, in all these thinkers a debate with their classical past (one that tends to stress perfection and changeless) and their desire to stress rather more creativity and change. Armed with this insight, he then wants to defend the coherence of a Christian (but one open to the insights from other traditions) account of an objective God.

To do this, he needs to take issue with those theologians and philosophers who think that talk of an objective God is not appropriate. He rightly points out that a metaphysic of naturalism is often assumed by non-realist philosophers; the stress on a 'way of life' needs to be grounded in certain objective values. This is precisely what is involved in the claim that 'God exists'. That God exists should be understood literally and, almost in passing, he deals delightfully with some of the needless confusions that abound in the writings of Tillich and McFague. Along with Aquinas, the rest of God talk should be interpreted analogically.

The sort of God that arose from his study of the four scriptural traditions involves the idea of a 'being of affectivity, creativity, love, wisdom, and bliss' (p. 104). In the second section he defends the coherence of such an idea. Perfection necessarily entails power and love; omniscience cannot know future free will acts; and there must be an 'analogue of time in God' (p. 215). This is the God who creates and, at this point, Ward feeds on the insights of John Polkinghorne *et al*. about modern cosmology. It is also the God who functions as a Trinity. However, his sensitivity to the monotheism of Judaism and Islam makes the social trinity too problematic. Instead 'there are three modes of being of the one omnipotent and omniscient will and awareness who is God (p. 336).

It is difficult to review books that one finds completely convincing. In my judgement on all the central questions, Ward is entirely right. The approach is right: theological reflection on God must engage with the totality of religious reflection in the world and this is best done by taking representative thinkers. The affirmation of an objective God, with appropriate stress on creativity and therefore temporality is not only coherent but compatible with the experience of most religious people. He is right to oppose the current fashion for a social trinity; instead Ward stresses the genesis of the doctrine as part of the logic involved in incarnational belief and is better understood as three modes of God's being. Finally, he is right to try a bridge between religion and modern science; ultimately the theological task must embrace all truth within all disciplines.

Inevitably there are areas of disagreement. Just to take two: first, although Ward discusses the link between God and values, his account of religion then tends to concentrate rather too much on God as an objective belief. The sense of religion as a total world-view, one with an all-embracing capacity, is not stressed sufficiently. Second, Ward does not admit the existence of a fifth tradition playing a very important role in this book. This is the post-Enlightenment, historically-sensitive, tradition of modernity. For Ward, modernity is a serious conversation partner. However, from the vantage point of comparative theology, it is only really Christianity and, to a lesser extent, Judaism that has been so comprehensively persuaded of the importance of this tradition. Although Ward picks representatives of each tradition

who at least are aware of a critical reading of religious history, he never raises consciously the significance of this fifth tradition and the problem it clearly poses for comparative theology.

Ward has identified the space in which theological reflection must operate, it is now up to others to assist him in this difficult task.

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