

Book notes

EDITED BY MARTIN STONE

Donald Wiebe *The Politics of Religious Studies*. (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999). Pp. xx + 332. £40.00 Hbk.

All the papers in this book have been previously published or appeared as conference proceedings. All illustrate Wiebe's long-standing concern with the failure of religious studies in the modern university to break free of a theological/religious paradigm for the organization of the subject. The insistent message of Wiebe's essays is that, despite the clear groundwork laid by the likes of Müller and Tiele, the twentieth-century 'science of religion' has not been scientific in orientation and method. Instead it has all too frequently confused knowledge about religion with religious knowledge. Religion has not been consistently treated like other aspects of human culture – a natural entity explicable by natural mechanisms. Religious studies has instead endeavoured to uncover the human race's contact with sacred, transcendent reality through a study of the world's religions. Wiebe's message is one of a subject betrayed by those who came after its founders and he illustrates this by a host of careful studies of the development of the study in different times and places. While acknowledging and welcoming the power and relevance of Wiebe's central thesis, this book does have some drawbacks. The separately conceived essays make for repetitious reading when placed end to end. Moreover, Wiebe's analysis of what must replace the half-baked theology and apologetics of much religious studies fails to confront a central problem. Wiebe claims throughout that a neutral, properly critical study of religion will be scientific in another sense: that is, committed to explaining religion by way of applying naturalistic theories to it. There is no other way than that mapped out by the tradition of Hume and Feuerbach and their many successors. He even looks forward at the end of the volume to the development of a neo-Darwinist paradigm for the study of human culture which will do away with the distinction between the humanities and the sciences. This many will find totally unconvincing. It is surely a mistake to think that being scientific in the sense of neutral, confession-free and critical in scholarship entails being wedded to the view that the natural sciences must explain all. Critical historians in a history department looking at religious events in the past can be expected to be scientific in the former sense, and we can rightly insist that historians working in a religious studies department likewise keep confessional interests out of their formal work as scholars. But we would not view critical historians as making crude attempts at understanding and explaining human behaviour which can only be completed by a natural scientific-based 'science of culture'.

[P.A.B.]

Kenneth E. Kirk *Conscience and its Problems. An Introduction to Casuistry*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1999; originally published 1927). Pp. 407. \$35.00.

Kirk's classic work on the history of casuistry was originally published in 1927. The book was reprinted and revised by the author on several occasions before it went out of print. It is now reprinted with an introduction by David H. Smith in the *Library of Theological Ethics* published by Westminster/John Knox Press. Smith's plodding introduction to Kirk's magisterial tome fails to communicate to the reader the energy and sophistication of the book. Kirk's work can be said to make a direct contribution to intellectual history on many fronts. First and foremost *Conscience and its Problems* is an authoritative work in the history of moral theology, one which eschews dogma and moralizing veridictiveness, and relies instead on careful argument and historical erudition. Ranging as it does from the Bible, ancient philosophy, medieval ethics, theology and jurisprudence to the casuists of early modern times, it possesses a command of its subject matter that is sadly lacking in so many works of contemporary moral theology. On another level, Kirk's work reveals a philosophical sophistication that enables him to communicate the subtleties of the casuistical method that raises it above the usual caricatures and misrepresentations that have bedevilled its discussion from Pascal to the present day. Kirk shows in interesting and appealing detail how casuistry can be used in a framework of general moral thought and how its method of reasoning is so often necessary in upholding the claims of equity and moderation against those of rigorism and hard-heartedness. While many aspects of Kirk's study, especially those relating to the Stoics and the Jesuit casuists, have been superseded by more recent studies, his work still remains the best single volume written on casuistry by an English writer this century. His humane view of the vicissitudes and exigencies of moral action will commend itself to many moral philosophers and theologians. David Smith and his publishers are to be congratulated for putting this important work before a new generation of scholars.

[M.W.F.S.]

Martin Laube *Im Bann Der Sprache. Die analytische Religionsphilosophie im 20. Jahrhundert*. (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999). Pp. v+498. DM 208 Hbk.

Laube's book aims to offer nothing less than a full-scale evaluation and assessment of 'analytic philosophy of religion' in the twentieth century. It begins by placing that discipline in the much broader context of English-speaking philosophy, and the preoccupation of that tradition of philosophy with language. The opening chapter considers the work of the Vienna Circle, Quine, Dummett and Davidson on sense and reference. Going on from there, Laube considers what he terms the 'beginning' of analytic philosophy of religion. This he locates in the verificationist criticism of religious language by Ayer, the falsificationist criticisms of Flew, and the non-cognitivist theory of religious language proposed by Braithwaite. Chapters 3 and 4 consider epistemology: of interest here is a long discussion of the work of Plantinga. The following chapter considers the work of Dalfert, and the final chapter is

devoted to a lengthy consideration of Wittgenstein. While there is much to admire in Laube's treatment of the philosophers and issues mentioned above, one is left with the impression on completing his long book that his evaluation of twentieth-century analytic philosophy of religion is all too partial. For one thing, there are important omissions and idiosyncrasies. The important work of Swinburne, particularly *The Coherence of Theism*, is ignored, while peripheral thinkers, such as Dalferth, are considered in detail. Further to this, there is an all too easy conflation of 'analytic philosophy', and by implication 'analytic philosophy of religion' with linguistic analysis, a conflation which is historically tenuous and difficult to sustain. So much of the important work over the last twenty-five years in philosophical theology and religious epistemology, which has contributed to the revival of philosophy of religion within English-speaking philosophy, is not considered at all. That said, there is something of value in Laube's book and his discussion of certain aspects of recent philosophy of religion is subtle and informed. For this and other reasons it is deserving of time and attention from anglophone philosophers.

[M.W.F.S.]

M. James C. Crabbe (ed.) *From Soul to Self*. (London: Routledge, 1999). Pp. xi + 158. £12.99 Pbk.

This multi-author interdisciplinary anthology is concerned with the following questions. Do we have souls? Can the soul be distinguished from the self? Can animal souls be distinguished from human souls? These questions are considered from the standpoints of the history of philosophy, theology, religious studies as well as the physiological sciences. Many eminent authorities such as Richard Sorabji, Anthony Kenny, Kallistos Ware, and Susan Greenfield contribute interesting essays that will appeal to the general reader and scholar alike. Readers of this journal will naturally gravitate to the contributions by Sorabji, Kenny and Ware. Sorabji considers the topic of soul and self in ancient philosophy. Under this heading he discusses a wide variety of ancient authors and is concerned to bring out the modern relevance of ancient thought. Kenny treats the relation of the soul to the body in Aquinas. Not only does he bring out the salience of Aquinas' views on this topic, but also sketches the historical problems to which Thomas's account of the soul was addressed. Ware essays in vivid detail the account of the soul in early Greek Christianity. Here, the brilliance of the Cappadocian Fathers, Origen and Clement of Alexandria is put on full display. An interesting aspect of Ware's discussion is his emphasis on the Greek Fathers' account of the essential unity of a human being, an account which was often at odds with some of the philosophical sources on which they drew. Besides papers in the history of theology and philosophy, Crabbe's volume includes a more scientific discussion of the soul from Susan Greenfield and a study of Shamanism by Peter Rivière. There are two further papers from philosophers, one from Gary Matthews on Augustine and Descartes and one from Galen Strawson on the self.

[M.W.F.S.]

Thomas Schieder *Weltabenteuer Gottes: Die Gottesfrage bei Hans Jonas*. (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998). Pp. 291.

Schieder approaches the philosophical concept of God of Hans Jonas (1903–1933) from a theological perspective. He begins by acknowledging the extent to which a philosopher of Jonas's outlook should have taken metaphysical questions seriously. However, Jonas's interest in God is anything but accidental. Jonas wrote his Ph.D. thesis on freedom in SS Paul and Augustine. This was followed by two monumental volumes on the Gnostics, for the abridged English translation of which he is still famous. Confronted by the Holocaust – his mother perished in Auschwitz – he wondered if there could be 'theodicy after Auschwitz'. Finally, his thoughts on matters ecological, on life, nature, creation, 'the organic', the 'anthropic principle' and 'teleology' over against modern scientism, made him think 'beyond' the confines of the immanent. Despite his overall appraisal of Jonas, Schieder is critical. To him Jonas is not quite metaphysical enough, but in danger of falling into 'immanentism', or even 'pantheism' (280). Yet the effort to develop a concept of God on the basis of a modern scientific world view and in the face of post-metaphysical philosophy, he thinks, needs to be acknowledged. His book is a useful summary of Jonas's thoughts on the matters cited and provides some thought provoking and inspired reading.

[J.L.]