

Reviews

Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology. By WILLIAM LANE CRAIG and QUENTIN SMITH. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993. vii + 342 pages. \$45.95.

This book is an important and intriguing debate between Craig, an unshakable theist, and Smith who is equally firm in his unbelief. The debate has three main sections, each formed of four alternating essays by the two authors. The first of the twelve essays abridges part of Craig's *The Kalam Cosmological Argument*. With the exception of Smith's 9 and 12, the later essays are all reprints (sometimes compressed or expanded) of journal articles.

Essays 1 to 6 discuss a theistic cosmological argument. Craig defends two main claims: (1) that the past cannot be infinite because all actual infinities are impossible, or at least because one could never get to an end of an infinite number of years, and (2) that a universe that begins to exist must have a divine cause. He supports the first claim largely by throwing doubt on the relevance of Cantor's theories. Consider al-Ghazali's attempt to show the absurdity of an infinite past. Over infinite time, al-Ghazali argued, a slowly rotating sphere would necessarily have performed many, many fewer rotations than a rapidly rotating one, although each would also have performed the same infinite number of rotations. But Cantor reasoned that *half of infinity* truly could be the same as *infinity*, and in many people's eyes al-Ghazali was thereby proved wrong. Is it true, though, that Cantor's theories of the infinite are applicable to real things? Craig points out that removing *every second book* from an infinite library, if such a library truly were possible, would leave many, many more books on the shelves than removing *the infinitely many books after book number three*, whereas Cantor might seem to say that the number of books removed would in each case be the same. This is so evidently forceful that Smith's subsequent appeals to Cantor could be thought question-begging. Still, Craig's *good point about the library* doesn't itself prove that al-Ghazali was right; . . . and so on, and so forth. While the debate's blows and counterblows in this area are fascinating, they can look very inconclusive—obvious though it may seem, before one enters the swirling mists of technical argument, that clocks could have been ticking forever and ever without logical contradiction.

Much the same applies to the battle over Craig's second claim, a battle made specially interesting by the fact that our universe's Big Bang could well have been an absolute beginning of existence. Craig finds it preposterous to suggest that such a beginning was causeless. Has Hume proved the reverse?

Craig cites Hume himself on the point. A letter from Hume to John Stewart establishes that Hume, too, found the suggestion preposterous. What Hume said he had shown was that the preposterousness wasn't open to demonstration. Smith's view is that, yes indeed, the preposterousness *isn't* open to demonstration, and that cosmologists have fairly strong evidence for an uncaused beginning of the universe. A classical Big Bang could appear not to be the kind of thing which could have a cause. Viewed through the technical mists which they generate, neither author is visibly victorious, plain though it has seemed to many people that a Big Bang that "just happens" is absurd.

The mists of technicality do swirl rather thickly through this book, as becomes ever more evident in essays 7 to 10. These consider an atheistic cosmological argument. Smith claims that divine creation is radically inconsistent with a classical Big Bang. He reasons that God would necessarily wish to create a universe with life-encouraging properties, but that a classical Big Bang's initial, infinitely dense "singularity" would give rise to a universe with unpredictable properties. (Here he puts a great deal of trust in some highly controversial scientific arguments. One can see why cosmology has been called the science "in which everybody is in disagreement and nobody in doubt.") What is more, he declares, at the time that a primordial unified force split apart, God would have to intervene to "fine-tune" nature's four main forces in a manner that would permit life to evolve. God would thus be like a watchmaker coming to the rescue of his ill-designed watch. He adds (over several pages) that John Leslie is wildly inconsistent on this matter. Leslie makes God a Fine Tuner (albeit one conceived Neoplatonically and so not as "a person" or "a being" in any straightforward sense). Yet simultaneously Leslie shudders at the messiness of any universe that requires the "occasional helpful shoves" of divine intervention.

In point of fact, what Leslie thinks—see his (i.e., my) book *Universes*—is that there are three main options:

1. There may be a universe (or set of universes) whose divinely specified physical laws guaranteed that the strengths of nature's main forces were from the beginning of time, or would in due course come to be, tuned life-permittingly without any divine intervention.
2. There may be a universe (or set of universes) in which the sole "intervention" needed was only very controversially worth that name, since all that was involved was God's decision to give reality to some possible force-strengths rather than others that are equally compatible with physical laws. (This decision may have been taken at the beginning of time but more probably later on, during a splitting up of a unified force.) The decision thus was one that God could not have avoided making in the ordinary course of world-producing or world-conserving activity; it was *not* a decision to give an extraordinary, law-violating "helpful shove."
3. There may be, as atheists would prefer to think, extremely many universes, in which chance has tuned the force-strengths in extremely many ways. An

“anthropic” observational selection effect ensures that in any universe observed by living beings, the strengths are tuned life-permittingly.

Might the second of the three options be argued to involve “intervention in a strong sense,” because a random choice from among the possibilities would have been extremely unlikely to produce life-permitting force-strengths? To this it could be replied that *no matter which* force-strengths God selected, they would have been extremely unlikely to result from random choice. The force-strengths might therefore be indications of God’s benevolence without being at all obviously classifiable as results of God’s “intervening with a shove.”

Here one also could appeal to some of the points that Craig makes against Smith. Craig maintains that any initial singularity would be a mathematical fiction; that God might well know in advance how an apparently unpredictable Big Bang would develop; and that one ought to be wary of claiming to know God’s likes and dislikes. Might God want to decree that a splitting apart of nature’s four main forces would occur in a life-encouraging fashion? What would be so very shocking in this, even supposing that a law-violating helpful shove really would be required? Human freedom wouldn’t thereby be threatened, as it would be if God decreed, e.g., that theists would survive thunderstorms, whereas atheists wouldn’t. And the world still could be very different from one in which God constantly interfered with Darwinian evolution or ensured that earthquakes never struck towns.

The book’s final two essays consider Stephen Hawking’s theory, which might appear to leave “nothing for a Creator to do.” At early moments Hawking’s cosmos is dominated by certain quantum effects that would spatialize and smear out the time and place of any initial singularity—or at any rate this would be so when, as recommended by Hawking, one viewed the situation “in imaginary time.” The early Big Bang would thus be more like Earth’s north pole than like the tip of an infinitely sharp pin. The question, What happened before the Bang, to cause it? could then seem on a par with the query, What is Earth like from the north pole northwards?

Craig sees little value in any of this. He objects that the notion of a Creator’s having “nothing to do” overlooks the standard theological insistence that divine creative activity is present at all moments, not just at some first moment. He notes that Hawking’s universe may in some sense be “eternal,” but, as Leibniz noted, there is nothing unreasonable in asking *why* about eternally existing things. Indeed, Hawking sometimes pictures himself as tackling only the *what* of the universe and not the *why*, and he himself admits that his theory is extremely speculative. In fact, Craig continues, in suggesting that the distinction between space and time is unreal, and that “imaginary time” is less of a fiction than the time of ordinary experience, the theory is simply silly. Moreover, its use of many-worlds quantum theory (in which seemingly alternative physically possible histories are *all* realized) seems to be a case of ontological flatulence. Actually, says Craig, Hawking

slides to and fro between *describing putative realities* (for otherwise there can be no sense in his intermittent attempts to draw atheistic conclusions) and maintaining that he is merely playing around with mathematics and modeling-clay.

Smith agrees with many of these criticisms. He suggests, though, that one can cull something important from Hawking's writings if one picks and chooses appropriately, throwing out almost all of *A Brief History of Time* and other popular pieces. Hawking then can be viewed as saying that quantum theory shows how a universe like ours could have arisen from nothingness through "quantum tunneling." The nothingness would have been in some sense absolute, instead of being a spacetime foam that contains events but no actual things. It would have been a nothingness empty of everything apart from Platonic mathematical truths. While Hawking's position is no doubt wrong in some of its details, Smith holds that we ought to accept its broad outlines. And certainly we ought to think it preferable to theism: Hawking tells us it was at least probable that a universe like ours would exist, whereas theism grounds everything in God's largely arbitrary will. Yet as he weaves his way through Hawking's tangled thickets, axe in one hand and fertilizer in the other, Smith can himself seem to be involved in many largely arbitrary choices.

It also can seem that Smith is too little troubled by the question of why the laws of quantum physics, which supposedly explain everything else, are as they are. Yes, it might conceivably be true that there is only one consistent set of laws for describing any universe at all like ours. However, virtually no philosophers would take seriously Smith's next idea, which is that no other laws, not even ones describing universes very different from ours, could avoid logical contradictions. Again, Smith will find it hard to persuade his fellow Platonists to give credence to the notion of mathematically dictated laws that encourage a universe to quantum-tunnel out of nothingness. (Might there be Platonic facts, eternally and unconditionally real, concerning what is ethically "needful," "required," "necessary"—and might these facts call *with creative success* for the existence of a good, omnipotent person or of a Spinozistic universe? Conceivably so. The journal *Religious Studies* recently included speculations along these lines, and Alvin Plantinga long has defended the idea that God's existence could be metaphysically necessary even if logically undemonstrable. But how are we to react to a quantum-probabilistic tendency for a universe to exist, a tendency growing out of mathematics alone? While mathematical Platonism is rightly popular, its defenders are unlikely to admire the use to which Smith puts it.)

A brief review can do nothing like justice to the richness of *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology*. Perhaps the book's most striking feature is the amount of pioneering work it contains. Remarkably few philosophers discuss cosmology's implications for theism. Why? For the present at least, people can contribute significantly without mastering the cosmologist's mathematical

equations. Many very basic philosophical points have yet to be investigated. We are trying to find our way through the fogs of dawn.

JOHN LESLIE
 Professor of Philosophy
 University of Guelph
 Ontario N1G 2W1
 Canada

Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory. By MARY DOUGLAS. London and New York: Routledge, 1992. 335 pages. \$29.95.

What can the study of "primitives"—Mary Douglas deliberately uses this most politically incorrect appellation—possibly contribute to the understanding of the central problems of "modern" society? The question is, needless to say, rhetorical. The essays in this volume are intended not so much to demonstrate as to convince the reader of the relevance of anthropology. They might more appropriately be subtitled essays "for" rather than "in" cultural theory. They seem for the most part to be aimed at colleagues in other disciplines, although the last essay, an address to the American Anthropological Association, exhorts her fellow anthropologists against the temptations of comfortable isolation.

Together, these essays call for a most ambitious program, a program that entails not only scientific research but also social activism. The link, Douglas argues convincingly, is not only possible but necessary. Thinking about society entails deciding what it is and what it could and should be. All theories of societies are, in one way or another, engaged; even attempts at clinical detachment are merely one form of engagement among others. The fact that the volume is a collection, that all of the essays were written in specific contexts for different audiences and for different purposes, means that the program emerges gradually, in bits and pieces.

Perhaps the best introduction to this program is her essay "No Free Gifts," originally published as an introduction to a new translation of Marcel Mauss's seminal *The Gift*. Here, she situates herself, like Mauss, clearly within the tradition of Emile Durkheim's sociology, most specifically its critique of Anglo-Saxon utilitarian social theory. The problem with such theory, she goes on, is its methodological individualism, its conception of human beings as isolated actors who rationally calculate costs and benefits in terms of available information. The contribution of *The Gift* was precisely to challenge such theory on its own chosen terrain—economics—using examples drawn from "primitive" cultures.

In her other essays, Douglas develops this attack on methodological individualism in a variety of domains from risk-assessment studies and organization theory to theology. The problem, in the first place, is that "costs" and "benefits" are not elaborated by individuals in a vacuum. What they desire and, perhaps even more important, what they most resolutely wish to avoid cannot simply be taken for granted. Worse, systematic utilitarianism is incapable of

accounting for the pervasiveness of “blinkers,” of the persistent unwillingness if not inability of individuals to take certain options into account. The point she is making is not, by any means, that humans are intrinsically irrational, but rather that they are members of communities.

The point is elegantly demonstrated in the essay “The Self as Risk Taker,” where she discusses the attitudes of various categories of persons to risks of contagion through AIDS. She rightly dismisses the naiveté of the view that it is all a question of “education.” The assumption here is that rational individuals will take the precautions prescribed by the medical community; by implication, all who fail to do so are either ignorant or irrational. Douglas quite rightly objects that such a view assumes that information is entirely “neutral,” that is, source is irrelevant. On the contrary, everything hinges on the question of authority. The behavior and attitudes of individuals depend in large measure on whether they accept the authority of the “scientific community,” an issue that is entirely social and political and not psychological, whether in the “cognitive” or “emotional” sense.

In short, fundamental attitudes about reality, God, the body, the self, even about scientific practice are all social. More to the point, Douglas argues that members of different types of communities tend to think about the world in different terms. Douglas’s starting point is the anthropological analysis of forensics, of the allocation of responsibility in “primitive” communities. Who is held to be responsible when things go wrong and on what grounds? Is an individual’s success attributed to the strength of the magic he possesses, and failure an indication that a rival disposes of even stronger fetish power? Is misfortune a punishment from the generally benevolent ancestors of the group, ever vigilant to uphold the moral code? Is it proof instead that the community harbors a witch whose secret appetites and grievances are a danger to neighbors? Such styles of explanation not only reflect but also serve to reinforce, through feedback loops, the very principles on which different kinds of community are constituted.

Readers familiar with the work of Mary Douglas will immediately recognize her scheme of “grid and group,” a scheme which, applied in a host of contexts, underlies virtually all of the essays in the collection. The scheme classifies communities along two axes: the “group” axis measures the degree of group boundedness, its tendency to make sharp distinctions between members and outsiders and its corresponding claims on member’s commitments; the “grid” axis the degree of individual autonomy to negotiate one’s own position—crudely, the reliance on ascription rather than achievement, on structure or on flux. The Cartesian language, suggesting that any community might be placed on a graph depending on its relative measures of “groupness” and “gridness,” is misleading. For all intents and purposes, Douglas’s analysis rests on identifying four contrasting types (+ group, + grid; + group, - grid; - group, - grid; - group, + grid). She proceeds in the different essays to apply the scheme to a host of

issues ranging from modern Japanese literature, to reactions to the threat of global environmental degradation, to the debate over whether women should be ordained as priests.

Indeed, this very range of applications raises the awkward question: exactly what do these four "types" categorize? Applying them to "primitive" societies, she tends to categorize entire cultures in terms of one type or another. With reference to "modern" society, the categories seem to shift with respect to levels of analysis. In some ways, we too, it would seem, fall into a single box. In other contexts, categories seem to apply to types of organizations, to institutional sectors of society, to the situations of different kinds of individuals in society at large (or in specific institutions), to different conceptions of society and of how it does (or should) work. Most of the essays are concerned with the categorization of her four types, applied in a variety of modern contexts, as "market," "hierarchy," "sect," and "isolate." The "market" is characterized by the ability of individuals to negotiate their prerogatives and obligations—including commitments to groups—without restrictions. This is low grid, low group. Its watchword is *liberty*: the liberty to enjoy unlimited success but also unlimited failure. The principle of equality is characteristic of "sects." In modern society, Douglas argues, such egalitarianism can be sustained only within a minority enclave, such as a commune or a "movement," low grid and high group. The threat of secession can be countered only by the maintenance of a sharp distinction between "pure" insiders and a "corrupt" outside world. Factionalism is endemic and expressed in terms of the susceptibility of insiders to "corruption" from outside. "Hierarchies," with high grid and high group, make equally strong claims on the loyalties of members, awarding them all—but not all equal—stakes in membership. Everyone has his or her place, not necessarily immutable by any means, but, unlike "markets," cushioned from the starkest consequences of "failure." I am tempted to characterize this type by the principle of "fraternity"—though rather along the lines of certain West African lineages, where the authority of older brothers over younger brothers is indisputable. This leaves the "isolates," who enjoy none of the above, not liberty, equality, or fraternity in their high-grid, low-group corner. They are the marginals, those whose destiny is (or so it seems) controlled from outside.

Douglas deduces from her contention, that each type of community has its own way of understanding the world, the conclusion that all debates about reality are essentially "political," by which she means ideological. In her essay "A Credible Biosphere," she spells out the implications for academics with particular clarity. Our own analyses, not only in terms of what they say but also in what they refuse to take seriously, all entail specific views about society. Methodological individualism considers the world only in terms of the rules of the "market," virtually defining nationality as market behavior. The sectarians are the radical egalitarians, those who write in the name of (and ostensibly on behalf of) the "oppressed" but whose concern with maintaining their social and ideological

purity is a certain recipe, Douglas suggests, for cliquishness and political ineffectiveness. The isolates, of course are politically ineffective by definition. The marginals, she suggest, need not be the underprivileged by any means. Her favorite example is the Russian intelligentsia of the mid-nineteenth century, privileged and powerless at the same time. Their contemporary counterparts are the radical skeptics—Derrida & Co., one presumes,—who withdraw themselves from the fray. This leaves, of course, “hierarchy,” which Douglas acknowledges (as one might infer) as her preference, and which she considers to be the only effective counterweight to individualism run wild. “Corporatism,” I suspect, would be both a more accurate and a more acceptable characterization: the “market” is no more egalitarian; inequalities are simply more openly negotiable.

There remains a fundamental, unanswered question about the correspondence between ideology and community. Does one’s thought style reflect the type of community to which one belongs, or, rather, the type of community to which one aspires? The methodological individualists would suggest that the choice is up to us, that rational debate is always possible. The “hierarchicals” might suggest that such freedom is at least partly illusory, that our perspectives inevitably reflect the kind of society to which we belong and our place within it. Mary Douglas’s argument that “hierarchy” is not nearly as irrational as it might seem is persuasive, but are the individualists in the market even capable of thinking in such terms?

Ultimately, these essays are far more satisfying as polemic than as analysis. The various (and varied) illustrations of the applications of “grid and group” are more suggestive than systematic. However, Douglas’s arguments about the ideological bases of knowledge and consequently its necessary political implications are not only eloquent but convincing. One can only admire the frankness with which she makes an (avowedly unpopular) case for “hierarchy,” and agree that those who appeal instead to abstract “reason” or “justice” are merely less forthright or less lucid.

ROBERT LAUNAY
Professor of Anthropology
Northwestern University
Evanston, IL 60208

Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming—Natural, Divine, and Human. By ARTHUR PEACOCKE. Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1993. 438 pages. \$21.00.

In the September 1992 issue of *Zygon*, Ted Peters contributed an insightful review of Arthur Peacocke’s *Theology for a Scientific Age*. The subject of this review is the expanded edition of the same book. The original edition contained two parts; the first, “Natural Being and Becoming,” is an account of the universe as revealed by contemporary science. The second part, “Divine Being and Becoming,” examines the classic attributes of God in the picture of creation developed

in the first part. Building on this foundation in a logical way, Peacocke has added a third section. "Human Being and Becoming," nearly doubling the book's length and completing his comprehensive vision of a meaningful, progressive universe on its way to fulfillment. In this new part, theological categories progressively govern the discussion and, by way of reflection, require the reader to reexamine the intentions of the earlier parts in light of this material. For this reason and because Ted Peters's review is quite sufficient for the earlier parts, my remarks will mostly involve this final section on humanity.

Peacocke begins with the major question of how God communicates and reveals the divine will to humanity for the sake of realizing God's goals. He believes that God can have providential accessibility to all creation without compromising either the order of the world or the integrity of scientific inquiry into that order. That is, miracles are unnecessary. Since there are no miracles, no divine unmediated action, revelation requires some medium of propagation. Just as interpersonal communication depends on the constituents of the world and is no less profound or subtle because of their employment, so the Divine communicates symbolically and personally through events in nature and history by conveying information in a top-down/whole-part fashion. God's mode of communication is thus a special case of how God interacts with the world. The creation consists of multiple levels of complexity, each having its own rules or regularities. Without violating these rules, a higher level can influence the events of any particular lower level simply by altering the context in which those rules operate. God is causatively effective in the world at the most inclusive level, the level of totality. By affecting the world as a whole, God can effect changes at any particular level included in that whole without abrogating the laws that apply at that level.

In a subsequent chapter Peacocke explores in detail the hierarchical structure of human existence based on the assumption of strong interaction at the boundaries of each level. Proceeding upward from physical through biological, behavioral, and cultural levels, he stresses the biblical teaching of the psychosomatic unity of the human person while concurrently emphasizing the uniqueness of *Homo sapiens* in the emergent feature of personality.

The appearance of self-conscious persons is a major development in evolution and the source of species-wide existential difficulties well known in theology. Peacocke refers to humans as self-perceived "misfits" in creation. Sin arises easily in this condition as the alienation resulting from misplaced amplification of our own importance in the world and willful efforts to pursue a destiny independent of God's intentions for creation, a distortion of what Paul Tillich called "the God-shaped blank in the human heart." The "long search" of humankind for its proper destiny must, consequently, be satisfied only by some "ultimate environment" best understood as interpersonal relationship between the Divine Person and the community of human persons, a goal for which our species has been prepared by the process of cosmic evolution revealed by modern science.

At this point Peacocke turns his attention to Jesus of Nazareth as the prototypical completion of the *imago dei* in our species, the person to whom and through whom God communicated fully. As the chief exemplification of what all persons should become, Jesus embodies the original intention and aim of all creation.

Peacocke examines the miracles attributed to Jesus and rejects or reinterprets each in turn. His treatment of miracles exposes his Humean leanings (a prohibitively high standard of evidence for the acceptance of an event as truly miraculous) and a commitment to a nonmagical universe governed by uniform and nonarbitrary laws. The one exception to this analysis is the Resurrection. His remarks here are subtle, novel, and ingenious. The Resurrection is not the resuscitation of Jesus' body but the imparting of a new body of unknown composition, a transformation or re-creation. Unlike Ezekiel raising dry bones, God raises Jesus to a new body of unknown character. Laws of nature applying to dry bones do not apply to this new being. Hence, the event is not a miracle in which God is forced to intervene in the lawful regularity of nature to achieve a purpose. No known law applies to the Resurrection that could be broken by its occurrence. God "supervenes" rather than intervenes from beyond the natural order to accomplish this extraordinary occurrence.

How is Jesus the Incarnation of God? Peacocke sets aside traditional substance models and turns instead to the informational approach pioneered by John Bowker. Jesus is the "God-informed person," the one into whose brain God encoded "theistic inputs" that shaped his consciousness to reflect God's will and intentions. Jesus was thus, as the creeds insist, wholly man and wholly God but in a most intelligible way.

In further chapters Peacocke interprets the Atonement, the salvific intention of the cross, in terms of Anselm's act of sacrificial love, and relates his vision to Christian practices, including prayer and the sacraments.

Peacocke has done an exceptional job, knitting together his arguments as tightly as possible. Still, there are bound to be points, in such a sweeping account of literally everything, where questions arise.

One question concerns the nature of God's influence at that point of interface between God and the whole world. Despite its novel character as being the only all-inclusive, nonincluded level of created reality, the total cosmic system exhibits rules and regularities appropriate to its level. How then does God influence events at the level of totality without violating these regularities in a miraculous or magical fashion? Because there are no higher levels through which to work, God's initial interaction with the world as a totality in His intention to influence events at lower levels must be unmediated, that is, direct. How are we then to understand this primary causality if the only model of divine causality we are given is of the mediated sort? The whole acts upon itself, its parts. But how does God act upon the whole that is not a part of God?

In addressing this issue, Peacocke uses the analogy of the conscious self or

"I" as the agent that ultimately unifies the actions of the brain and body by acting on and through the brain in a global fashion. The analogy appears to break down at a crucial point. Whereas the self and, indeed, all consciousness or cognition is grounded in the neurophysiology of the brain and arises from it as an emergent reality, God is not so grounded and emerges only from God's own life. The "I" is an insider with respect to the brain, but God is very much the outsider with respect to the world. A disjointedness remains along with the question of nonmiraculous divine influence.

The assumption of the classic model of God as absolutely fundamental, ontologically complete, leaves no common ground between God and world that would allow us to understand God's causal interaction with that world as a totality. One possible cure for this problem is to embrace both God and world in a metaphysical system that overcomes the "ontological gap." Ian Barbour, for example, accomplishes this task through process philosophy. But Peacocke's commitment to the classic model of divinity inhibits his consideration of such a common metaphysical ground.

Another question is how one discerns or "reads" a series of natural events for its revelatory content. How would one distinguish between event *X* as a natural event obeying the laws of nature and resulting from them alone and that same event *X* as a law-abiding event *and* a message from God? The answer seems to be that the expectations of the observer contribute to the distinction. This is especially true of special revelation, which is identified as such through a canon of assumptions about what properly constitutes revelation for the tradition of a given community. The perspective of the community not only contributes to the revelatory character of the event but, more seriously, actually *defines* that character. This explanation runs the risk of being subject to projection theory wherein the revelatory character of the event is contributed exclusively by the observer—the "faces in the clouds" phenomenon.

Finally, there is the question of the inherent worth of nonhuman creation. Peacocke says that God appreciates the natural world for its own sake; God takes "joy and delight" in it. Yet far greater attention is given to the theme of the *theosis* or progressive deification of humankind as the goal and aim of the becoming of creation than to the inherent worth of nature. The reader is left with the impression that the value of nature is secondary and instrumental.

Despite these questions, *Theology for a Scientific Age* remains one of the most original, comprehensive, reasoned, and, above all, readable attempts to contour the broader features of a synoptic vision of the world to which theology and science necessarily contribute. Authur Peacocke is one of the very few qualified to attempt such an ambitious project. Anyone who reads this book will come away with a profound appreciation for his accomplishment.

JAMES E. HUCHINGSON
Associate Professor of Religious Studies
Florida International University
Miami, FL 33199

On the Nature and Existence of God. By RICHARD GALE. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991. 422 pages. \$18.95 (paper).

In 1967, Alvin Plantinga, then of Calvin College and now of the University of Notre Dame, shocked the philosophical world with the publication of his book *God and Other Minds*, which contained a radical defense of the rationality of religious belief. Intellectually respectable religious belief had been in a decades-long retreat in the face of logical positivism, ordinary language philosophy, and Enlightenment evidentialism. Even while death-of-God theologians were capitulating to the “established insights” of the new philosophy, Plantinga provided a sophisticated, novel, and powerful defense of the rationality of belief in God. Although he acknowledged that standard theistic proofs are not successful, Plantinga argued that beliefs analogous to belief in God also lacked the support of arguments. In particular Plantinga noted the similarities between *belief in God* and *belief in other minds*. If God is a person, then belief in God will more relevantly resemble belief in other persons than belief in, say, atoms or the existence of a ninth planet. The demands for evidence need not be satisfied when believing that someone else is a person. While we have access to the behavior of persons, we have no access to minds—the rich and varied mental life of thoughts, feeling, pains and so on that are essential to one’s being a person and not merely a cleverly constructed automaton. If it is rational to believe that there are other persons, then it is rational to have a very important belief that is not based on evidence. Plantinga completes the analogy in the famous concluding sentences of the book: “Hence my tentative conclusion: if my belief in other minds is rational, so is my belief in God. But obviously the former is rational; so, therefore, is the latter” (p. 271). Plantinga’s book was a benchmark in the reestablishment of an intellectually potent philosophy of religion.

In thus firing the first shot across the atheist’s bow, Plantinga initiated a battle that has seen theists recover much lost ground. But his ammo was not yet running low, and in the succeeding decades he continued firing his intellectual cannon. Two of Plantinga’s most honored accomplishments are his version of the ontological argument for the existence of God and his free-will defense of God’s existence in the face of evil. Plantinga is a logician par excellence, and he confounded his detractors with his use of the latest developments in logic. His version of the ontological argument is not susceptible to the standard Kantian critique that existence is not a predicate. Employing the recently developed and axiomatized logic of possibility and necessity, Plantinga demonstrated the necessary (and therefore actual) existence of a supremely perfect being from that being’s mere possibility. Granting a few simple assumptions (which are unprovable but have a great deal of intuitive support), the conclusion clearly follows.

His free-will defense of the possibility of God’s existence given the fact of evil is almost universally recognized as a final refutation of the deductive

argument from evil. The deductive argument from evil, if successful, would prove that God and evil are logically incompatible. Given that there is evil in the world, so the argument goes, it is impossible for God to exist. Again using the powerful tools of contemporary logic, Plantinga demonstrated that the alleged conclusion simply does not follow from the premises. There cannot be a simple disproof of the existence of God from the mere fact of evil.

Plantinga has been joined in this intellectual crusade by a mighty host of thinkers from prominent universities. Let me mention a few: William Alston and Peter Van Inwagen of Syracuse University, Richard Swinburne and Michael Dummett of Oxford University, Robert and Marilyn Adams of Yale University, Norman Kretzmann of Cornell University, George Mavrodes of the University of Michigan, Philip Clayton of California State University, Sonoma, and Thomas Morris of the University of Notre Dame. The Society of Christian Philosophers was organized in 1979 to encourage philosophical reflection on matters religious and now boasts over a thousand members. But Plantinga has led the charge, and his work is the most sophisticated, developed, discussed, and criticized.

While not nearly so well organized, the response to the renaissance of religious philosophy has been predictable. There is still a great deal of hostility to theism among philosophers. The most prominent book-length critique was J. L. Mackie's posthumously published *The Miracle of Theism*. Mackie attacks nearly every recent defense of religious rationality, contending with David Hume that given its lack of intellectual foundations, to believe in God would require a miracle. But Mackie's essays, while encyclopedic, are less than fully developed. What parades as rigorous logic is merely suggestive but debatable intuition and occasionally deep misunderstanding. One could only hope that Mackie's book would have been more rigorous if he had lived long enough to sufficiently develop his arguments.

Richard Gale, like Mackie, locates himself within the tradition of the great skeptic David Hume. His book *On the Nature and Existence of God* is a sustained discussion of the rational justification of religious belief. Without Plantinga this book would be considerably thinner; he writes: "Again, we find Plantinga taking the lead among his contemporaries: Were it not for his brilliance and creativity, I never would have been moved to write this book." This is rather like George Bush praising Saddam Hussein for moving him to war against Iraq (and thus I continue my silly battle metaphor).

Gale treats familiar topics: creation-immutability, omniscience-immutability, the deductive argument from evil, as well as the ontological, cosmological, and pragmatic arguments for the existence of God and the argument from religious experience. The deductive argument from evil merits the most attention and is accorded a chapter that is disproportionately long. While the chapter is often illuminating, Gale's loose definitions in the end prevent him from making the tight case against Plantinga's free-will defense that he believes he has made. His

critique of Plantinga's ontological argument for the existence of God is not the final word on this matter; rather, it resolves into deep and apparently unresolvable disagreement about intuitions between atheist and theist.

It is not altogether clear if Gale's purpose is to undermine rational theism or to provide, as he claims, a more adequate conception of God. He concludes the book with the following: "if the only available arguments were the epistemological and pragmatic arguments examined before, faith would lack any rational justification. . . . I resonate to their [Kierkegaardian] view of faith as a subjective passion that outstrips reason" (p. 387). Does he, therefore, endorse faith in the manner of Kierkegaard or reject it in the manner of Hume and Mackie? He tantalizingly ends the book with this question unanswered. But here we come back to Plantinga's contention that belief in God is rational even if it is unsupported by an argument. Suppose Gale is correct that there are no good arguments for the existence of God; what follows from that? If Plantinga is right, nothing much. Suppose there are no good arguments for the existence of other persons; what follows from that? That I should cease treating my wife as a person until such a proof is forthcoming? What should a believer in God do under such circumstances? Gale could have continued engaging the defender of rational theism at this point in two ways: he could have stated (1) whether or not he has defended Humean agnosticism or Kirkegaardian fideism and (2) whether or not it is possible, à la Plantinga, that belief in God is rational even if it is unsupported by an argument.

This book is not for the logically faint of heart. It is populated with numbered propositions, the latest in logic, and lengthy and complex argumentation. The occasional primers in logic are too brief for the uninitiated and unnecessary for the expert. So the typical reader of this journal, unless training in modal logic is typical, will find large portions of this book quite difficult. One also must be warned of Gale's frequent expulsions of humor, which often border on the annoying. But Gale has presented intriguing arguments against the recent defenses of theism. I believe that his arguments while not altogether successful are worthy of serious consideration on the part of the philosophical theist.

KELLY JAMES CLARK

Associate Professor of Philosophy
Calvin College
Grand Rapids, MI 49506

The Natural Contract. By MICHEL SERRES. Translated by ELIZABETH MACARTHUR and WILLIAM PAULSON. Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1995. 124 pp. \$39.50; \$14.95 (paper). Page numbers in the review refer to the French edition: *Le Contrat Naturel*. Paris: Francois, Bourin, 1990.

French philosophy is not renowned for either a focus on nature or attention to science. Sartre's indifference to science, as Simone de Beauvoir tells it, was acute

enough to find him maintaining that “microbes and other animalculae invisible to the naked eye simply didn’t exist at all.” Contemporary philosophers such as Bourdieu, Lyotard, and Derrida seem also well ensconced in the realms of a human consciousness and of a society somehow free-floating outside the realm of nature. The one major exception to this trend is the latest philosopher named to the Académie Française, Michel Serres.

Trained originally as a mathematician, Serres (born 1930) subsequently studied the history of science, received his *aggregation* in philosophy, and, after spending time in England reading Russell and Wittgenstein, was the first to offer a French university course in mathematical logic. Sympathetic to painting and literature, Serres attempts to work out a philosophy free of the bifurcations that have plagued post-Cartesian thought. Thus, his surprising, perhaps even oxymoronic title, *Le Contrat Naturel*. If contracts can be entered into only by “subjects,” then nature, as “object,” is simply ineligible as a partner.

Ligatures, threads, and cords provide the metaphors central to Serres’ meditation. What we need most of all today is a religion, that is to say, a re-ligaturing, not just with other humans, but also with the world. “Can we put into practice, while waiting anxiously for a second deluge, a diligent religion of the world” (p. 81)? This religion is not so much theo-centric as a rejection of its foil, neg-ligence. “Whoever has no religion must not carry the label atheist or nonbeliever, but that of being negligent” (p. 81). The urge to become like gods (all-knowing, all-powerful), has led us to ignore humility, our links to “humus.” This escape from humility identifies that fundamental neg-ligence which Serres seeks to overcome.

Our need to enter into a relation of equilibrium (the contract) with nature results from what Serres calls a “bi-planetary” relationship between ourselves and the world. We continue to be dependent on it, but its ability to sustain human life is now also dependent on us (p. 171). “Contract,” in its root sense of pulling or drawing together, recognizes this “bi-planetary” relationship.

The Enlightenment’s *social* contract was partial, admitting only the linkage of humans to each other. Serres highlights this partiality by introducing, in his opening pages, Goya’s painting of two men locked in combat, neglecting the mud into which they are sinking and which can defeat them both (pp. 13–14).

Archaic societies saw no need for a natural contract. They were overwhelmed by the power, force, and unchangeable necessity of nature. Modernity saw humans gain a modicum of revenge by a reversal of power coupled with an attempt at domination. In neither case was a truce or an equilibrium sought out. Our own time, however, aware that it could easily sink into Goya’s mud, requires a treaty (etymologically related to *tract*), and a contractual balance (p. 66).

Unfortunately, as Serres points out, much of philosophy continues to be “acosmic,” oblivious to the cosmos within which our activities take place (p. 54). Mountain climbers, harnessed not only to each other, but to the rock

facade, know better. "The group finds itself linked, not only to itself, but to the objective world. . . . The natural contract is added to the social contract" (p.163).

Fortunately, the acosmic separation of the "natural" world studied by the sciences from the "social" realm, which is the province of law, is not an atemporal, philosophical absolute. The Egyptian Harpenodapt, who measured out parcels of land (who literally "geo-metrized") after the flooding of the Nile, is exemplary in this respect. Herodotus saw in the Harpenodapt's function the beginnings of geometry. But, says Serres, he could just as easily have seen the beginnings of justice, the politically approved parceling out of land (p. 90).

Instead of granting priority either to empirical science (rooted in nature) or to a scheme of justice (rooted in society), Serres describes a kind of hermeneutical circle in which neither is absolutely foundational (p. 128). The Harpenodapt cannot be classified as uniquely a representative of science or of the justice system. The origins of science begin with a certain staking out of territory and of rules for admission into the community of discourse. In other words, it begins with judicial decisions. These judicial decisions, in turn, are originally occasioned, and subsequently revised, by new empirical information.

This hermeneutic interlocking of nature and culture voids the philosophical justifications for modernity's negligence with regard to the world. Replacing negligence with diligence allows us to re-ligature ourselves, not only to each other, but also to nature.

Serres is a great paradigm breaker, struggling to articulate an inclusive philosophical position. He is too little known in this country. This small book, of interest to those in philosophy, religion, and science, would serve as a good introduction to his thought.

RAYMOND D. BOISVERT
Professor
Department of Philosophy
Siena College
Loudonville, NY 12211

René Girard and Myth: An Introduction. By RICHARD J. GOLSAN. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1993. 237 pages. \$38.00.

The bibliographical data bank on *girardiana*, which the newly created Colloquium on Violence and Religion (CV&R) maintains at the University of Innsbruck, contains thousands of items, including books, articles, collections of essays, and published interviews, which in one way or another apply, echo, or critique in a wide range of scholarly fields René Girard's theories. But, to the best of my knowledge, Golsan's book is the first and only one specifically conceived as a basic introduction to Girard's thought. For an introduction to *René Girard and Myth* is inevitably a general introduction to Girard, given the central position that his notion of myth occupies within the scope of his

theoretical thinking.

Golsan's approach is basically chronological. He begins at the beginning with Girard's theory of mimetic, or "triangular," desire, as originally developed in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (1961) and *Dostoevski: du double à l'unité* (1963). This is chapter 1, where the notions of external and internal mediation are explained, and where the ground is laid for what in later works Girard would call "interdividual psychology." This is also, quite appropriately, the place to show Girard's critique of Freud and the fundamental differences between the two. Golsan's presentation of this critique is both concise and clear, including Girard's views on "Masochism," "Sadism," and "Homosexuality,"

Some points, however, need further clarification. The deficiency is not so much Golsan's as Girard's own. For example, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* may indeed give the impression that for Girard *all human desire* imitates "the desire of someone I have chosen as a model" (p. 1). But this is not literally so. For although Girard maintains that all specifically human desire is "triangular," that is to say, dependent on a model or mediator, the mediating or modelic function is not necessarily fulfilled by another individual's desire. Human culture itself, in its conventions and traditions, generates its own collective mediation. To the extent that such cultural mediation works, it is supposed to prevent individual desire from becoming fixated on—mediated by—the desire of another individual. This is the "external mediation" par excellence. But as the untouchable, or *sacred*, character of the collective model breaks down, individual desires assume the mediating function. This is why "in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* Girard links the transition from external to internal mediation with the passing of the monarchy during the French revolution and the emergence of bourgeois culture and society," as Golsan rightly observes (p. 7). We should not, however, understand this link in absolute or even paradigmatic terms but simply as a historical example that is particularly close and relevant to us as members of modern Western culture.

Likewise, as one reads Girard's seminal first book, one also can get the impression that "external mediation" is all good and "internal mediation" all bad. But this would be an oversimplification of a complex problem. Not all external mediation is good, and not all internal mediation is bad. Take Don Quixote, the example given by Girard in *Deceit* as typical of external mediation. To be sure, if we compare him with Dostoevski's man from the underground, the Manchegan Knight appears a lot healthier, or rather a lot more sincere and honest, than his Russian counterpart. But we cannot ignore the fact that he is, nevertheless, mad; and Cervantes leaves no room for doubt about that. Clearly, in Cervantes' mind not all external mediators are the same, independently of the distance (in itself an existentially complex notion) at which they may stand from the subject. Some, like Amadis, a purely fictional one, is definitely the wrong model to follow. On the other hand, in his recent book on Shakespeare (*A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991]),

Girard describes a good and admirable case of internal mediation in the person of Hermione in *Winter's Tale*, the most Christian drama in Shakespeare's repertoire. In fact, since Girard frequently refers to the imitation of Christ—the defining imitation for a Christian—as the very model of all good mimesis, we could ask the following question: In the ideal Christian imitation of Christ, is Christ an external or an internal mediator? The answer, it seems to me, would have to be both.

In general, one could perhaps say that the distinction between external and internal mediation, as well as the ever present danger of sliding from the former to the latter, is quite clear. The distinction works very well in the case of *bad* mimesis: mimesis of what Girard calls deviated or false transcendence. But it seems to lose its importance and its existential relevance in the case of *good* mimesis. After all, whether potential rivals are kept at a great distance from each other or close to each other is of great importance; on the other hand, in the good mimesis of genuine love and mutual respect, such a distance, at the very least, loses its urgency.

Chapter 2 deals with "Sacrificial Violence and Scapegoat." The convincing ease with which Golsan passes from triangular desire to the sacred-making crisis and the scapegoat mechanism stands in contrast to the surprise, even the bewilderment, with which many of us read *Violence and the Sacred* (1972) after being already familiar with Girard's first book. As posed by Golsan, the problem is rather simple: "In attempting to assess the impact of mimetic desire on the development of culture and social institutions . . . Girard is obliged to confront one major problem at the outset: the destructive potential of mimetic desire. If imitation of others leads inevitably to rivalry and conflict, and if all humans act mimetically, then humanity as a whole would appear to be doomed to an endless cycle of competition and violence. Human survival and the genesis and development of culture are difficult to conceive under these conditions" (p. 29).

The solution to the problem lies, of course, in the very mimetic character of human violence: "In order to understand how scapegoating occurs, Girard argues that one need simply consider the nature of violence and the mimetic process itself. . . . In imitating each other, the members of the community copy each other's violence and take as the object of their violence the focus of their model's hostilities. Once this process begins, a chain reaction takes place, and soon *all* members of the community share a common outlet for their hostile energies: the scapegoat itself" (p. 35). This is, so to speak, pure Girard. Golsan examines this process, first in the literature studied by Girard from this particular perspective (Greek tragedy and Shakespeare)—to which he adds his own excellent analysis of Celine's 1932 novel *Journey to the End of Night*—and then in "Primitive Rites and Rituals" (p.55).

Then comes the central chapter on myth. "While [Girard] shares [with others] the view that myths are not precise accounts of historical occurrences,

he does argue that they originate in real or historical events and are in fact distorted representations of these events" (p. 61). The reality behind the myth is the real violence behind the victimizing mechanism that founds the community; and the distortion is by no means accidental but an integral part of the victimizing mechanism itself, which does not and cannot, originally, see itself as such. Myths are "persecution texts" similar to those we can easily recognize as such in our own culture (typical anti-Jewish texts, witch-hunting, etc.), in which the sacralizing process inherent in the victimizing mechanism works to the full, transforming its victims into gods or sacred monsters. All of this is clearly explained by Golsan, who also uses Girard's critique of Levi-Strauss's theory of myth "as a convenient starting point" to examine "how Girard arrived at his theory" (p. 69). A number of Girardian analyses of myths are presented, including the one about "Romulus and Remus and the Founding of Rome" (p. 78).

In Girard, myths are, therefore, "an authentic source of knowledge of human origins" (p. 84), but they are also, inevitably, a formidable cover-up of an original violence, which cannot be faced squarely by the primitive community without risking utter annihilation. This founding cover-up is precisely the *sacred*, or rather the primitive sacred.

And after the sacralizing cover-up comes the revelation of the cover-up, that is, "The Bible: Antidote to Violence," which is Golsan's title for chapter 4. "What is the essence of Biblical revelation?" asks Golsan. "It centers on a change—or, more precisely, a reversal—of perspective. The violent origins of culture, and specifically acts of foundational, sacrificial violence, are viewed from the standpoint of the victim rather than of the persecutor" (p. 85). The limits of this review do not allow for a full commentary on this chapter. Suffice it to say that, in my view, this is probably the best chapter in the book. Golsan touches on practically every aspect of Girard's reading of the Bible, and he does it with great fidelity to the Girardian text.

Then he presents with great objectivity and candor some of the main objections that have been raised against Girard's theory, as well as some purely negative reactions. Occasionally, when the objection rests on a clear misunderstanding of Girard's text, Golsan is quite capable of saying so and exposing the error. One can only regret that he does not do that in the case of some blatant distortions and misunderstandings of Girardian theory of the feminist variety.

The book also includes an interview with Girard, an appendix in which Girard himself analyzes a Venda myth from Africa, and a very comprehensive bibliography.

As a whole, Golsan's book is an excellent and much needed introduction not only to Girard's concept of myth but to Girard's thought in general.

CESÁREO BANDERA

Professor of Romance Languages
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, NC 27514