

Kolakowski is right to be sharply realist about solutions to philosophical problems: If I am free then it is within my power to not do what I do. If my actions are causally determined then I cannot but do what I do. If there is a God then it is false that there is no God and *vice versa*. If everything knowable is scientifically knowable then there is no knowledge accessible only through mysticism and *vice versa*, and so on.

In 'The Philosophical Role of the Reformation: Martin Luther and the Origins of Subjectivity' (pp. 143–160) Kolakowski calls subjectivity 'the embryo of modern philosophy' and says 'philosophy is constantly striving to return to a primary, unmediated human subjectivity' (pp. 159–160). I contest this. Although Husserl's doctrine of the transcendental ego admittedly falls under this description, it is an exception. For Kant, subjectivity is formally constituted by the transcendental unity of apperception. For Hegel, subjectivity is socially constituted at a profound level by the struggle of master and slave. In scientific and pseudo-scientific philosophy there is no subject, or only a reduction of the subject to a complex physical object. In poststructuralism the subject is deconstructed. If Kolakowski's embryo grew to be Cartesian it was aborted soon thereafter. It does not make much sense to speak of the 'origins' of subjectivity unless these are divine. One's own existence *qua* one's own is a metaphysical mystery that cannot be explained away, or even explained, philosophically.

Kolakowski rightly criticises Louis Althusser for a lack of analytical rigour in his *For Marx* (1969); grossly and tendentiously assimilating 'says' and 'proves' for example, and for huge historical blunders, such as ascribing a quasi-Aristotelian or Scholastic theory of abstraction to empiricists. It would be interesting to hear Kolakowski's judgement on Althusser's paper 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (1971). At the end of 'Karl Marx and the Classical Definition of Truth' (pp. 173–195) Kolakowski says Antonio Gramsci's interpretation of Marx's epistemology is 'roughly in line' with his own and arguably Althusser's allocation of causal efficacy to ideology in historical transitions is partly anticipated by Gramsci.

In 'Heresy' (pp. 263–288) Kolakowski claims 'A historian cannot accept the definition of heresy accepted in the Roman (or any other) Church, otherwise he would be assuming the viewpoint of a particular body, and the teaching of this body would be decisive in identifying the historical facts' (p. 266). Although there is such a thing as not assuming the viewpoint of a particular body there is no such thing as writing history without deploying some set of assumptions. History is more explanatory if methodologically self-conscious, so if the historian's assumptions are Catholic they should be made explicit as such. It is the responsibility of the historian to write the truth, to report what happened in the past as it happened. Suppose the Roman Catholic definition of 'heresy' is correct. It follows that those doctrines correctly identified as heretical by the Church really were heretical. If the historian should write the truth, he should write that truth. It is historically impossible for the historian to deploy a retrospective *epoche* which guarantees agnosticism about beliefs held in the past, because the historian is himself historically situated. History is a relationship between the present and the past, or one time and another.

It is not true that by eschewing a Catholic commitment the historian occupies some 'neutral' vantage point. There is no such thing as not being committed.

STEPHEN PRIEST

**UNDERSTANDING OLD TESTAMENT ETHICS: APPROACHES AND EXPLORATIONS** by John Barton, *Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville & London, 2003, Pp. xi + 212, \$ 24.95 pbk.*

It is a slightly odd task to review a book which itself amounts to an extended book review, and this is what John Barton has produced: a substantial work in its own

right undoubtedly, but one that serves principally as a review of and a response to Eckart Otto's 1994 work, *Theologische Ethik des Alten Testaments*. This is by no means a bad thing, except inasmuch as the reader unfamiliar with Otto's book, or perhaps even unable to approach a book not yet available in English, might feel a little wrong-footed from the beginning. Nonetheless, there are few writers on the Old Testament more worthy than Barton of receiving the reader's absolute confidence: trust to his reading of Otto, and enjoy a great deal more than a long book review: for this critique serves as the springboard for a novel and stimulating approach to the moral theology of the Old Testament.

It is, moreover, an approach that will be of particular interest to scholars in the Thomist tradition, for the heart of Barton's argument is that an important yet often ignored element of the ethical teaching of the Hebrew Bible is a notion of natural law. To be precise, taking the examples of Amos's Oracles against the Nations (Amos 1.3–2.5), various parts of the Book of Isaiah, and the Book of Daniel, Barton demonstrates that these prophetic books not so much preach or argue for the concept of natural law as simply pre-suppose it. Such a view stands in marked contrast with those, largely of the Barthian tendency and exemplified by Walter Eichrodt and Johannes Hempel, who see submission to the divine will as the basis for Old Testament ethics. Barton warns us that the simplistic distinction between this 'Hebrew' idea and the Greco-Roman concept of natural law and justice will not stand; thus he joins the growing chorus of biblical scholars who will not admit the presupposition that Hebrew thought, and (or even because) Hebrew language, is fundamentally opposed to Western thought.

Indeed it is typical of Barton that he is wary of any simplistic, monolithic approach to scripture, to the notion that a single conceptual key will unlock the whole of the bible and thus open the way to an authentically biblical theology. The history of this approach to the Old Testament is well-known and need not be rehearsed, but this makes it all the sadder that, now often under the heading 'covenant' rather than *Heilsgeschichte* (or whatever), it still tempts the unwary exegete. Few scholars have a more comprehensive or a more critical awareness than Barton of the changing moods of biblical studies, and it is this combination of wisdom and knowledge that leads him once again to warn us not to exclude large tracts of evidence for the sake of a neat theory.

With reference to Otto's recent book, it is a rather surprising omission of evidence that has attracted Barton's attention, namely the content of the prophetic writings. Otto, it appears, limits himself to the legal and the wisdom texts in his task of uncovering the principal currents of Old Testament ethics. It must be admitted that, surprising though this omission is, it is as great a surprise, though perhaps a happier one, to follow Barton's clear argument that inclusion of the prophetic books would make one more and not less inclined to admit that an idea of natural law is one of the bases of biblical ethics.

The argument is no less clear because the book is in fact a collection of originally separate essays, written between 1978 and 2001. The introduction and conclusion written for the present book, along with the careful arrangement of the material, succeed in bringing together what could have been a much more confused collection to make a very worthwhile whole. It is, of course, inevitable that there is some material here not directly germane to the overall thrust of the book: a notable example is a substantial part of the chapter on Amos, discussing the 'authenticity' of particular oracles. Such an expression is not one that Barton would use today without a good deal more nuance, but we can perhaps forgive it in an article based on his doctoral thesis of 1974. In any case, there are great treasures to be found in many of these seeming dead-ends.

Barton ends his study with a look to the future of this aspect of biblical studies. He places himself firmly and without embarrassment within the historical-critical tradition and therefore hopes for a volume, to supplement the work of Otto,

which would explore in detail the ethical teachings and presuppositions of the prophets (as distinct from 'the prophetic books', perhaps). One might tentatively add, as Barton mentions only in passing, that the narrative parts of the Old Testament also have a role to play in establishing the ethical *milieu* of the Old Testament. It is to be hoped that someone, perhaps less wary of the literary-critical approach, might take upon themselves the even more daunting task of a volume on this topic. Meanwhile, we should be grateful to John Barton for doing so much to prepare the ground, and doing it with such style.

RICHARD OUNSWORTH OP

**AD MONACHOS by Evagrius Ponticus, translation and commentary by Jeremy Driscoll OSB [Ancient Christian Writers no.59], *The Newman Press* imprint of *Paulist Press*, New York, 2003, Pp. xiv + 398, \$ 39.95 hbk.**

This new volume from the series *Ancient Christian Writers* is a welcome addition to the works of Evagrius Ponticus available in English. The actual text, in both Greek and English, occupies only 25 pages (pp. 41–66) out of 398. It is a strange text, consisting in 137 brief sentences of enigmatic proverb-like sayings. The other 373 pages of exposition are therefore not only welcome but essential. In this, Dr Driscoll has provided an admirable addition to the discussion of the works of Evagrius, one of the major monastic writers of the early Church.

The introduction contains a discussion of the reliability of the Greek text used here, concluding that the 1913 critical edition by H. Gressmann from five Greek manuscripts (from 12<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries) is, with some reference to later work, still standard. In part one, the Greek text of *Ad Monachos* and Driscoll's English translation are given. In part two, the structure of the text is examined, showing that these proverbs are far from haphazard but are presented in a highly sophisticated order. Part three gives a perspective on Evagrius as a writer, positioning his work within the setting of 4<sup>th</sup>-century Egypt, and part four returns to a close reading of the text, proverb by proverb, expounding many of them in detail, as part of the whole of Evagrius's thought; as Driscoll says, this is to be reading 'Evagrius with Evagrius' (p. x). A select bibliography and an index complete the volume.

It is clear that this collection of proverbs from Evagrius is of importance for the understanding of the Evagrius corpus as a whole: it is also clear that it forms a part of our knowledge of early monasticism. For instance, such sayings as 'better a man lying down to sleep than a monk keeping vigil with idle thoughts' (p. 50) echo the severe comments of the Desert Fathers about the need for inner commitment rather than outward show. Driscoll, however, suggests that these texts are of interest to a wider audience than monks and scholars, with such sayings as 'if you imitate Christ you will become blessed. Your soul will die his death and it will not derive evil from its flesh; instead your exodus will be like the exodus of a star and your resurrection will glow like the sun' (p. 44).

The translation aims to follow Origen's dictum, and be both word for word and sense for sense, an excellent plan though in this case giving the shape of the Greek words means at times that the English sense appears somewhat stilted. This is, however, in all other ways an admirable presentation of a text central to the study of early Christian monasticism, illuminated by the extensive commentary on every phrase of Evagrius.

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