

credal implications are clear enough. As Collins herself warns us religious educators face a difficult task if they are asked to re-establish a model for ethical decision-making that is based on religious authority' (p.101). There is much else to savour in this collection. Not least is Jessica Lindohf's alert, and theologically sophisticated account of the role of Judeo-Christian apocalyptic in popular cinema ('in an era when the Church is now turning its back on the apocalypse the challenge is being taken up by popular culture' p.199) and Kieran Flanagan's dazzling demolition of Giddens' *Transformations of Intimacy* where 'as relationships become purified in calculation, the need to let go in love is undermined' (p.113).

Nonetheless, good as many of these essays are, some broad caveats remain. One is that the precise relationship between so-called 'virtue ethics' and public and private morality (itself a component of post-modernity) is not always clearly delineated. The whole question of what moral absolutes should be retained, and by whom, in a morally relative universe, is not *directly* confronted by any of the contributors. Another is that a strongly documented case could be made for the recent emergence of 'human rights' as a kind of globalised virtue ethic, serving of only as the secular theology of secular global institutions such as the U.N., but also as something which has become increasingly salient within the in-house theologies of religious bodies themselves. Above all, and perhaps inevitably, papers originally delivered in 1997 and finally published prior to 11 September 2001 have a certain *déjà vu*, even unreality, about them. Indeed it could be argued that the present macro-scenario (where polarization has displaced globalization) puts metaphysics in general, and virtue ethics in particular, firmly back into the public, and private, domains.

Behind the banality of phrases like 'the axis of evil' and the incapacity of elites to ask 'but who is terrorizing *whom?*' lies a highly traditional debate about the ethics of a just war. The vocabulary may be archaic, even arcane, but the consequences are not, especially for virtue ethics themselves. To adopt Max Weber's well-known remarks (cited by Tester p.42) in his 1918 lecture: 'I do not know how one might wish to decide 'scientifically' the value of Judeo-Christian and Islamic culture: for here...different gods struggle with one another and for all times to come'. A chilling prospect for all of us.

GRAHAM HOWES

A BRIEF GUIDE TO BELIEFS: Ideas, Theologies, Mysteries and Movements by Linda Edwards. *Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2001. Pp 578, £12.99 pbk.*

A throng of books has appeared in recent years claiming to tell you within one volume all you basically want to know about the world's religions. In fact, none of them can meet everybody's needs—some are dictionaries of religion, some anthologies, some introductory guides to the six or seven major faiths, some interfaith guides, some social or historical surveys. However, Linda Edwards bravely sets out to meet all our fundamental requirements in 578 pages. She tells us in her first sentence that her book

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is 'both a reference book and a guide'. Clearly she has given a lot of thought to how best she can achieve this, though—perhaps inevitably—she has exposed herself to the criticism of trying to take on too much.

The book is intended 'for the general reader or the Christian seminary student', not for professional theologians or teachers of religious studies. So it opens with six introductory summaries covering a massive field. Unfortunately, it is doubtful how helpful the first five of these will be for a reader who has not already got some very basic philosophical grounding. They are on present-day cultural pluralism, secularization and fundamentalism (which is seen as 'the flip side of postmodernity'); followed by brief treatments of the philosophical arguments down the ages for and against the existence of God; of the West's ethical theories from Plato onwards; of the debate between science and religion; and of the problem of evil and suffering.

The sixth introductory chapter, which runs to 68 pages and is entitled 'Aspects of Religion', is different. Here the author defines her methodology. She states that her approach in her book will be empathic, in other words, 'it recognises the need to be aware of one's own beliefs while attempting to understand another person's tradition'. Edwards argues, surely rightly, that in a world that is becoming increasingly international and multicultural a degree of understanding of faiths other than one's own is essential if we are to comprehend our own religious culture. She also states that her approach will be eclectic, in other words she will adapt her approach as she considers appropriate for each case. In chapter 6 itself, in which she provides a simple conceptual framework for studying religious beliefs, she employs a broadly phenomenological approach. The 'aspects of religion' she focuses on in this chapter—a wider range of concepts than in many books of this kind—are God and religious language, salvation, death and the afterlife, moral action, prayer and meditation, gender and religion, mysticism, and scripture and sacred text.

Here, for the first time in her book, specific beliefs of the principal different faiths are brought together. Inevitably the treatments are short: remember the author is mainly concerned here with helping students to organise their work. As throughout the whole of the rest of this book, each sub-sections consists not only of accounts of the relevant aspects of the various faiths but also brief biographies of famous founders and teachers, and extracts from appropriate texts. Among these this reviewer can find only one serious misquotation. The extract on p.123, in the section on mysticism, supposedly from Meister Eckhart's *Tractate 11*, is in fact made up of four unrelated snippets of a bad translation of an old and unreliable edition of *Tractate 2*, which scholars for almost a century have agreed are not by Eckhart at all.

Next, in chapter 7, we have treatments ranging in length from 8 to 21 pages of twelve world faiths—Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Shintoism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, and the Baha'i faith. Rather more space should have been given to Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and probably Buddhism, in other words the

religions which (along with Christianity) feature most frequently in the headlines in our time. Surprisingly, surely, Edwards dedicates the next 140 pages (a quarter of the whole book) to a history of Christianity and to the better-known protestant cults. This does seem an unbalanced allocation of space in a book about world-wide religious belief. On the other hand, to dispose of the Roman Catholic Church, which currently half the world's Christians belong to, one-sixth of the world's entire population, in a mere eleven of those pages does seem a trifle perfunctory. Moreover, this little bit of space is not particularly well used. Cardinal Newman occupies nearly two of these pages, Opus Dei nearly one, and Vatican II one-third of a page.

However, the book closes with two chapters which reveal that Edwards is ready to push her boundaries further than do most writers of books of this genre. She devotes a chapter to modern pagan, occult and esoteric thought, though it is disappointing that, of native religious traditions (so important to understand if we are to begin to comprehend religion in sub-Saharan Africa and in parts of South America and of Eastern Asia), she only gives mention to those in North America. Lastly comes a chapter on the development of 'personal growth' movements, the humanistic and secular equivalents of religion. The book's appendices (charts of numbers and places, and a glossary) are simple but good.

This is an intelligently organised book, it is easy to find one's way about it, and it is lucidly written. It has some quite serious imbalances, attributable mainly to the fact that the book is aimed primarily at the protestant American market. All the same, bearing in mind its scope and the type of readership it is principally intended for, *A Brief Guide to Beliefs* is a welcome guide.

JOHN ORME MILLS OP

A THEOLOGY OF THE SUBLIME by Clayton Crockett, Routledge, London, 2001. Pp. 160, £45.00 hbk.

In an essay entitled 'The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy', John Milbank has written that, in modernity, the 'Kantian sublimity of pure infinite possibility' becomes confused with the 'traditional theological notion of a divine darkness that is not the abyss of contentless will, but rather the darkness to us of an utterly dazzling light'. Clayton Crockett's book makes just that modern confusion, argues that it has its merits, and develops it into a postmodern theology.

Chapter One argues that, like Kantian epistemology, postmodern theology is a formal discipline, characterised by an approach of 'ceaseless questioning', and sets out to justify a reading of Kantian critical philosophy as negative theology. Chapter Two mounts a defence of Kant against the perceived attacks of 'Cambridge Radical Orthodoxy'. Chapter Three discusses the use made of Kant by Heidegger and Lyotard. For Heidegger, notions of temporality and imagination are taken from the First Critique to fashion his own motif of subjectivity, *Dasein*: this is seen as an