

ABSTRACTS

Evan Fales, *Scientific Explanations of Mystical Experiences, Part I: The Case of St Teresa.*

Several writers have argued for the implausibility of there being naturalistic explanations of mystical experience. These writers recognize that the evidential significance of mystical experiences for theism depends upon whether explanations that exclude supernatural agency can be discounted; but they seem unaware of some of the best scientific work done in this area. Part I of the present paper introduces the theory of I. M. Lewis, an anthropologist, and tests it against the case of St Teresa. I use Teresa because of her prominence, and because we have considerable biographical data for her. I conclude that Lewis's approach, suitably supplemented, is strikingly successful in explaining this case.

Katherin Rogers, *The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity.*

Traditionally God has been considered absolutely simple. Some contemporary philosophers argue that this means that God *is* His attributes and hence is mere quality, and that all the divine attributes name exactly the same quality, which is incoherent. However, the contemporary debate misunderstands the tradition. God is not quality, He is *act*. Analogies from human experience can minimize the initial implausibility. There are worrisome corollaries to this doctrine, the most troubling being that God's nature is somehow dependent on the choices of His free creatures. This conclusion, though radical, is not as shocking as it appears.

Steven S. Aspenson, *Swinburne on Atonement.*

I criticize Richard Swinburne's account of the need for and means of atonement in his *Responsibility and Atonement*. I offer objections to his understanding and use of the notion of 'the gift of life' in his account of the need for atonement; and closely related to that, I show that his conclusions about duties to God as a benefactor do not follow from his reasons. Furthermore, when examined closely, these conclusions seem false. In relation to his account of the means of atonement, I argue that the mechanism he provides to explain how Christ's actions benefit sinners does not work.

Michael McGhee, *The Locations of the Soul.*

Belief in life after death is implicated, for the typical 'Wittgensteinian', with Cartesian dualism, and the latter seen to entail a private inner subject that cannot survive the anti-private language argument. But Descartes does not really suffer from this defect and belief in life after death is not merely a product of 'confused' Cartesian metaphysics. Descartes is presented as an intellectual analogue of the formation of the concept of 'soul' in spiritual contexts. Just as metaphysical reflection forces us to conclude, for Descartes, that we are only *contingently* flesh and blood beings, so it is only under the condition of recalcitrant experience that exemplary

practitioners seem forced to forge a distinction between body and soul, thus revising influentially their view of themselves as single beings both conscious and extended.

Gavin D'Costa, *The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions.*

In the debate about Christian attitudes to other religions, a threefold typology has emerged depicting differing Christian responses: pluralism, inclusivism and exclusivism. (This typology is not restricted to the Christian debate alone.) Traditionally, pluralism is opposed to exclusivism, the former claiming that it is arrogant and untenable to make exclusive truth claims, and that all religions are potentially equal paths to salvation and truth. In contrast, I argue that pluralism must always logically be a form of exclusivism and that nothing called pluralism really exists. The main purpose of my paper is to show that there is no high-ground in the pluralist position, for in principle its logic is no different from the exclusivist position. If this is established, then the debate can proceed with more substantial issues regarding the justification and clarification of truth claims.

John O'Leary-Hawthorne and Daniel Howard-Snyder, *Are Beliefs About God Theoretical Beliefs? Reflections on Aquinas and Kant.*

The need to address our question arises from two sources, one in Kant and the other in a certain type of response to so-called Reformed epistemology. The first source consists in a tendency to distinguish theoretical beliefs from practical beliefs (commitments to the world's being a certain way versus commitments to certain pictures to live by), and to treat theistic belief as *mere* practical belief. We trace this tendency in Kant's corpus, and compare and contrast it with Aquinas's view and a more conservative Kantian view. We reject the theistic-belief-as-mere-practical-belief view: it is bad descriptive anthropology, it embraces a misguided ideal of a fragmented self unattainable by human beings, and it will deter people from the most desirable sort of faith. The second source consists in the idea that since theistic beliefs function as answers to why-questions, their epistemic status hangs on whether they meet certain distinctively explanatory standards, whatever support they might receive from other sources. We argue that this is a non-sequitur and suggest questions for further research.

Don Fawkes and Tom Smythe, *Simplicity and Theology.*

Richard Swinburne has given a defense of arguments for the existence of God (and in particular of teleological arguments) in his book *The Existence of God* (1979/1991). This paper argues that such theistic arguments fail, and poses some general problems for theistic arguments. Swinburne's use of a principle of simplicity is not given adequate justification and, if justified, works against theism. There are adequate rebuttals to Swinburne's arguments that depend upon there being few particles of basic physics, universal laws of nature, cogent cosmological argument, and temporal order in the universe. Theistic arguments falter on malleability, on going well beyond evidence, on anthropomorphism, on treating consistency as if it were evidence or explanation, on selective and inconsistent use of principles, and on a lack of any serious attempt to disprove hypotheses. All of this serves to support the conclusion suggested by Hume's posthumous theological writings that theistic arguments are so malleable, profligate, overreaching, equivocal, anthropomorphic, selective, inconsistent, and uncritical as to be inept.

Jane Compson, *The Dalai Lama and the World Religions: A False Friend?*

The Dalai Lama is well known for his tolerance of other religious traditions, actively encouraging people to celebrate their own faiths rather than convert to Buddhism. However, far from being a pluralist as this attitude suggests, he believes that ultimate liberation is obtained only through the practice of Buddhist teachings. This apparent contradiction is resolved when one examines some of the teachings that he follows, such as the notions of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), skilful means (*upāya*), karma and rebirth. On such examination it becomes apparent that it is precisely through the prioritising of these Buddhist teachings that his tolerance is rendered possible.