

British author. Must the exigencies of the market always dictate?

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An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion (New edition)

Brian Davies

Oxford University Press, 1993, £8.99

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An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion

B.R. Tilghman

Blackwell 1994,

ISBN 0-631-18937-8, 0-631-18938-6 (Paperback).

RÉSUMÉ

L'ouvrage de Davies est une édition revue de l'ouvrage de 1982. Il aborde successivement plusieurs sujets : le problème du langage sur Dieu, le mal, les miracles, l'éternité et la vie après la mort. Il présente un Dieu éloigné et atemporel. L'ouvrage est assez difficile à suivre et l'auteur, un dominicain, laisse souvent au lecteur le soin de se faire sa propre idée. Les lecteurs évangéliques trouveront sans doute que des arguments plus positifs auraient dû être développés de manière plus complète.

L'ouvrage de Tilghman se veut une introduction, mais se trouve être plutôt une histoire de la pensée. Il se montre souvent hostile au théisme traditionnel. La façon dont les croyances sont exposées est souvent simplifiée à l'excès. L'auteur doit beaucoup à L. Wittgenstein et à D.Z. Philips. Le sens de la religion se réduirait, selon lui, à une certaine manière de vivre, de se comprendre soi-même et de considérer ses relations avec autrui.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Bei Davies' Buch handelt es sich um eine Revision der Ausgabe von 1982. Es ist thematisch angelegt und behandelt z.B. das Problem einer Sprache über Gott, das Böse, Wunder, die Ewigkeit und das Leben nach dem Tod. Gott erscheint als fern und zeitlos. Das Buch ist recht schwer verständlich, und der Autor (ein Dominikaner) überläßt es häufig dem Leser, sich sein eigenes Urteil zu bilden. Evangelikale würden es wahrscheinlich begrüßen, wenn vorteilhafte Argumente ausführlicher entfaltet worden wären.

Tilghmans Buch ist eigentlich als Einleitung konzipiert, geht jedoch eher wie eine Ideengeschichte vor, die dem traditionellen Theismus ausgesprochen feindlich begegnet. Glaubensdarstellungen werden

häufig übermäßig vereinfacht wiedergegeben. Tilghman ist stark von Wittgenstein und D.Z. Phillips geprägt. Folglich gilt Religion nur dann als sinnvoll, wenn sie verstanden wird als "eine Art der Lebensgestaltung, des Verständnisses seiner selbst sowie seiner Beziehungen zu anderen Menschen".

When two text books share the same transparent but unimaginative title we might expect them to take a similar, rather predictable treatment of the subject they discuss. In this case, the contrast between the authors' approach to the philosophy of religion could not be more marked. Brian Davies' work is a revision of his very successful first edition first published in 1982. The book still consists of a series of chapters each of which deals with a particular argument or topic although there are links in reasoning behind the sequence in which they come. The order is basically the same, although the original first chapter, *Verification and Falsification*, has become part of a larger discussion entitled *Philosophy and Religious Belief*, and the chapter on omniscience has been absorbed into the new chapter on eternity. The material has been extensively rewritten to take account of more recent developments and discussion and the result is a longer book.

Davies begins by asking: 'What is the role of philosophy with respect to religious belief?' His answer briefly considers the attacks of logical positivism and its successors, together with the work of Karl Barth, D.Z. Phillips and Alvin Plantinga. He concludes that it is meaningful to consider the existence of God and that belief in God can be defended by 'means of argument, reasons, evidence or the like.' Next he considers problems associated with talking about God and moves on to examine arguments that the problem of evil either counts as strong evidence against the existence of God or demonstrates that his existence is impossible. He considers that a further line of defence is to show that, in spite of the existence of evil we can show that it is reasonable to believe in God and moves the discussion to consider the various classical arguments for the existence of God. The last three chapters deal with miracles, eternity and life after death.

In spite of his claim that the book is 'a basic introduction for those who are approaching the philosophy or religion for the first time' and his attempt to 'write on the assumption that readers have little or no theological background', Davies' work is reasonably demanding and would really need some philosophical back-

ground to make it fully accessible. Many Christians might like to see favourable arguments developed more forcefully, whereas Davies often prefers to let readers decide for themselves. The influence of his Dominican background is more muted in the revised edition, but the book tends to present God as a remote timeless first cause whom it is senseless to describe as a morally good agent. I think that evangelical Christianity must ask for more. However Davies' *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* remains a well organised, up to date contribution to the subject and an excellent teaching resource.

R. Tilghman's Introduction is obviously presented as a text book with a Preface: *Addressed to the Instructor* and attempts to be much more of a general introduction to philosophy within the context of the history of ideas. Thus the introductory chapter *Philosophy and Religion: Tracing our origins* offers potted accounts of Greek science, mathematics and philosophy, the history and thought of the Old Testament and the interaction of Christianity and philosophy. As with many such brief introductions the accounts are often over simplified, partial and contentious. For example: 'There is little, if any, suggestion of monotheism in the first five books of the Bible.' The other chapters are entitled *The existence of God, The Bible, Truth and History, Religion and Science, Religion and Ethics and Religion, Life and Philosophy*. In contrast with Davies' cautious defence this book is openly hostile to traditional theism. The author offers 'suggestions about how religious life and belief may be understood when it is stripped of the hindrance of shabby intellectual baggage.' Such baggage includes 'fundamentalist' views of the Bible, Creationism as 'fraudulent science', and the mythological features of Christianity as argued for by Bultmann, together with Bultmann's own appeal to existentialism. The arguments of Aquinas are explained entirely within the shortcomings of Aristotelian science and the standard Kantian objections are held to destroy the Ontological Argument. Miracles are discussed within the wider area of religion and science and once again we are treated to a brief history of scientific development. However, some useful conclusions are drawn about the role of religious commitment in the concept of miracle.

Tilghman concludes that religious life and belief can survive only when it is understood to be 'a way of living, as a way of understanding

oneself and one's relations with other people.' He stands firmly within a tradition of thought stemming from the work of Wittgenstein and represented on this side of the Atlantic by philosophers like D.Z. Phillips. Thus religions are self-contained ways of understanding the world so that 'religion and science are very different kinds of things and it would be a mistake to insist that the one adopt the practice of the other or risk being a failure.' It is the task of the philosopher merely to observe 'what religious people say and do, how they think of the world, themselves, and other people. We can note, for example, that from within the practice of religion believers do not ask for evidence to confirm their belief.'

Tilghman's book reads as if much of the philosophy of religion developed over the last twenty five years had never been written. At the same time it might have a place as an articulate and influential expression of views that students need to understand as well as answer.

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***Theologie und Frömmigkeit im
Zeitalter des Barock: Gesammelte
Aufsätze***

Johannes Wallmann

Tübingen: Mohr, 1995, 439 S., DM 178,-, Hb.,
ISBN 3-16-146351-X

SUMMARY

This collection of essays, based mainly on lectures by Wallmann, well-known for his studies of Spener, comprises detailed studies in Lutheran Orthodoxy and in Pietism in the baroque period. In individual essays, Wallmann considers, among other things, the adoption of mystical literature by Johann Arndt, millennialism and the 'primitive Christians' claimed as disciples by Spener. Further essays address particular aspects of the life and work of Spener. In addition there are studies of the reciprocal influence of German and European Pietism, and of topics in the localities of Erfurt and Helmstedt. An analysis of the library of Johann Sebastian Bach shows that he was an orthodox Lutheran.

The essays published here not only add certain contributions of a historical-theological nature to research into Lutheran Orthodoxy and Pietism, but also demonstrate the author's concern, by means of detailed studies of the origins of Pietism, to