
In the conclusion to this book, Anthony Rudd expresses his overall intention as having been ‘to root out some confusions and to make clearer some of what is involved in ethico-religious commitment’. This, he seems more than adequately to have achieved. Alongside the scant collection of good secondary literature on Kierkegaard (such as C. Stephen Evans’s *Kierkegaard’s Fragments and Postscript*, Louis Pojman’s *The Logic of Subjectivity*, and Patrick Gardiner’s *Kierkegaard*), Rudd’s work may be favourably noted, not least in terms of both its lucidity and its intricacy.

The book divides into four lengthy chapters, and begins from the recognition, and evaluation, of the ‘Disengaged View’, an outlook obtained at the end of a process of abstraction from the particular toward an objective stance; a view Rudd sees as ‘central to modern culture’. He is concerned with the dilemma this stance effects in terms of the possibility of a cogent social morality. Kierkegaard, he argues, provides us with a possible means of overcoming this disengagement, through our ethical commitment to purposeful projects with which we can both instil meaning in our lives, and acquire personal identity as individuals. At the same time, however, the religious life alone is that which offers the individual a single overriding *telos*, unachievable in the purely ethical domain.

Rudd has provided an extremely useful template, from which the reader may feel readily equipped to tackle Kierkegaard’s work without the fear of misunderstanding. He illustrates an impressive grasp of the three stages of existence (which he further sub-divides into five), providing a most incisive evaluation of the nature of each as they merge with, and differ from, each other. The distinctions drawn between ‘religiousness A’ and ‘religiousness B’ are particularly illuminating, and perhaps some of the most fruitful offered as commentary. Again, Rudd has a good eye for rooting out misconceptions of Kierkegaard. The common blunders of interpretation are corrected: that Kierkegaard is a thoroughgoing existentialist; notorious misrepresentations of the ‘Truth is subjectivity’ motif; and criticisms of Kierkegaard’s alleged asocial individualism, are all dealt with sensitively. The pseudonym problem is also sensibly handled.

If criticism need be made of this book, it would relate to those parts of the text which are concerned with the application of Kierkegaard’s ideas to the sphere of contemporary ethical theory and personal identity. Rudd tells us that he wishes to ‘reconstruct’ elements of the ethical sphere of existence, applying these aspects of Kierkegaard’s thought to problems in contemporary philosophy. So, there are sections of the book where Rudd leaves Kierkegaard behind to explore, for example, Parfit, Derrida, Quine and Davidson, and, while none of this is inadequately executed, one is grateful
when Kierkegaard resumes his centre stage position. In other words, a certain superfluity surrounds those parts of the book not dealing explicitly with Kierkegaard’s own thought. These comments aside, however, this book would, and one hopes will, act as a fine introductory text to undergraduate Kierkegaard studies in a way that other, less accessible commentaries (Evans’s and Pojman’s, for example), fail to do.

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Although the author describes this book as ‘a study of the nature and grounds of religion and its function in life and culture’ (preface, p. x) it turns out to be primarily a critique of scientific naturalism. In a wide-ranging discussion encompassing religion, cultural change, metaphysics and spirituality, Adams presents us with the fruits of his life-long dialogue with the metaphysical presuppositions of modern scientific culture. His basic argument is that naturalism is inconsistent and incoherent and that science, and any other cognitively significant activity, can only proceed on the basis of a humanistic metaphysic.

In language reminiscent of the humanism of Karl Rahner, the book opens with a discussion of the grounding of religion in the experience of self-transcendence and the struggle for identity and integration. The identification of religion with human consciousness and the expression of this in culture establishes the key motif for the entire book. In the second and third chapters the author provides us with a detailed discussion of the relationship between religious belief and beliefs in other sectors of culture. In this Adams restricts his attention to the Judaeo Christian tradition and the story of its transformation through contact with the changing categorial structures of western society. In a careful survey of developments in science, history and morality, he uncovers the basis of the intellectual difficulties facing modern believers. These he identifies not with scientific or historical method as such but with the naturalistic presumption that value, meaning and subjectivity are no longer to be recognized as dimensions of reality. He contends that modern believers can, and indeed should, modify their beliefs in the light of modern scholarship: what they cannot do, however, is reconcile their beliefs with the categorial assumptions of the prevailing naturalistic metaphysic. University and college teachers will welcome Adams’s clear and concise delineation of this problem. His treatment of both the historical unfolding of this problem and its philosophical implications is extremely helpful. Equally