

The study of this volume has much to offer the reader who is willing to see philosophical approaches amid the contributions of other disciplines rather than in isolation and apart.

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Kant and the Meaning of Religion. By Terry F. Godlove. New York NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 2014. Pp. 245. \$90.00 cloth.

Despite the alluring title, this book has very little to say about Immanuel Kant's theory of religion. Rather, it is a thoroughgoing study of his theory of how words acquire and retain their meanings that uses the word "religion" to illustrate the various aspects of Kant's position. The book does comment in some detail on theories of religion in general, inasmuch as many of the author's interlocutors are writers concerned with issues relating to how religious language and/or experience can be meaningful. But a discussion of Kant's official *definition* of religion is the closest that Terry Godlove comes to discussing *Kant's* multifaceted views on the nature and purpose of religious beliefs and practices.

The introduction and the conclusion place the book's six chapters in a religious setting by discussing an issue that receives relatively little explicit attention within the book itself: Nietzsche's reference to Kant as a "cunning Christian" seems to entail the accusation that the Critical philosophy itself covertly stacks the deck in favor of Kant's childhood religion. According to Godlove, a careful examination of Kant's theory of meaning in the first *Critique* reveals the vacuity of Nietzsche's claim: although he admits that some of Kant's basic epistemological distinctions are "walking along the edge of religious reflection" (p. 9), Godlove's aim in writing this book is to demonstrate that such distinctions have "nothing to do with Christianity." He gives us clear forewarning: "The Kant I wish to portray has no substantive connection with Christianity," at least insofar as Christianity is understood in terms of Protestant individualism (p. 10). Rather, Kant's epistemology points in some rather surprising directions, often highly relevant to contemporary discussions. Godlove notes, for example, that it would be interesting to examine how Kant's theory of meaning "plays out in the arena of ritual studies" (p. 11), but this is not a lead followed within the present book.

Chapter 1 explores Kant's theory of concept-formation, which Godlove calls "the spatial theory of concepts" (p. 18). According to this theory, every concept that we employ is part of a hierarchically interrelated network of concepts that intersect with each other like (potentially) endless collections of overlapping spheres. Their interrelations are so complex that, at least in the case of empirical concepts, we can never *fully* determine how a concept relates to specific individuals: "No amount of conceptual detail can guarantee univocal reference" (p. 19). The three main features of a concept, for Kant—namely, "generality, rule-governedness, and the denial of an *infima* [i.e., *lowest*] *species*" (p. 24)—are all commonly discussed in "contemporary portrayals of concepts." As such, Kant can be regarded as "an early, and probably the first, proponent of a strongly inferentialist theory of conceptual content," of the sort now associated with the work of Michael Dummett or Robert Brandom (p. 28).

What sets a priori concepts apart from such empirical conceptual content is that the former, through Kant's special procedure of transcendental deduction, *can* be fully determined. While Godlove fully recognizes this important distinction, he unfortunately pays little attention to this special Kantian form of philosophical justification, because it does not apply to "such empirical concepts as 'religion'" (p. 18; see also p. 33). Had he delved further into Kant's

actual theory of religion, especially as elaborated in *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, Godlove would have had to make more of the fact that Kant explicitly distinguishes between empirical religions (called “historical faiths”) and his own special (a priori!) concept of *rational* religion. But such an extension is beyond this book’s intended scope. While Godlove admits that Kant is an essentialist “as applied to concepts,” he emphasizes the fact that Kant’s epistemological distinctions require one to be an *anti*-essentialist “as applied to objects” (p.35). That is, insofar as we apply concepts to *know* any given object (including, for example, a particular religious tradition), our knowledge is *always* provisional.

Chapter 2 (on Kant’s theory of definition) begins by citing Kant’s official definition of religion “as ‘recognition of all duties as divine commands’” (p. 37). After reviewing the spatial theory of concepts, Godlove shows how various aspects of that theory can be illustrated by Kant’s definition. As for the *status* of Kant’s definition, he argues that Kant is attempting to isolate the analytic *essence* of what the concept “religion” entails. The further distinction made in *Religion* between “revealed” and “natural” religion demarcates two *species* of the genus “religion.” Those who criticize Kant’s definition as not being applicable to concrete religious traditions, Godlove points out, are not really criticizing his theory of religion but his theory of definition. “Concepts are general all the way down” (p. 57), and “Kant is well aware” that “his definition does not fit . . . even a single historical tradition” (p. 59). For Kant, the philosopher’s job is to set such definitions; testing them through “experiment” is the task of the social sciences, whose creation was largely due to Kant’s influence (pp. 61ff). Here Godlove launches into an interesting discussion of the Kantian influence on Durkheim and others, but unfortunately he makes no mention of the fact that in *Religion* Kant does claim to be conducting *two* “experiments” of his own, the second being close (if not identical) to the one that Godlove claims Kant bequeathed to social science.

In chapter 3 Godlove analyzes Kant’s understanding of the function of reason. Once we appreciate Kant’s view of the role of reason (the unity-seeking faculty) in guiding the progress of science, Godlove insightfully points out, we can see that the function of concepts and definitions is no different when applied to the study of religion than it is when applied in any other scientific context. Here he defends the controversial position that *regulative* uses of ideas “make experience possible” as much as constitutive ones do (p. 86). He admits, however, that this is a strange form of necessity indeed. Here Godlove would have done well to consider an option that I have proposed: that reason’s regulative use conveys an analytic a posteriori kind of necessity. If its necessity is synthetic a priori, then it becomes indistinguishable from what is constitutive of human knowledge.

Chapters 4 and 5 offer what seem like a parenthetical discussion, respectively, of the role of experience in human cognition (i.e., how non-conceptual content can be conveyed meaningfully) and of how our experience of ourselves (i.e., as an inferred “self”) illustrates this aspect of human experience. In the former Godlove persuasively demonstrates that Schleiermacher was assuming an essentially Kantian view that “the deliverances of receptivity are immediate and non-discursive” (p. 114) but when applying this fact about human experience to the understanding of religion, he committed errors that Kant avoided. In the latter he similarly argues that William James commits errors that Kant avoids, to the extent that in both cases “Kant can offer . . . a way to transcend a bare naturalism but one that stops short of dualistic theism.” A possibility that Godlove does not consider is that Nietzsche’s tantalizing reference to Kant’s *cunning* might indicate a revolution that Kant was seeking to implement, whereby Christianity becomes a form of theistic *monism*.

Chapter 6 aims to complete the foregoing analysis of Kant’s spatial theory of concepts by exploring its implications for a more general theory of meaning. In this case, however,

Godlove strays further from Kant than anywhere else in the book. After introducing Michael Williams's tri-partite theory of meaning in terms of its "inferential," "epistemic," and "functional" components (pp. 152–53), he considers a string of examples that are meant to provide "a broadly Kantian approach to illuminating the content of particular vocabulary items." God-talk, according to Godlove's Kant, must have a function that "is earth-bound" (p. 164). As such, theological language becomes one part of Kant's overall "humanizing program" (e.g., pp. 166, 177). Unfortunately, as the chapter progresses, the anticipated climax never arrives, for Godlove's reflections on Durkheim, Weber, Davidson, and a host of other recent thinkers end up taking center stage. No doubt, this is because he thinks that these recent theorists aptly illustrate what Kant was trying to do with (and perhaps also to?) the concept "religion." Nevertheless, some treatment of Kant's position in its own right would have been very helpful at this point.

While it is difficult to fault the author's detailed and insightful treatment of Kant's theory of meaning—surely the best treatment of its kind to date that focuses on its application to the thorny issue of conceptualizing religion—this book does leave the reader pining for what James aptly calls *something more*. If this was part of the author's intent, then he succeeded admirably. In any case, the book underplays the role of Kant's transcendental idealism as a backdrop (albeit, a hidden one) throughout Kant's *Religion*. Moreover, Godlove never mentions that what Kant purports to study on the empirical or historical side (i.e., what Kant calls his "second experiment") falls under the concept of *faith*, not under "religion." As a result, while Godlove convincingly refutes Nietzsche's characterization of Kant as a "cunning Christian" when it comes to his conceptualizing of *religion*, it is not at all clear that Nietzsche's remark can be faulted, if it is taken as a reference to Christian *faith*.

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The Problem of Evil. By Daniel Speak. Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 2015. Pp. 149. \$64.95 cloth.

Daniel Speak's *The Problem of Evil* has two primary goals. The first is to introduce thinkers to the family of issues that in the world of analytic philosophy is known as the "problem of evil." The second is to defend the rationality of theism against those who would argue that the existence of evil makes religious belief irrational.

The book has six chapters. In the first, Speak broadly introduces the problem and the primary strategies with which theists have responded to it. In the second, third, and fourth he presents and discusses the specific argument that best captures the concern expressed in one of the primary formulations of the problem of evil—the "logical," "evidential," and "hiddenness" problems respectively—and presents the strongest theistic replies to it that he knows. In the fifth chapter he briefly explains the "project of theodicy." The sixth chapter serves both as a conclusion to his reflections and an introduction to aspects of the problem of evil that Speak has not directly addressed in his book.

Each of the chapters is carefully articulated and accessible. Speak is mindful of the fact that logico-philosophical reasoning can seem to the neophyte to be nothing more than a series of variations on the same phrase. He intersperses logical reasoning with humor and stories. Above all, his clarity makes the ideal of philosophical precision attractive.