

10-1-2014

Book Review: Solved By Sacrifice: Austin Farrer, Fideism, And The Evidence Of Faith

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Recommended Citation

Hebblethwaite, Brian (2014) "Book Review: Solved By Sacrifice: Austin Farrer, Fideism, And The Evidence Of Faith," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 31 : Iss. 4 , Article 10.
Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol31/iss4/10>

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the canon. For instance, Margaret Cavendish's and Mary Astell's writings about social and metaphysical liberty provide important insight into the link between the human and moral order in early modern Europe.

But this criticism is by no means meant to indicate that the aim of the volume is not met. Watkins has done an excellent job of demonstrating the richness and promise of the narrative of order. The volume should serve as a call to specialists and advanced students in the field to develop and extend these themes within the systems discussed here and to other thinkers in the history of philosophy.

Solved by Sacrifice: Austin Farrer, Fideism, and the Evidence of Faith, by Robert MacSwain. Leuven: Peeters, 2013. xiii + 275 pages. \$88.74 (paper).

BRIAN HEBBLETHWAITE, Queens' College, Cambridge

This book is unquestionably a major contribution to the study of Austin Farrer's writings and to philosophical reflection on the topic of faith and reason. It still betrays its origin in a doctoral dissertation, but its thoroughness in knowledge of relevant sources and background, and of fascinating biographical detail about Farrer, is most impressive. One cannot resist a wry smile, however, at the presence of so many long footnotes in a book about an author who forswore footnotes altogether.

Austin Farrer, regarded by many as the leading Anglican philosophical theologian of the twentieth century, was for many years Fellow and Chaplain of Trinity College, Oxford. He ended his career as Warden of Keble. His many books include *Finite and Infinite*, *The Glass of Vision*, *The Freedom of the Will*, *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, *Saving Belief*, *A Science of God?*, and *Faith and Speculation*. What has impressed his colleagues, pupils, hearers (he was a great preacher too), and readers was the way in which he combined philosophical skill, theological acumen, and profound spirituality. Readers of MacSwain's book will want to ask whether a sufficiently balanced picture of Farrer's many-sidedness is maintained.

The title of the book should first be explained. "Solved by Sacrifice—*solvitur immolando*" was Farrer's parody of the solution to Zeno's well-known paradox of Achilles and the Tortoise, which "*solvitur ambulando*," that is, is solved by carrying on walking and overtaking the tortoise, not by continuously stopping and thinking at fifty per cent segments of the distance behind. Similarly, Farrer urges (in a sermon, be it noted), Christian faith finds its justification, not in logic or argument, but in actually following the way of the cross and finding spiritual blessedness thereby. This is manifestly true of the saints and up to a point of the ordinary believer

too. Reference to such experiential justification of religious belief certainly played an increasingly important role in Farrer's writing about faith and reason, but it remained only one element in his blend of spirituality, theology and philosophy. Readers of *Faith and Philosophy* will be forgiven if they find themselves wanting to focus as much on the latter two as on the first of these three elements.

MacSwain takes his starting point from the initial fear expressed by Farrer's friend and colleague, Basil Mitchell, on reading the MS of Farrer's last book, *Faith and Speculation*, that Farrer "had become a sort of fideist." Mitchell later withdrew this complaint, concluding, rightly in my judgment, that Farrer remained a rationalist to the end. MacSwain rejects this, holding that, largely under the influence of the Princeton philosopher/theologian, Diogenes Allen, Farrer did indeed become at least a moderate fideist.

Of course it depends what you mean by "fideist." MacSwain devotes his second chapter to this question, setting aside pejorative senses of the term, and distinguishing mainly between an "extreme fideism" that appeals to faith alone and a "moderate fideism" that begins with faith but allows for rational defense and exploration from within faith's commitment and perspective. The latter was Allen's position and MacSwain's thesis is that Farrer eventually came very close to this view, not only in *Faith and Speculation* but also in earlier sermons and essays as well. The term "fideism" remains pretty slippery, however, and it does not help to find the notion of "semi-fideism" introduced. This is held to be an approach that begins with faith but at the same time permits support and clarification by probabilistic natural theology and by theology of revelation, as in the work of Basil Mitchell and even of Richard Swinburne. At this point one would really have preferred the term "fideism" to be dropped and the discussion conducted simply in terms of the relation between faith and reason, as it was by Farrer himself.

Certainly Farrer was not a foundationalist. Faith is not founded on reason. Farrer begins with faith, both in the sense of the Christian faith, that is, the tradition handed down and expressed in the creeds, and also in the sense of the believer's personal faith, although he allows, in sermons as well as in his books, this starting point to be no more than exploratory, an "initial faith" open to enquiry and critique. (I would not wish to contrast an open heart with an open mind here as MacSwain does. A mindless heart only means fideism in the pejorative sense.) It would, of course, be absurd to suggest that the believer has also to be a philosopher, but both the faith tradition and personal faith have metaphysical presuppositions and implications; and these are what Farrer was primarily concerned with throughout his writing career, right up to *Faith and Speculation*.

The reason why MacSwain gives perhaps too much prominence to the influence of Diogenes Allen on the development of Farrer's thought is his decision to focus primarily on religious epistemology in Farrer's work to the relative neglect of metaphysics and doctrine. This is fair enough if

one's main interest is faith and reason, but a rounded picture of Farrer's importance as a philosophical theologian is distorted if his spirituality is allowed to overshadow his philosophy and theology. As I say, what has impressed enthusiasts for Farrer's work is the way he combined these elements and held them in creative tension.

Certainly Zeno's paradox *solvitur ambulando*. But it is also solved by rational reflection on the difference between continual motion and segmental haltings. Similarly, the paradox of faith *solvitur immolando*. But it is also open to the rational support and clarification by what Rowan Williams called Farrer's "viable and sophisticated natural theology," of which Austin Farrer remained a masterful exponent till the end.

Philosophical Religions from Plato to Spinoza: Reason, Religion, and Autonomy, by Carlos Fraenkel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. 358 pages. \$79.00 (hardcover).

JAMES BRYSON, McGill University

In a bold and exciting new book, Carlos Fraenkel traces a tradition of what he calls "philosophical religion" from its beginnings in ancient Athens through Jewish and Christian Alexandria and through medieval Arabic *falsafa*, arriving finally at the early modern thought of Spinoza, who represents both the culmination of this tradition as well as a challenge to its legitimacy by planting the seeds of biblical criticism. This is no mere historical exercise. Fraenkel presents philosophical religion as a response to the Enlightenment confidence in the rational autonomy of the individual, which he sees as the greatest challenge to maintaining religious culture within the parameters of evolving modern institutions that prize the equality of all persons ahead of religious authority.

Fraenkel explains that the post-Enlightenment consensus which separates philosophy from religion would puzzle historical proponents of philosophical religion, who are called to become God-like through the perfection of reason, as Plato teaches in the *Theaetetus*. Thus philosophy is the highest form of worship, for which it simultaneously provides the foundation. Beginning with the metaphysical concept that God is Reason, historical forms of religion are regarded as exhortations to the practice of philosophy. Homer, Moses, Christ, and Mohammed employ revelation as a tool to set their respective religious communities, composed principally of non-philosophers, on a path to the philosophical life. This way of reading historical religion is an alternative to cultural revolution, which would remake society in the image of an ideal Republic based on pure