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The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy and Human Value, by John Cottingham. Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. xii+186. \$70.00 (hardback), \$24.99 (paperback).

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The project of John Cottingham's *The Spiritual Dimension* is to advocate a 'humane turn' in discussions of religion by analytical philosophers: that is to say, to advocate giving serious attention to "questions about human self-understanding and self-discovery" in the philosophy of religion (p. ix). Cottingham finds that many analytical philosophers work with an impoverished view of religion because they fail to acknowledge the 'primacy of praxis'—religion's connection with "ethical commitment and individual self-awareness, with the attempt to understand the cosmos and the struggle to find meaning in our lives" (p. x). *The Spiritual Dimension* applies this theme to a number of discussions in the philosophy of religion.

Cottingham's first chapter presents the theme of the 'primacy of praxis' in detail. Claiming that "it is in the very nature of religious understanding that it characteristically stems from practical involvement rather than intellectual analysis" (p. 6), Cottingham argues that it is crucial to understand religion as grounded in behavior (such as the kind of regular ritual participation that attends long-term membership in an historical religious tradition) and involving 'love's knowledge' (building on remarks by Pascal and Nussbaum, Cottingham takes religious truths to be such that "to try to grasp them purely intellectually is to avoid them"[p. 11]). This is not to say that religious knowledge is not susceptible to criticism and correction by reason; it is to say, however, that an adequate model of religion cannot be assembled using only the tools of rational analysis.

Chapters 2 and 3 address, respectively, theodicy and the issue of autonomy and heteronomy in religion. Acknowledging the primacy of praxis generates an alternative to the view that claims of religion represent a 'best explanation' for the world we experience; rather, in order to 'reasonably discharge' the task of theodicy, the religious adherent needs only a theistic account of the world which is *compatible* with the existence of evil and according to which "an innocent construction can be placed on the relevant divine acts or omissions" (p. 26). To satisfy this requirement Cottingham sketches an account which combines elements of Leibniz's 'best of all possible worlds' strategy (if God was to create a world out of matter, then by metaphysical necessity, that world would be subject to entropy and corruption) with Swinburne's free will defense (suffering presents opportunities for human self-development). In chapter 3, Cottingham considers whether it makes sense for theists to speak of God as a source of moral value, and whether submission to the will of such a god is compatible with human autonomy. Both questions are answered in the affirmative: the second because Cottingham understands submission to the will of God to involve no departure from ordinary procedures of moral discernment, and the first because he judges attempts to provide a fully naturalistic account of moral value unsatisfactory.

In chapter 4 Cottingham argues that philosophers should view the psychoanalytic tradition (broadly construed) as a resource for understanding

the workings of the human mind, rather than assuming the 'transparency of the mental.' By way of addressing the traditional hostility between psychoanalysis on the one hand and religion and (analytical) philosophy on the other, Cottingham considers Freud's charge that religion is an illusion based on a belief in the 'omnipotence of thought.' His response is two-pronged: first, much (perhaps all) of what commonly passes for religion, inasmuch as it does assume the omnipotence of thought, is really mere superstition; and second, within the Jungian branch of the tradition the salutary effects of illusion have been noted, in that religious imagery opens up a 'primordial psychic level' that is crucial for healthy development (p. 70). Cottingham positions psychoanalysis as a resource for 'guided self-discovery,' and ultimately for narrowing what John Hare has called the 'moral gap' (p. 74).

The poverty of the assent-to-propositions model is the focus of chapter 5. Acknowledging the primacy of praxis with respect to religious language requires appreciating the role language actually plays in the lives of religious adherents. Cottingham argues that "religious language characteristically involves a *layered structure of mutually resonating symbols and narratives*" (p. 88). Religious adherence is akin to the adoption of an 'interpretation of reality' whose multiple layers of meaning are mutually reinforcing; hence the question of the justification of religious adherence cannot be profitably addressed by consideration of individual propositions about transcendent realities (p. 99).

In chapter 6 Cottingham observes that religion on his construal involves not 'grand metaphysics,' but seeing the world infused with 'value and purpose.' Religion does, however, harbor some metaphysical ambitions, in that the religious adherent views the world as displaying "*traces of the transcendent divine world that is its ultimate source*" (p. 123). Cottingham finds this position to be compatible with contemporary methodological naturalism (although not with ontological naturalism, which he characterizes as itself a 'remarkably dogmatic' piece of metaphysics of which we have good reason to be skeptical). Seeing 'traces of the transcendent' in the world is also compatible with Kant's philosophy of religion as presented by recent interpretations; and because 'Enlightenment philosophy' is not altogether hostile to religion, "the postmodernist strategy of 'dissing' the Enlightenment" in order to defend religion (represented by John Caputo) is as unnecessary as it is poorly informed about the content of that philosophy (pp. 115f.).

Chapter 7 returns to the theme of the justification of religious adherence. The 'traces of the divine' previously described turn out to be an experiential justifying ground for religion (p. 136). But such 'traces' are not accessible to all: on the contrary, it may take "a lifetime of the appropriate *askesis* to acquire the capacity to appreciate them" (p. 139). In other words, religious beliefs cannot be critically evaluated through the impartial weighing of evidence because the relevant grounds are not publicly available. These perceptible 'traces' save religion from being merely a 'leap in the dark,' and so save the religious adherent from the charge of epistemic irresponsibility; it would seem, however, that what distinguishes religion from mere fideism will only be evident to those who have attained a certain level of religious development themselves. Nevertheless, appreciating

the 'primacy of praxis' makes possible a broader approach to the justification of religion. The 'difference theistic belief makes in the actual life of the religious adherent' turns out, according to Cottingham, to be a matter of fostering development towards psychological and moral maturity, towards the 'attainment of happiness and virtue' (p. 140). Religion is thus fundamentally aligned with the goals of reason-guided self-development and self-realization, and in fact may be essential for the realization of these goals (p. 148).

In the final chapter Cottingham discusses the question of religious pluralism. Like John Hick, he finds "a striking degree of convergence with regard to what one might call the moral psychology of religious practice" among the 'great religions' of the world (p. 154). Cottingham does not embrace Hick's pluralism, however, as there are significant incompatibilities between these religions at the level of doctrines and specific practices. Cottingham denies the possibility of impartially evaluating the world's religions and choosing the 'best' one, for "we can never achieve a 'sideways on' perspective on reality" (p. 164). The project, however, of advocating *one's own* religion over the alternatives is perfectly valid, for (with a nod to Neurath) "[a] sailor may offer a valid and rational defense of the structure and design of the rudder he has built, even though he was born on ship and recognizes that his view of how things should be done is itself conditioned by the traditions of life aboard this particular vessel" (p. 166). The position that Cottingham ultimately recommends is one that is committed to a particular tradition, and yet recognizes that "the imperatives of morality always take precedence over doctrinal and metaphysical disputes" and so is tolerant of religious diversity (p. 167).

In general, *The Spiritual Dimension* is a timely and well-aimed book. Cottingham's point that important dimensions of religion have been under-appreciated by philosophers is certainly correct, although some of the conclusions he draws from this point seem to point back towards the established literature (i.e., on the problem of evil or divine command theory) rather than towards radically new lines of inquiry. The benefits of Cottingham's approach are most evident, it seems to me, in his recommendation that philosophers explore how religious language actually functions in the lives of adherents. As I read him Cottingham does not argue that the propositional model is fundamentally mistaken; his work thus articulates the possibility of deepening our understanding of religious language without surrendering at the outset the idea that beliefs about transcendent realities are a natural part of religion, which suggests that the recovery of the field from the damage of the 'linguistic turn' is proceeding apace.

There are, however, at least two problems with the book. First, given that Cottingham commits himself early on to the position that the methods of "careful gathering of evidence, precise mathematical modeling, and systematic empirical testing" constitute "a paradigm of what can properly be termed objective and reliable knowledge" (p. 19), the choice of the psychoanalytic tradition as a resource for "systematic self-scrutiny and reflective analysis" is puzzling. For the most part Freud and his school have, after all, been left behind by empirical psychology as something between an

historical prototype and an embarrassment (a fact which Cottingham does not consider). But a more serious issue has to do with the view of 'religion' presented here. The book assumes that 'what it is to adhere to a religion' finds paradigmatic articulation in the 'great religious writers' of Christianity, supplemented by the reflections of philosophers such as Wittgenstein, for whom the boundaries of religion could be remarkably clear. The religion described therein is deeply moral, sacramentally rich, tolerant of diversity, and characterized by 'compassion and universalism.' Such a religion is certainly compatible with 'intellectual integrity and philosophical vigor,' and so is suited to the book's apologetic aims. But not all religion, not even all Christianity, is like this. Cottingham does not consider such forms of Christian praxis as protesting homosexuality at military funerals, firebombing abortion clinics, or teaching one's children in the home-school classroom that the earth is eight thousand years old; but taking seriously the primacy of praxis, and understanding 'how religious language actually functions' in the lives of its adherents, would seem to lead naturally to considering such cases. There is a significant tension between that *ideal* of religion which Cottingham shares with his chosen sources and the goal of understanding religion *as lived*, both of which he is concerned to recommend; and in the end, this book suggests that philosophers in search of a deeper understanding of religion may need, in ways large and small, to choose between these two.

Atonement, Christology and the Trinity: Making Sense of Christian Doctrine, by Vincent Brümmer. Ashgate, 2005. viii+125 pp. \$29.95 (Paper).

ANDREW S. NAM, Baylor University

Brümmer's central concern is to make sense of the Christian doctrines of atonement, Christology, and the trinity in terms of a category congenial to our contemporary mindset: *reconciliation*. By doing so, he hopes to gain a sympathetic hearing from both average Christian believers for whom a typical abstract theological construction of those doctrines means little or no existential applicability, and those of Jewish and Islamic traditions for whom these doctrines constitute an enduring stumbling block.

In chapter 1, Brümmer explains the limitations of *metaphorical thinking*, our common, intuitive practice of seeking to understand things by comparing them to similar objects with which we are familiar. Metaphorical thinking regularly employed in theological abstraction (1) often fails to recognize the relevant differences between the objects of comparison, (2) is one-sided and selective, necessarily excluding other models due to irresolvable conceptual conflicts, and (3) tends to be purely theoretical and abstract, thereby losing touch with the present cultural framework of understanding and the existential nature of our relationship to God. Accordingly, it results in a *static* view of God.

Furthermore, there is 'commisive implication,' a certain set of moral, emotional, and practical commitments, to every conceptual grammar of the religious language game, such that we cannot understand a religious