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TROELTSCH

Erratum

bookreview

relation between basic actions done by God in a creature and the activities of the creature. This problem is particularly acute if God's basic actions include those movements of the bodies of humans which are part of the repertoire of basic actions for them, for Tracy himself says that no basic action can be the action of two agents (p. 82).

It is possible to distinguish the implications for the concept of God of Tracy's analysis of how we identify agents (in terms of patterns in their actions) and of his discussion of God as a nonembodied perfect agent. Although the former raises fewer problems than the latter, it is not without its problems. Tracy seems to conclude that we identify God as the agent of certain large-scale actions (e.g., delivering Israel from Egypt) without specifying the sub-actions by which this is accomplished (pp. 77-83). I think that this idea has merit as a statement of how many believers operate. And certainly it is not impossible to do this for human agents. (I might say that Eisenhower commanded the D-Day invasion without knowing in detail how he did it.) But if (as Tracy admits) one lacks any idea of possible sub-actions by which God does things, this approach becomes more problematic. And if (like Bultmann) one holds a scientific view which seems to render divine sub-actions impossible, then our inability to specify sub-actions might lead us to question whether there were any large-scale actions at all. Tracy is aware of this problem (cf. end of Part II) and says that specifying sub-actions is the task of particular theologies; but that seems to make the usefulness of his proposal heavily dependent on the theologian's ability to do this.

I raise these questions not to demean the book's value but to highlight it. Many of them concern issues beyond the scope of the book. It is because Tracy has done so well what he set out to do that his conclusions deserve to be brought into relation with other bases for constructing a doctrine of God. In my questions I have certainly not touched on all these other bases. And none of them are themselves beyond question. But Tracy's work deserves careful consideration by anyone who wishes to use the language of agency as one of the bases for his theological constructions.

Crisis in Consciousness: The Thought of Ernst Troeltsch, by **Robert J. Rubanowice**. Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1983. Pp. xxiii, 177. \$20.

Reviewed by RUSSELL T. BLACKWOOD, Hamilton College.

This volume is more an excursion in intellectual history than it is a treatise in philosophy or theology. As such, it is a miniature encyclopaedia of the thought and work of an eminently important historicist. A generous Foreword by James

Luther Adams points to the ambiguous relationship between the thought of Troeltsch and that of Tillich. Adams also claims, with some justification, a current "Troeltsch revival." Rubanowice, in the Preface, cites approvingly Emil Spiess's assertion that Troeltsch was "the greatest theologian of German Protestantism"—a claim that, at the very least, is difficult to sustain.

Nonetheless, this is an extraordinarily useful work. Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) was not only a representative of an age of crisis but an important influence on many thinkers in the even more troubled decades after his death. The growing recognition of this latter fact provides some evidence in support of Adams' claim of a revival. Rubanowice argues that the cultural crisis in which Troeltsch found himself was a world where "everything is tottering." Such a world was one where "absoluteness" had failed. On the one hand he saw a crisis of confidence in traditional Christian faith; on the other hand he found a decline in the political and social influence of the historical churches. Most profoundly he perceived that if Christianity were to be an historical religion it could not be absolute religion. While Troeltsch never lost his personal faith he came to believe that Christianity could not claim validity beyond the bounds of Western civilization.

The key to most of Troeltsch's thought is his view of historicism (*Historismus*). Originally influenced by, but then rejecting, the Ritschlian *Heilsgeschichte* Troeltsch established his own *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*. This movement led to a sort of sociology of religion in which all faiths, including Christianity, were to be studied "purely on the basis of historical development with every renunciation of a supernatural information and foundation." Rubanowice claims that Troeltsch's historicism "rejects any static view of eternal ideas" and "regards truth, values and institutions as related to specific historical times and places." But, Rubanowice argues, Troeltsch's historicism did not entail relativism, as Tillich has claimed. Historicism does involve "relationism" (seeing values and institutions in relation to their historical setting) and while relationism might tempt one to relativism it does not entail it, Troeltsch asserted. This sort of tight-rope walking led to his central concept of "polymorphous truth." On this notion certain claims are true ("valid" is a term frequently employed) for Europeans, for example, but not true or valid for Orientals. However, the claim that certain assertions are "true for us" (but perhaps not for them) must be distinguished, it seems to me, from James's "faith ladder" where we have the right to believe certain claims as "true for us." In James, the right to believe was always subject to correction in the face of new evidence. But, for Europeans, Troeltsch claimed that Christianity is "final and unconditional for us."

All of this sort of talk is something of a muddle, albeit an interesting muddle. H. Richard Niebuhr once described Troeltsch's position as "non-sceptical relativism." Rubanowice's understanding of Troeltsch is more or less the same. And that is interesting; but it would be even more interesting if this work had

attempted to set out a philosophically clear statement of the relation between relativism and truth. That, of course, was really Troeltsch's task and one which occupied him and the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* for some time and without notable success. But it would have been interesting to see Rubanowice wrestle more thoroughly with the matter.

Troeltsch's *religionsgeschichtliche* method and his notion of polymorphous truth carry over into his philosophy of history. There is, he claimed, "not merely *one logic* of human thinking, but *various logics*." Again, this is an interesting claim but one which needs careful philosophic analysis.

The final chapter of this work traces Troeltsch's life in politics from 1914 to 1923. It shows an intellectual torn by his complicated view of history and religion and by his Germanness.

A final epilogue rejects the conventional judgment that Troeltsch failed to resolve the crisis of values he had uncovered. Rubanowice believes that the answer is ambiguous. That Troeltsch was an important thinker Rubanowice quite rightly leaves in no doubt. I would quarrel with ranking Troeltsch beside Hegel, but that he belongs with Ritschl and Schleiermacher seems quite right.

The book has a superb selected bibliography. Some might argue that 820 footnotes in a 138-page volume are a bit much. However, intellectual historians, while often not given to much philosophic analysis, are known for their meticulousness. This book is a fine and meticulous intellectual history of a complicated theologian who profoundly displayed the nature of the crises we live with yet.

The Argument To The Other: Reason Beyond Reason in the Thought of Karl Barth and Emmanuel Levinas, by **Steven G. Smith**. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983. Pp. 307. \$20.95.

Reviewed by EUGENE THOMAS LONG, University of South Carolina.

This comparative study of Karl Barth and Emmanuel Levinas was the author's dissertation directed by William Poteat at Duke University. Although there is no evidence that either Barth or Levinas was influenced by the other, and although Barth appeals primarily to the Christian faith and Levinas to phenomenology and the Jewish faith, Smith argues that they share in common a preoccupation with transcendence or the Other which changes the ground rules for thinking and speaking of God, and hence for philosophy and theology. For Karl Barth the Other is the transcendent God of Biblical Christian faith whose infinite qualitative difference from man and the world makes impossible any analogy in human experience. For Levinas the Other is the other person, ultimately the other person in his nearness to God, but this Other is also said to be beyond the