BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

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John Hick. *Between Faith and Doubt: Dialogues on Religion and Reason*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

As one would expect, John Hick's latest book is honest, bold, lucid, down to earth and lively. With his usual clarity, Hick has produced an accessible introduction to key questions in philosophy of religion, this time suitable for A-level and undergraduate students and interested non-specialists. The book familiarises readers with subjects as wide-ranging as realism and irrealism, mind-brain identity and mind-body dualism, neuroscience, telepathy, Kabbala and Sufi mysticism, and much else besides.

Between Faith and Doubt takes the form of a dialogue between John himself, and David, an imaginary physicalist friend. Two other characters participate briefly in the dialogue: Donwi, an amalgamation of Don Cupitt and Dewi Phillips, and Grace, an 'ordinary' churchgoer whose initial questions serve as a catalyst for John's introduction to historical biblical criticism, but who later champions the integrity of religious praxis as a counterbalance to John's rationalist approach to religious belief.

Chapter one outlines religious and materialist worldviews. David provides three possible explanations for religion (Durkheim's, Marx's and Freud's). John argues that materialism is itself a form of faith because it is intensely believed but cannot be proved. The relationship between science and religion is discussed.

In addition to these topics, the discussion of *subjectivity* in this chapter may also be useful to students. John defines 'subjectivity' as occurring in our consciousness and only accessible to the experiencer, making the point (often not grasped by students) that all experience (including religious experience) is subjective, but that this does not render it erroneous or inauthentic.

In chapters two and three, John and David join forces in debunking the ontological and designs arguments and classical theism. In chapter two, John argues that even if a version of the design argument did work, it would not entail the God of religion. In chapter three, John rejects classical theism, partly due to reservations about the coherence of 'omnipotence', 'omniscience', and 'infinite person', and partly because divine intervention would render God responsible, by omission, for non-averted suffering. A distinction is made between intercessory prayer (which assumes an arbitrary God), and loving-kindness meditation on someone's behalf. (While John rightly attributes this to Buddhism, it is interesting that a similar idea is found in Hick's own Quaker tradition, expressed as 'holding someone in the light'.)

John puts forward the idea that there are many gods (also called angels or *devas)* who can influence us via the psychic or mental network through which we are all connected. When people pray they are sometimes talking to these gods, though, equally, they are sometimes simply experiencing hallucinations. John also argues that Judaism, Islam and Christianity do not describe the same deity, and are therefore three distinct but overlapping monotheisms.

Chapter four contrasts non-realism and physicalism (on the one hand) and realist religion (on the other) in their views of the afterlife. John points out that denying an afterlife is bad news for humanity as a whole since most people are prevented from fulfilling their potential in this life by oppression, poverty, lack of opportunities, and premature death. Donwi counters that even people born into the worst circumstances have 'their share of life and love and beauty' and that we should not write off any life as not worth living (p. 37).

In chapter five, John notes that his own philosophy is rooted in religious experience. Like many others', John's religious experiences involved a sense of the goodness and friendliness of, and unity with, the rest of reality. Like David, John thinks that religious experience can be illusory, but John cites Teresa of Avila's criterion of the fruits or 'jewels' of an experience for discerning whether it is real. Against this, David points out that some illusions (e.g. placebos) can have a positive effect.

In chapter six, John sets out to explain why he thinks that people are entitled to trust their religious experiences. Disagreeing with Dawkins' claim that the existence of God is a scientific hypothesis, he argues that it is rather a fundamental belief, like the belief that other people exist. The belief that others exist is based on sensory experience; religious belief

is based on religious experience. It is rational to trust our experiences unless there is reason to distrust them. David argues that religious experiences are untrustworthy because, unlike sense experiences, they are not i) compulsory; ii) universal; iii) uniform. John replies to i) and ii) by outlining the idea of epistemic distance, which, he argues, can be applied to both theistic and non-theistic traditions.

Chapter seven is about why religious experience is not uniform. John argues that critical realism provides a way by which we can see different, seemingly-contradictory, religious experiences as authentic responses to the same ultimate reality. The ultimate is unknowable, but we experience its phenomena according to our existing categories. The findings of neurological experiments on meditatives and contemplatives from different traditions are cited as evidence.

David raises the objection that pluralism is antithetical to each of the religions themselves. John concedes that pluralism is unacceptable to the leaders of the religious organisations, but argues that it is present in the religions' mystical strands.

John suggests that the authenticity of a religious tradition can be gauged by the extent to which its adherents are transformed from self-centredness to other-centredness. While this is unquantifiable, all major religions seem roughly successful (or unsuccessful), and so all are equally valid responses to the ultimate.

Chapters eight and nine concern whether neuroscientific experiments that produce religious experiences prove that religious experiences are inauthentic, or simply show that they have a neural correlate. Chapter eight looks at mind-brain identity, the mystery of consciousness, Popper's principle of falsification, and determinism. Chapter nine focuses on whether drug-induced experiences can be regarded as mystical experiences, and whether they demonstrate that religious experiences are illusory.

Chapter ten explores the implications of John's philosophy for Christianity. John outlines the historical critical problems with traditional Christianity, such as contradictions between the different resurrection narratives, suggesting that the disciples saw visions of Jesus rather than a physical appearance. Grace argues that the creed should not be seen as a list of propositions to which believers assent but, rather, as a declaration of belonging to a community that is part of a two thousand year old tradition.

John argues that rejecting the incarnation is necessary because belief in the incarnation is (he contends) linked to Christian exclusivism. This is because the incarnation 'means that Christianity alone among the religions of the world was founded by God in person.' (p. 107).

In chapter eleven, John discusses frequently ignored non-conservative movements within Islam: liberal intellectual Islam (particularly Abdulkarim Soroush) which stresses the mediated, contextualised nature of the Qur'an, and Sufi mysticism. He agrees that the majority of Muslims are less egalitarian, but points out that, globally speaking, most Muslims are poor and ill-educated, and therefore accept what the imams tell them.

Chapter twelve concerns whether religion has had a harmful or beneficial effect on the world. John distinguishes between religious organisations (which have a mixed record) and the inner experiential aspect of religion. David raises the problematic connection between right-wing religion and right-wing politics in the USA, and John agrees, citing the 'heretic trials' he underwent, and more extreme discrimination suffered by some of his friends. John argues that religious wars and terrorist attacks tend to be political rather than genuinely religious, and suggests that, of all the major religions, Buddhism has had the least violent past.

Chapter thirteen outlines the problem of evil, the free will defense, person-making theodicy, the value of epistemic distance, and the appeal to an eschatological resolution. Among other objections, David argues that there is an excess *amount* of suffering for soul-making which a good God would not allow. John responds that, in order for the world to be person-making, we must not be able to see that it is person-making.

In chapter fourteen, John says that he does not believe in life after death on the basis of evidence such as spiritual mediums, though he is open to the possibility of a 'psychic factor' that persists after someone's death, and believes in telepathy (or ESP). John's belief in life after death is rather an inference from his religious understanding of the universe: 'Human existence must be a project, not a dead end' (p. 150). John posits reincarnation (on this or other planets) as the most plausible model of afterlife for person-making, though he is sceptical of memories of previous lives. The continuant is not memory, but the dispositional structure formed by the karmic process. David points out that this means the mortality of our present conscious selves and John agrees, saying that we need to think of ourselves as 'like runners in a relay race, each passing the torch onto the next' (p. 158).

In chapter fifteen, John characterises the religious outlook as one that is pessimistic about the present, but optimistic about the future. He argues that, in being an atheist, David is missing out on having the benefit of a sense of the ultimate goodness of the universe. They conclude that the reason they disagree is not intellectual but experiential: John bases his outlook on religious experience (including but not limited to his own) while David does not have religious experience as part of his 'data'.

Between Faith and Doubt is explicitly intended for atheists and agnostics (*ix*). Equally, however, it would be of interest to people within a religious tradition who wish to think through their faith, or to people who affirm a spiritual dimension but who do not belong to a particular tradition. Despite the intended atheist/agnostic audience, the book does not seem straightforwardly to be an apologetic, as is shown by the fact that David is not converted to John's beliefs by the end. While John's beliefs and experiences receive rather more attention than David's, the overall tone is one of mutual respect combined with a recognition of the teleological ambiguity of the universe.

Between Faith and Doubt is a pedagogical treasure trove. The chapters are short, making them manageable for students and non-academics. The dialogue format draws the reader in. It also imparts Hick's approach to philosophy of religion as investigation and dialogue rather than attack and defence, setting a good exploratory tone. Individual chapters would be suitable for reading in a classroom or seminar context as a springboard for a discussion of the topic. As with all his works, Hick's enthusiasm for the subject is likely to inspire most students. This is in combination with the humility inherent in his writing, which may encourage students lacking confidence to articulate their own views. In contrast to most other accessible philosophy of religion books, the *non*-neutral stance and very personal engagement makes it difficult for apathetically inclined students to sit on the fence.

The book is primarily intended for non-specialists. At the same time, established philosophers and theologians who read it will be rewarded by an up-to-date account of Hick's ever-evolving beliefs. *Between Faith and Doubt* also shows how Hick's specific personal experiences (religious experience, being subject to a heresy trial, witnessing a spiritualist séance) have influenced his thinking.

The book is nicely produced. The quality of writing and editing is high. The cover image, a dramatic blue and yellow astrological scene, is compelling and mirrors a major theme of the book: physicalist and

religious interpretations of an ambiguous cosmos. An index and endnotes are provided. In keeping with the book's overall light touch, the index is simple to use, but more than sufficiently detailed for the general readership for which it is intended.

It would not be in the spirit of Hick's work or person to discuss his latest book without critically engaging with some of his arguments and ideas (as they are presented here).

First, John does not address David's point that an illusion (such as a placebo) can nevertheless produce a positive effect. This is a problematic omission because the same point could be applied as a criticism to John's rule that a religion is a valid response to the ultimate if its 'fruits' include transformation from self-centredness to other-centredness. Here, John seems to me to be erroneously conflating what is helpful (personally transforming) with what is true (a valid response to the ultimate, and a reflection of the religion's truth value).

Second, John sees a necessary connection between the incarnation and Christian exclusivism where, I argue, none exists (there is no contradiction in believing that Jesus is divine and that the other religions are equally valid responses to the ultimate reality). Perhaps there is a suppressed premise in John's argument (i.e. that a religion founded by a divine person is likely to be less 'mediated' and contextualised, and thus more true, than a religion founded by a non-divine person). However, this premise is not self-evident, particularly when the matter is complicated by the divine person also being fully human (and so limited and contextualised).

Third, and relatedly, John characterises incarnational Christianity as believing that 'God came down from heaven to earth in the person of Jesus to found a new religion – Christianity' (p. 107). This is a simplistic and rather Docetic caricature of Christian theology. It also overlooks the fact that most modern Christians agree that Jesus did not wish to found a religion separate to Judaism. That Paul, not Jesus, was the founder of Christianity, and that Jesus remained a Jew throughout his life, is now well recognised among most Christians.

Fourth, John offers no evidence for his claim that, in order to be person-making, we must not be able to see that the world is person-making (p. 143). The claim is not self-evidently true, and it might equally well be argued that the person-making quality of suffering would be more likely to be actualised if the sufferer were aware that that was its purpose. The claim also calls into question the person-making potential

of suffering in the case of Hick and others who accept his theodicy (since they 'see' that the suffering is soul-making, and that makes it less so).

Fifth, it seems to me that there are some unresolved issues about basing religious belief on religious experience. In John's and others' cases, the religious experience occurred once the subject already had a religious outlook. While this does not necessarily discredit the religious experience (though an interesting question is raised about whether they are 'seeing with the eyes of faith' or exhibiting a confirmation bias), it does imply that the experience cannot be the *basis* of the belief or outlook, because the belief or outlook occurred prior to it.

These and other issues mean that there is a great deal in this book for readers to get their teeth into. *Between Faith and Doubt* is undoubtedly a valuable contribution to accessible philosophy of religion literature, and a worthy addition to Hick's phenomenal corpus.

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Paul K. Moser. *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology.* Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Like many other philosophers writing today, Paul Moser believes that God's existence is *hidden*, at least for some people at some times, meaning that God's existence "fails to be not only obvious but also beyond cognitively reasonable doubt" (p. 1). In this book, Moser presents an original approach to divine hiddenness and explores the implications of this approach for religious epistemology. He argues not only that hiddenness fails to rationally support a skeptical attitude to divine reality but also that a proper understanding of divine purposes in self-revelation should lead us to *expect* hiddenness. The book's central thesis is that we should expect conclusive evidence of God's existence to be *purposively available* – that is, available in a way that "accommodates the distinctive purposes of a perfectly loving God." Such purposes, says Moser, "would aim noncoercively but authoritatively to transform human purposes to agree with divine purposes, despite human resistance of various and sundry sorts" (p. 2). On Moser's account, then, God is hidden from some people at some times because such people, through their unwillingness