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McInerny, CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF THEIR AUTHOR: THE GIFFORD LECTURES

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make sense of oneself and the world in terms of the religious account and to continually be working out that account more fully. In this latter characterization, some of what appears to be consumerist reading must surely be going on, i.e., consumerist reading in terms of the *kind* of reading—quick, cursory, not committing to memory. But it is not consumerist reading in terms of the second thread, the *purpose* of the reading. For consumerist reading is self-absorptive, focused on creative production for its own sake, whereas religious reading is fundamentally reading aimed at providing a better and deeper religious account of the world.

The questions I have raised about the role of memory and the nature of virtuosi readers are only intended to rein in some of Griffiths' analyses where the distinctions are drawn perhaps too starkly. His fundamental point about the loss of religious reading and its importance in learning and living a religious account of the world is surely right. It has implications for the future of universities and religious institutions of learning and worship. It also has personal implications: one should start memorizing, choose more carefully what to read, and be more intentional about the task of giving a religious account. Griffiths seeks to convert readers to the practice of religious reading. I have been so converted.

Characters in Search of Their Author: The Gifford Lectures, Glasgow 1999-2000 by Ralph McInerny. University of Notre Dame Press, 2001, 132pp. \$25.00.

LAURA GARCIA, Boston College

In these lectures, presented in Glasgow in October and November of 1999 and February of 2000, Professor McInerny spins a fascinating tale of the history of philosophy since Descartes that reads like a novel. Though he finds most of the major modern figures wanting with respect to their philosophical views, they emerge from these pages as living, three-dimensional persons, so vividly portrayed that one's previous encounters with them seem to have taken place in a kind of philosophical flatland. We follow Descartes from his famous dream as a young soldier to his death in Stockholm in the presence of his priest and confessor. Looking back to a medieval thinker, we pause beside Anselm of Canterbury in "the first stall on the left in the monastery at Bec in Normandy," chanting Psalm 41: "The fool has said in his heart there is no God."

The burden of these early lectures is to show that the trajectory of philosophy tends toward today's widespread intellectual nihilism, a philosophical attitude that McInerny calls "radical chic." The remainder of Part I of the book begins a ground-clearing operation for the project of natural theology, itself taken up more explicitly in Part II. Nihilism or anti-realism confronts Aristotle's defense of the first principle of reason, the law of non-contradiction. Following St. Thomas (just a coincidence?) McInerny argues that logical and psychological versions of this principle depend on its ontological formulation: "It is impossible for a thing to be and not to be at the same time and in the same respect" (p. 48). The connection between

thought and reality, problematic since Descartes and denied altogether by anti-realists, must be accepted at least in this instance. Any reasoned objection to this principle turns out to be untenable.

McInerney turns next to the fideist's objection to natural theology, that the search for proofs of God's existence and nature is both fruitless and likely to be badly motivated. He assesses Søren Kierkegaard's suspicion of reason in the realm of faith, showing sympathy with Kierkegaard regarding the mysteries of faith (revealed doctrines inaccessible to unaided reason) but preserving a role for reason in arriving at the preambles of faith (e.g., God's existence, unity, and intelligence). A strong piece of evidence for the latter claim is the work of Aristotle. "For Thomas, natural theology is not a possibility. It is a fact. It is the achievement of pagan philosophy" (p. 66).

The second series of lectures, "The Recovery of Natural Theology," does in fact review and endorse St. Thomas' proof from motion for an unmoved mover. But McInerney warns against the cursory treatment this argument customarily receives in introductory philosophy courses. Building as it does on Aristotle's proof for the same conclusion in Books 7 and 8 of the *Physics*, the argument requires an understanding of the groundwork laid in preceding books of the *Physics* as a precondition of an informed and intelligent appraisal. McInerney's more general point is that "Proofs for the existence of God can neither be fashioned nor appraised without reliance on a vast fund of knowledge" (p. 78). The speaker and the hearer (or the writer and reader) must share several fundamental assumptions and goals: that a proof is an attempt to know something objectively true, that truth in these matters is possible, that it is of paramount importance, and so on. It is no surprise that when these assumptions are missing, attempts at natural theology meet with indifference or incomprehension.

Subsequent lectures explore possible causes of the ongoing intellectual indigestion concerning natural theology. Some complain that it has no practical significance or that it has been rendered irrelevant by advances in the natural sciences. Departing from Kierkegaard and John Henry Newman, McInerney insists that knowledge of God's existence, unlike most practical knowledge, can be attained even by the morally corrupt and that it does not necessarily lead to an exemplary life. That is, he preserves a healthy distinction between theoretical and practical uses of reason, without claiming that one can be wholly insulated from the other. McInerney insists in this section that there is an objective or 'intrinsic' appraisal of an argument that proceeds independently of the character or antecedent dispositions of the argument's defender. He does concede, however, that a sufficiently entrenched negative attitude toward belief in God "all but guarantees that the task will not be undertaken in such a way that will allow the truth of the matter to shine through" (p. 107).

McInerney professes disagreement with Newman's claim that the illative sense ranges over all forms of reasoning, theoretical as well as practical. But since one's attitudes do seem to influence the attempt at an objective (intrinsic) appraisal of a theoretical argument, Newman may be on to something. Newman claims that the illative sense, a form of practical reasoning or judgment, must decide when the premises are to be accepted as true, when the objections have been satisfactorily disposed of, and so forth. The question

of basic logical validity may not involve the illative sense, and Aristotle saw no need to invoke any such faculty for premises he deemed self-evident or evident to the senses. But after the modern turn that McNerny laments at length in Part I, it now takes (at least for some) a conscious decision to trust those claims of common sense that earlier philosophers might take for granted. Wherever the will enters in, practical judgment comes into play about when and where and how enthusiastically to give one's assent.

McNerny closes with a rousing endorsement and defense of John Paul II's attitude toward faith and reason, presented in the papal encyclical *Fides et Ratio*. This approach insists both on the *autonomy* of philosophy in relying on reason for its conclusions and assessments, and on an attitude of openness to truth that is *beyond* human reason (and may in fact be reason's ultimate fulfillment). It is autonomy but not self-sufficiency that philosophy needs in order to flourish. As for the brand of modern philosophy that deliberately closes off the path from reason to faith, McNerny calls this "lapsed Christian philosophy" and its adherents "theologians manques." The atheological presuppositions that would *preclude* all discussion of God thus instantiate the very philosophical bigotry of which they so often accuse believing philosophers.

Worse still, mistrust of the Creator has led to a mistrust of the creature as well, so that it is up to believers to defend the capacity of the human mind to know the truth. In *Fides et Ratio* and in McNerny's book as well, Christianity emerges as the philosopher's best friend. For a spirited, intelligent, and deftly-written defense of these and other "preambles to the preambles" of faith, this book is an excellent place to begin.

Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought by John Lippitt. Macmillan Press/St Martin's Press, 2000. xii and 210 pp. Cloth. \$65.00

Kant and Kierkegaard on Religion, edited by D.Z. Phillips and T. Tessin. Macmillan Press/St Martin's Press, 2000. xxi and 303 pp. Cloth. \$65.00

ANTHONY RUDD, St Olaf College

A well-established popular conception of Kierkegaard has it that he is a fideistic irrationalist, and that the dominant tone of his writings is one of melancholy and gloom. These perceptions are vigorously challenged in these two volumes.

As he admits in the first sentence ("Kierkegaard and humour? But isn't he so gloomy?") Lippitt's title is liable to surprise those who have acquired the simple image of Kierkegaard as "the melancholy Dane." Yet, as is apparent to readers of at any rate his pseudonymous works, Kierkegaard is, for all the undoubted bleakness of some of his writing, probably the most humorous of all major philosophical authors. Wit, satire and comedy are pervasive features of many of his works, and (moving from use to mention) he is as interested in analyzing the existential significance of irony and humour as he is in anxiety, guilt or despair. Commentators have,