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Brown, TRADITION AND IMAGINATION, DISCIPLESHIP AND IMAGINATION; GOD AND ENCHANTMENT OF PLACE; GOD AND GRACE OF BODY; and GOD AND MYSTERY IN WORDS

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smuggled into the discussion without comment or justification. Ragland's rejection of the widespread theological claim that the earthly life is the sole sphere of choice, though central to Ragland's argument, is never articulated, let alone justified.

While it is tempting to vary the theological elements of a doctrine in order to solve philosophical problems, it should be remembered that theological claims need theological justification. It is one thing for a philosopher to say "This combination of theological (or scientific) claims is philosophically problematic"; it is quite another to say "This theological (or scientific) claim ought to be accepted for philosophical reasons."

One way to keep these problems within some limits is for a philosophical discussion of topics such as hell, the incarnation, providence, or the Trinity to be prefaced with an acknowledgement that the discussion will take for granted, insofar as it is possible, the theological understanding of the doctrine in some reasonably specific and (ideally) familiar tradition: mainstream traditional Christianity may be specific enough in some cases, though not in others. A parallel point holds about philosophy's interaction with other disciplines, including science, religious experience, and literature. It is certainly not the case that an interdisciplinary approach, which Stump is credited with promoting, is wrong in principle; rather, openness to interdisciplinary projects requires more, not less, awareness of what kind of argument and what kind of claim are proper to each discipline.

Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change, by David Brown. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. 402 pages. $140.00 (hardback), $50.00 (paperback).

Discipleship and Imagination: Christian Tradition and Truth, by David Brown. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 438 pages. $49.99 (paperback).

God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience, by David Brown. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. 436 pages. $55.00 (paperback).

God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary, by David Brown. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. 446 pages. $75.00 (hardback), $35.00 (paperback).

God and Mystery in Words: Experience through Metaphor and Drama, by David Brown. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 288 pages. $35.00 (paperback).

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The last book of David Brown's to be reviewed in this journal was *The Divine Trinity*, published in 1985 by Duckworth in the UK and Open Court in the US. Eleonore Stump began her review by stating that this "is an important book which I hope will influence the direction of certain work

in contemporary philosophy of religion. It is an attempt to stimulate a dia-logue between philosophers of religion and biblical scholars, a dialogue I think is long overdue, in order to combine the studies of the historical basis for and philosophical credibility of Christian doctrines."[1] Although she naturally went on to raise critical concerns with various aspects of Brown's argument, in her penultimate sentence she still described this book as both "excellent and learned."

The Divine Trinity has indeed maintained a remarkably long shelf-life, and is still frequently cited in contemporary discussions of the Social Trin-ity and analytic philosophical theology. However, Brown's own interests gradually shifted away from mainstream philosophy of religion toward a greater concern with the relationship between Christian doctrine and human culture more broadly. Although a professional philosopher by training, he began to develop extensive interdisciplinary competencies far beyond the dialogue between philosophy and biblical studies praised by Stump in *The Divine Trinity*. This shift eventually resulted in a series of five major books published over the past decade by Oxford University Press, which collectively weigh in at just over 2000 pages. Asked to review the last three (which form a trilogy of their own within the overall series), I found that I could not begin without providing these contextual remarks and some comments about the first two.

Tradition and Imagination and *Discipleship and Imagination* will be of con-siderable interest to those philosophers of religion who have been follow-ing the work of scholars such as William J. Abraham, Stephen T. Davis, C. Stephen Evans, Eleonore Stump, Richard Swinburne, Nicholas Wolt-erstorff and others on the topics of revelation and the previously men-tioned dialogue between philosophy and biblical studies. Where Brown differs from some of the figures listed above is his greater willingness to accept the findings of contemporary Biblical scholarship and reconstruct our understanding of revelation, biblical authority, and the incarnation accordingly. Brown is convinced that all three of these doctrines must be understood as both fallible and culturally-conditioned. For example, in the incarnation God committed "himself to a developing tradition. Not only did he expose himself to the vagaries of being human, he also submit-ted himself to the uncertainties of human comprehension in abandoning himself to humanity's most characteristic way of thinking: gradual per-ception through creative retelling of the story of his identification with us in Jesus. Even the incarnation could only be made known as part of a developing tradition" (*Tradition and Imagination*, 278–279). Brown frankly admits that the "process was a messy one since it entailed God's deep in-volvement with people like ourselves, and so a fallible Bible and a fallible Church interacting with a no less fallible wider world" (*Discipleship and Imagination*, 405).

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[1]Eleonore Stump, "Review of David Brown's *The Divine Trinity*," *Faith and Philosophy* 3:4, (October 1986), 463–468. The first citation is from 463 and the second is from 468.

Brown also argues that the distinction between Scripture and tradition is a false one (not in the sense that tradition is Scripture but that Scripture is tradition), that later Christian understandings can improve upon and even correct biblical teaching, that divine revelation continues through subsequent Christian tradition and also may be found in both secular human culture and other religions, and that what has provided the impetus for change in the developing tradition of Christianity has more often than not been imagination (artistic, literary, and devotional) rather than reason. Over the course of these first two volumes he thus traces in fascinating detail the histories of various biblical stories from both the Old and New Testaments, showing how and why they have been retold and rewritten over the centuries to form a "moving" rather than a "fixed" text. He also looks at general questions of hermeneutics; contributions from the classical world, Judaism, Islam, and the visual arts; gender relations; the communion of saints; the role of conflict and authority in Christian tradition; and the truth-value of fiction (including fictitious biblical narratives). The second volume specifically considers these matters as they relate to Christian discipleship, with particular case studies focused on Job and the problem of evil, and on Mary the Mother of Christ as paradigm disciple (that is to say, not without sin but growing through struggle like the rest of us).

In the trilogy that followed these first two volumes, Brown turned his attention more directly to human culture in all its forms. His twin goal was to expand the concept of the "sacramental" beyond the officially sanctioned two or seven ecclesial ones, and to rehabilitate the category of "natural religion" as a viable alternative to "natural theology." If the first two volumes dealt with divine revelation as conveyed through Scripture, tradition, and imagination, the next three dealt with religious experience mediated through the visual arts, place, pilgrimage, buildings sacred and secular, gardens, sports, the human body, music (classical, pop, rock, heavy metal, rap, blues, jazz, country, opera), literature (primarily poetry), drama, and finally liturgy (including preaching, hymns, and church music) and the Eucharist. For Brown, all of these may function sacramentally in making God present to us, not just the Christian Eucharist. As with revelation, Brown looks to find sacraments in unexpected places, and thus evidence of a natural religion pervasive through all creation, not only what has been specially revealed by God to a chosen few. As previously indicated, this also means he takes seriously the possibility that other religions such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism may contain not only valid religious experience but also divine revelation.

For philosophers of religion, the key to Brown's motivations may be found in a footnote on page 412 of *God and Enchantment of Place*. Here, after several hundred pages of remarkably detailed and informed discussion of Orthodox icons and Renaissance art, American landscape painting, figures such as Van Gogh, Cézanne, Mondrian, Kandinsky, and Klee, the entire history of Christian architecture, town planning both ancient and contemporary, martial arts, baseball, cricket, golf, and much, much

more, Brown states that he is seeking "to go beyond the formal analyses that characterize the writings of Richard Swinburne and Alvin Plantinga." Including William P. Alston's *Perceiving God* (1991) along with the work of Swinburne and Plantinga, Brown argues that instead of focusing on either arguments for the existence of God or formal and abstract approaches to religious experience, we instead need to "take more seriously the great range of human experience in which God was also once found by Christians and which implicit religion continues to explore" (411–412). For example, Brown argues that buildings themselves can mediate God's presence, independently of the congregations that use them, with different styles conveying respective aspects of the divine nature: immanence with Romanesque, transcendence with Gothic, rationality with Renaissance classicism, exuberance with Baroque, and simplicity with Modern.

If *God and Enchantment of Place* can be thus brought into dialogue with certain important figures in contemporary philosophy of religion, *God and Grace of Body* presents a more difficult challenge. For whatever reason, the primary topics of this book—the human body as beautiful, sexual, ugly, or wasted, the religious significance of dance, the symbolic character of food and drink, the many different genres of musical expression both explicitly and implicitly religious—have been left by philosophers (or, at least, philosophers of religion, and even most theologians) for scholars in other fields such as religious studies or anthropology. But why should that be? Both *God and Enchantment of Place* and *God and Grace of Body* seem to be arguing for not a linguistic but a "material turn" in our thinking about God, an approach that recognizes our own cultural, historical, bodily, located character, but which rather than seeing these aspects of human life as obstacles to be overcome—in the classically Cartesian manner—instead incorporates them into the argument. In other words, philosophy necessarily involves arguments, but it does not necessarily involve *arguments about arguments*. If I understand Brown correctly, he is trying to shift philosophy of religion away from arguments about arguments to arguments about *things*: works of art, pieces of music, poems, architectural styles, bodies, comestibles, clothing, and so forth. For these too can mediate God to us.

The final volume, *God and Mystery in Words*, subtitled "Experience through Metaphor and Drama," is structured accordingly with two parts dedicated to each topic. Brown again ranges widely through history and various disciplinary fields, dealing with, for example, Jewish Kabbalah, ancient Greek drama, the poetry of George Herbert, Christian hymns and homiletics, church music, and (in the title of the final chapter) "Performance, Costume, [and] Staging." The volume concludes with a valuable ten-page summary of all five volumes and what Brown sees as their primary arguments in relation to his fundamental thesis that "both natural and revealed theology are in crisis, and that the only way out is to give proper attention to the cultural embeddedness of each" (269). To single out just one aspect of this volume, Brown's defense of metaphor can be

contrasted usefully with Michael Rea's comments on analytic suspicions of it in his introduction to a book published the following year, *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*.[2] According to Rea, one prescription of philosophy in the analytic mode is "P3. Avoid substantive (non-decorative) use of metaphor and other tropes whose semantic content outstrips their propositional content" (5; see also 18–21). In *God and Mystery in Words*, however, Brown argues that "metaphors and images inherent in them are integral to helping us grasp the totality of whatever reality it is with which we wish to engage" (46); metaphors can "yield genuinely new knowledge that is by no means reducible to some weaker version of what might have been said, had a more literal or analytic approach been adopted" (56). Interestingly, for Brown part of the power of metaphor is its capacity to *connect* disparate items and thus *integrate* our experience of reality: although trained in analytic philosophy, the drive of his thought is now clearly toward imaginative integration rather than conceptual analysis.

In a project of this magnitude, there are bound to be missteps and mishaps, and to again cite Stump's review of *The Divine Trinity*, "I found a good deal to disagree with in [these] rich book[s]" (464). Despite bringing these five volumes into dialogue with contemporary philosophy of religion for the benefit of the readers of this journal, their actual genres range far more widely, and much of Brown's text reads more like straight biblical studies, or historical theology, or art history, or cultural studies, or musicology, or dramatic theory, or whatever. But they nevertheless represent a monumental achievement of recent Christian scholarship, as well as a significant challenge to the way philosophers of religion and systematic theologians typically operate. If nothing else, these five volumes may be commended as valuable general introductions to the various forms of human culture they survey, and to the religious significance of these forms. But to once again adapt Stump's comments about *The Divine Trinity*, I hope that they may also collectively stimulate a new conversation between philosophy of religion and human culture as they both explore the truth of Christian doctrine.

The Psychology of Character and Virtue, edited by Craig Steven Titus. Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2009. 134 pages. $25 (paperback).

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This slim book of essays—the fourth volume in the John Henry Cardinal Newman Lecture series—aims to be a collection of psychological, philosophical, and theological perspectives on "the integrity of character and

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[2]Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea, eds., *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).