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Alasdair MacIntyre and Paul Ricoeur. *The Religious Significance of Atheism*. Pp. viii + 98. (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969.) \\$.75.

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Religious Studies / Volume 8 / Issue 01 / March 1972, pp 88 - 93

DOI: 10.1017/S0034412500004935, Published online: 24 October 2008

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0034412500004935

How to cite this article:

Charles A. Corr (1972). Religious Studies, 8, pp 88-93 doi:10.1017/S0034412500004935

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Systematic Theology to a 'self-transcending God'. Wheat takes this description of God to be a concealed declaration of the humanist faith that God is man, on the ground (sic!) that the notion of self-transcendence is discussed in the first volume of *Systematic Theology* 'only in relation to man'. Since Tillich maintains in the second volume that no major change in his theological views has taken place since the appearance of the first volume, 'it follows', Wheat claims, 'that a self-transcending God is the same as a self-transcending man: God is man' (p. 108).

Wheat is unperturbed by the fact that Tillich's writings are full of explicit denials of his main thesis. Noting that Tillich 'sometimes expresses hostility towards attitudes he identifies with humanism', Wheat asserts: 'Remarks like these may seem to express a lack of enthusiasm for humanism but they actually constitute a smokescreen, laid down by Tillich to hide his own humanism from the larger audience' (p. 171). When Tillich says 'I myself believe that the humanist ideal is inferior to the Christ concept', Wheat blandly comments: 'As an avowed apologist for Christianity, Tillich must say that the "Christ concept" is better, but he does this with the secret reservation that humanism is what the Christ symbolises' (pp. 172-3).

It may be that Wheat supposes himself to be entitled to violate all the ordinary canons of exegesis because of the extraordinary devices allegedly employed by Tillich to disguise the fact that he is a humanist saboteur bent upon destroying the foundations of the Christian faith. He claims, for example, that one of Tillich's 'techniques' is 'to plant one premise in one book and another somewhere else, leaving it to the reader to find them and put them together to arrive at a conclusion' (p. 99). Wheat's attribution of this 'technique' to Tillich is, however, utterly groundless. Moreover, if, *per impossibile*, it were one of Tillich's techniques, it would mean an end to all serious interpretation of his writings.

A. M. MACLEOD

Alasdair MacIntyre and Paul Ricoeur. *The Religious Significance of Atheism*. Pp. viii + 98. (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969.) \$4.75.

During the past five or ten years growing attention has been paid to the topic of atheism. Representative publications which come immediately to mind include Henri De Lubac's *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (Meridian, 1963), Ignace Lepp's *Atheism in Our Time* (Macmillan, 1964), William Luijpen's *Phenomenology and Atheism* (Duquesne, 1964), and Jean Lacroix's *The Meaning of Modern Atheism* (Macmillan, 1966). More recently the Newman Press has made available a translation of Cornelio Fabro's massive Italian study under the title *God in Exile: Modern Atheism* (1968). It is an

intriguing fact that all but one of these authors are Catholic priests. I believe the broad impetus for these studies, however, lies in the increasing presence of atheism as a functioning option in our culture, together with a shift in philosophy towards philosophy of religion and away from a concentration on natural theology. As atheism becomes a widespread sociological phenomenon and as philosophers pursue their reflection on the facts of human religious experience, we may expect the topic of atheism to provide a continuing point of departure for critical analysis in philosophy and other disciplines. Even the so-called 'death of God' theology—which has itself recently been accused of being moribund—made a useful contribution to this discussion by focusing attention on the basic issues of religion, theology, and God.

Until recently, however, the emphasis within the philosophical concern for atheism has largely been devoted to historical or conceptual clarification. Thus the books listed in the preceding paragraph are, for the most part, surveys of the development of atheism as a comprehensive world outlook or internal analyses of the structure and variety of contemporary atheistic viewpoints. *The Religious Significance of Atheism* seeks to move the discussion to a further stage by pointing to the on-going implications of contemporary atheism. Alasdair MacIntyre and Paul Ricoeur present some of the questions which are stimulated by a consideration of atheism and which may be expected to feature prominently in future discussions of this topic.

The Religious Significance of Atheism is a slim volume of some 27,000 words which originated in the Bampton Lectures for 1966. In these lectures Columbia University sought to bring together in reference to a common topic two European philosophers of quite disparate background and viewpoint. MacIntyre and Ricoeur embody all of the polarities of Englishman and Frenchman, non-believer and believer, linguistic analyst and existential phenomenologist. Nevertheless, although they view the issue rather differently, both men share a sympathetic concern for contemporary atheism. And both agree that their lectures raise the question of 'the whole relationship of sociological analysis to philosophical argument' (v), though that issue is not faced in the book itself.

The central theme, expressed in the title of *The Religious Significance of Atheism*, is itself skillfully chosen. It presupposes the reality of contemporary atheism and focuses on the import of that fact. In addition, the consequences to be considered are those of a broadly religious character. Although MacIntyre and Ricoeur each begin from a special expertise—which rests for MacIntyre in a sociological or cultural context and for Ricoeur in a more directly philosophical or theological emphasis—both bring their analyses to bear on the overall human significance of the topic. It is instructive to be reminded that atheism is more than an abstract, intellectual position, and that it does have religious implications which speak to the total human situation.

The general theme of MacIntyre's two lectures is 'The Debate about God: Victorian Relevance and Contemporary Irrelevance'. As he says: 'I must ask whether what is at least a decline in the urgency of the debate and what may be, as I shall be claiming, a change in its whole character may not be connected with, indeed explained by, more fundamental changes in our culture' (5). That there has been a change in the character of the debate between theists and atheists is established in the first lecture, 'The Fate of Theism', by comparing the historical dialogue with our contemporary situation. MacIntyre traces the vicissitudes of theism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as it responded to atheism by changing into deism or by withdrawing to the extremity of Pascal's wager. More recently, he finds that since the mid-nineteenth century some people have simply rejected theism (e.g. Russell and Sartre), others have preserved their theistic beliefs by withdrawing to a kind of enclave or self-imposed ghetto, and still others (T. S. Eliot is offered as an instance) have retained orthodoxy by living in the world as theistic critics of secular culture. All of these alternatives are unacceptable to MacIntyre because they depend on an active controversy between theists and atheists. As he says, 'the self-conscious ex-Christian atheist is to be distinguished from the secularised unbeliever, who sees no point in actually denying the existence of God because he never saw any point in affirming it in the first place' (14-15). That is, what we now find is an indifference to theism or an evacuation of its content to the point that it need not be rejected since it involves so small a commitment. Where belief in God has become belief in belief and where attendance at church is more a social than a religious pursuit, there atheism has no real opponent to sustain it as an active alternative.

It might be argued that one need not evacuate theism of its entire substance in order to make possible a viable relationship between it and our secular culture. Many theologians, for example, have recently sought to preserve what they regard as the heart of theism or of Christianity, while discarding the outmoded accretions which have traditionally come to encumber it. MacIntyre rejects this endeavour almost out of hand. He simply states that such aims are incompatible with each other, offers one or two critical examples, and closes with the claim that 'any attempt of this kind must inevitably fail' (26).

In his second lecture MacIntyre turns to the question of 'Atheism and Morals'. Employing tactics similar to those of the first lecture, he begins by noting the importance of the issue of the relationship between Christianity and morals for the Victorian era. An instance is Dostoyevsky who announced that if God does not exist everything is permitted. We no longer put much credence in such pronouncements because we know that atheists need not be the immoral hedonists of the traditional stereotype. Indeed, MacIntyre goes further, for he contends 'that theism itself requires and

presupposes both a moral vocabulary which can be understood independently of theistic beliefs and moral practices which can be justified independently of theistic beliefs' (32). If this is true, theism can be abandoned without doing violence to its moral presuppositions.

The account of morality with MacIntyre advances involves an initial critique of divine voluntarism as an adequate basis for moral values. This granted, he concludes that theists can only resort to the intrinsic rightness or goodness of moral actions or values. That is, theists must admit that moral rules are self-justifying in a way that makes them independent of the theistic context in which they have traditionally been presented. Furthermore, MacIntyre maintains that for many reasons a self-validating moral code is no longer acceptable as a viable ethical position. Therefore he can argue not only that an individual can be moral without being theistic, but also that 'a change in the character of morality is at least partly responsible for the modern inability to accept theistic belief' (39). All of which results in MacIntyre's final conclusion with regard to theists and atheists, namely that 'an understanding of the marginal position of their debate in our culture is a key to our understanding of both that culture and ourselves' (54).

Paul Ricoeur's general position and his approach to the topic are quite different from those of MacIntyre. 'As I see it,' he says, 'the phrase "the religious significance of atheism" suggests that atheism does not exhaust itself in the negation and destruction of religion; rather, that atheism clears the ground for a new faith, a faith for a postreligious age' (59). This ability to view atheism both as a salutary break with past dogma and as a favorable opportunity for belief in the future depends on the central distinction between religion and faith which underlies Ricoeur's entire position. The distinction is treated only implicitly in the lectures, but its pursuit may be Ricoeur's most important contribution to the discussion.

Ricoeur's two lectures are devoted to the twin topics of accusation and consolation. Accusation represents the human sense of lack and sin, the awareness of divinity as a threat, and the fundamental religious fear of punishment; consolation involves the desire for protection, the role of God as comforter, and the hope of man for reward. As he treats these questions, Ricoeur seeks to avoid the role of preacher and to maintain his function as a philosopher by limiting himself to a preparatory discourse which draws heavily on the thought of Martin Heidegger.

In his lecture 'On Accusation', Ricoeur takes Nietzsche and Freud as examples of a new hermeneutic which undercuts the traditional foundation of religious and moral belief. From their writings he concludes that the God of classical metaphysical theology is now dead. Repudiation of an a priori principle of obligation has overthrown Kant's moral God. But the reliability of this negative critique must also be demonstrated in the positive message which accompanies it, and here Ricoeur judges that Nietzsche in particular

has failed us. 'This is why I think that nothing is decided and that all remains open after Nietzsche. Only one lane, it seems to me, is closed by Nietzsche—that of an ontotheology culminating in a moral God who would be the principle and foundation for an ethics of prohibition and condemnation' (68).

Whether a new path to faith can actually be opened at this point is problematic, but Ricoeur suggests at least a way to begin. 'I propose that as our first step along this difficult path we consider our relation to words—the word of the poet or the word of the thinker or any word which says something about beings and Being' (70–71). To begin with words is to begin with silence and listening, and thus with a kind of nonethical obedience. This 'prepares the way for understanding a human relation to God as Word which is prior to prohibition and accusation' (75), thereby leading to an ethic of the desire to be or of the effort to exist, rather than to an ethic of obligation. Curiously enough, the example for this sort of existential ethic which may undergird a new birth of faith is the ethics of Spinoza. It was Spinoza who realised the need to ground a moral system in the effort or 'conatus' of the human act of existing, a requirement which atheism serves to make prominent once again in our contemporary situation.

At the outset of his lecture 'On Consolation' Ricoeur suggests that 'if atheism is to have any religious significance, the death of the providential God should point toward a new faith, a tragic faith which would be to classical metaphysics what the faith of Job was to the archaic law of retribution professed by his pious friends' (82). That is, atheism has overthrown the Leibnizian theodicy, the attempt to vindicate God's goodness and omnipotence in the presence of evil in the world. According to Ricoeur we are thereby led beyond the search for a rational reconciliation of the opposing forces in reality to a positive ontology centering in what Nietzsche called 'the innocence of becoming' and what Freud termed 'the principle of reality'.

Yet Freud admitted that religion has the important function of comforting man and compensating him for the hardness of life. A faith which could serve this need in the context established by contemporary atheism would call not on a strong, providential Deity, but on a weak, crucified God who teaches us to draw on our own resources in facing the trials of life. Such a faith is similar in many ways to the Christianity which Bonhoeffer called for in his last writings from prison. It would neutralise all accusation, exclude the narcissistic desire for protection, and lead to a Job-like resignation to a nonethical order of the whole of being. This resignation is really a consent to reality or a love of creation, and thus it is a mode of dwelling on earth which is its own reward quite apart from eternal recompense. Put another way, the father-image of traditional religion must die as an idol so that it may be recovered as a parable of the ground of love, as a symbol of Being itself. For

Ricoeur, then, the religious significance of atheism is that it effects this repudiation of our religious past so that we may find our way to the beginnings of a new and tentative faith for the future.

Quite obviously, MacIntyre and Ricoeur are advancing interpretations of contemporary atheism which are sharply different. Each reader will have to judge for himself which is the more acceptable viewpoint. All may agree, however, that a further study of human religious experience is necessary and useful to determine whether theism is as irrelevant to contemporary society and as outdated by contemporary morality as MacIntyre maintains, or whether it makes possible the new birth of belief and humanistic concern which Ricoeur envisions. Such a study will be invaluable for an adequate philosophical anthropology, whatever it may say to the issues of theism and atheism. For advancing such suggestions and for the entire context in which it places the discussion of contemporary atheism, *The Religious Significance of Atheism* is well worth reading.

CHARLES A. CORR

Paul R. Clifford. *Interpreting Human Experience*. Pp. 254 (London: Collins, 1971.) £2.75.

There are signs of a metaphysical thaw in Christian thinking. With *Interpreting Human Experience*, Paul Clifford joins a small but growing company who are returning to natural theology after the long interlude of Barthian fideism, the austerities of linguistic analysis, and the fun and games of pop-theology. In the grand manner of traditional apologetics, he attempts to correlate Christian theism with contemporary science and philosophy.

Taking departure from micro-physics, he proposes a pluralistic universe, reminiscent of Leibniz as well as Whitehead and Teilhard de Chardin, in which centers of energy continually interact. Philosophically, his most arresting suggestion is the application of this concept to the problems of perception and causation. As long as the perceived object is conceived as passive, he argues, it inevitably either dissolves into sense data or else becomes an unknowable *ding-an-sich*. But if, as modern physics indicates, it is a locus of energy, then to perceive is to be acted upon; perception becomes the product of a dynamic transaction between subject and object. The author shows how such a view could not only 'save the appearances', but preserve the notion of causation as well.

To provide for God and personal agents within the system, he draws freely upon the work of H. D. Lewis and I. T. Ramsey. Empiricism, he argues, has not been empirical enough. When all the evidence is in, experience testifies to an 'elusive self' which demands recognition as surely as it defies description. Similarly, God too is directly experienced on special