

9-1-2005

Review of "Denying and Disclosing God: The Ambiguous Progress of Modern Atheism" by Michael J. Buckley, SJ

Philip J. Rossi

Marquette University, philip.rossi@marquette.edu

AUGUSTIN DANS LA PENSÉE DE PAUL RICOEUR. By Isabelle Bochet. Paris: Facultés Jésumites de Paris, 2004. Pp. 122. € 12.

In her deeply appreciative and evocative reading of Ricoeur's interpretation of Augustine on evil, time, Scripture, and memory—the four main areas where Ricoeur has called on Augustine—Bochet is struck by the delicacy with which Ricoeur treats Augustine's unabashedly theological point of departure on these topics. As a philosopher in a post-Enlightenment world, Ricoeur cannot start with Augustine's faith. Yet, throughout his life, he has been interested in these liminal topics that for Augustine presupposed revelation. As a philosopher Ricoeur was determined to stay within a philosophical framework. In listening to Augustine, he transformed these boundary topics into points of disclosure of inescapable enigmas and aporias of thought. B. shows Ricoeur's profound indebtedness to Augustine for thinking at the boundaries of philosophical thought.

While B.'s concern is the mode, style, and validity of Ricoeur's interpretation of Augustine, the underlying theme of the slim book is modernity's distinction between philosophical and theological discourse. For Augustine this distinction was unthinkable. In Ricoeur, as shown in his decision to leave out a scriptural hermeneutics of the self from the published text of his 1986 Gifford Lectures, B. sees a certain nostalgia for the historical unity between philosophy and theology (99). For Ricoeur the split between the two discourses in today's academy jeopardizes the unity of the self as testimony. The attesting self is left with a question mark as to the source or referent of the attestation. On the positive side, the embargo of the academy has permitted Ricoeur to disclose in these four areas a surplus of meaning, an enigma of reality or an aporia in thinking as residues of theological reflection.

B.'s generous interpretation of Ricoeur's Augustine reawakens the desire to rethink the relationship of philosophy and theology beyond the suspicious and all-too-narrow portal of mod-

ern rationality. She has done a real service by bringing together Augustine who so dominated the premodern symbolic framework of the West and Ricoeur's inflected interpretation of Augustine in a time when we succumb too easily to the disjunctive siren of late modernity.

JOHN VAN DEN HENGEL, S.C.J.
Saint Paul University, Ottawa

DENYING AND DISCLOSING GOD: THE AMBIGUOUS PROGRESS OF MODERN ATHEISM. By Michael J. Buckley, S.J. New Haven: Yale University. 2004. Pp. xviii + 173. \$35.

This expansion of Buckley's D'Arcy Lectures of 2000 adds significant highlights to his claim advanced in *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (1987) that "the dialectical genesis of modern atheism" (xi) lies in the theological apologetics that engaged the worldview, emergent from the new science, of mechanistic principles governing a universe of matter and motion.

After providing vignettes of the "three distinct settlements negotiated between the new knowledge and the ancient faith" (23) by Galileo, Kepler, and Newton, B. responds to John Milbank's criticism of his dialectical claim by sketching three "great 'theological experiments.'" (29) These further illustrate the pattern of contradiction by which "atheism as an argument and a theory was generated by the very intellectual forces enlisted to counter it" (28). Since the core of the contradiction lies "in the bracketing of the religious" (46), B. then addresses the charge, paradigmatically articulated by Tillich, that Aquinas bears major responsibility for blazing the path on which affirmation of God is mediated theoretically by inference rather than experientially in religious encounter. B. argues that close textual reading shows Aquinas's view to be that "God was not primordially reached as a conclusion . . . but as a presence" in which "[t]he first moment is given by human longings and loves" (62). B. then puts 19th- and 20th-century critiques of "the divine as the antithesis of the human" and "the di-

vine as projection . . . of the human" (100) in creative interplay with a renewed 20th-century interest in contemplation, mystical life, and apophatic theology (108). Both approaches radically call in question "the self-projection inescapably present in religious ideas" (110) so that, paradoxically, "the secret revealed by nineteenth-century atheism had been recognized for centuries by a tradition of radical spirituality" (121).

B. concludes this elegant set of essays by proposing a further negation of the dialectic of religious argument that issued in atheism: retrieval of a "religious intellectuality" (xv) that acknowledges cognitive weight in "the claim of God" (133) disclosed in the witness of holiness in human lives, and in the absolute claims of truth, beauty, or justice upon our human attention and assent.

PHILIP J. ROSSI, S.J.
Marquette University, Milwaukee

NÉS DE DIEU: ITINÉRAIRES DE CHRÉTIENS ENGAGÉS: ESSAI DE LECTURE THÉOLOGIQUE. By Étienne Grieu. *Cogitatio Fidei*, vol. 231. Paris: Cerf, 2003. Pp. 518. € 35.

In this sizable volume, Étienne Grieu of the Centre Sèvres in Paris proposes a fundamental theology that starts not solely from revelation nor from personal experience but from the milieu of one's existence. For G. this means examining faith in the fuller context in which it arises: in the midst of the life of the Christian believer. He thus begins his work by interviewing 33 committed Catholics actively involved in both church and society in France (e.g., Action catholique ouvrière, Jeunesse étudiante chrétienne, Confédération française démocratique du travail). Each is asked to tell, in his or her own words, how they came to believe in God. The resulting "life stories" become the primary material on which G. bases his work.

The book is structured into three parts, each exploring a different aspect of one's relationship with God. Filiation is the common theme. Part 1 focuses on recognizing and accepting oneself as God's son or daughter. Part 2 turns to

one's relationship to others and the possibility of welcoming others as brothers and sisters. Part 3 examines the believer's experience in relation to the world. In each part, G. uses biblical texts from both Old and New Testaments and contributions from such contemporary theologians as Metz, Rahner, and Tillich to illuminate his argument.

Nés de Dieu is a creative endeavor; its approach is not entirely new, but G. argues that it has been somewhat forgotten. In recent years, he says, theologians have been more concerned with either the origin of faith or its goal but not in the way believers express their faith. Those interested in the relationship of revelation and faith, its discernment and transmission, are encouraged to consider this work.

MICHAEL ATTRIDGE
University of St. Michael's College,
Toronto

AFTER SUNDAY: A THEOLOGY OF WORK. By Armand Larive. New York: Continuum, 2004. Pp. 198. \$21.95.

Larive articulates a theological understanding of work modeled on the work-related characteristics of the Trinity. His overall theme is that everyday human work has a metemphatic value that incorporates not only humanity's concerns, but also God's. Unfortunately, this metemphatic value has been virtually ignored by both Christian clergy and scholarship, even though it forms the basis for the theological significance of human work.

In the opening chapters, L. offers contemporary views on work, demonstrates the "firewalls" constructed by Christian theology to undermine the significance of secular work, and introduces a framework from which the laity can begin to recognize their work as a vocation. These chapters are helpful because L. draws from the social sciences to help bridge the often experienced disconnect between faith and everyday life. He also persuasively argues that the life and work of the laity need to be afforded a "primary identity" status within the Christian Church.

In the next three chapters, L. explores