

thus continues to leave definitions open, she also adds to the theories of others outlined in her work by providing her own analysis of theory, which may be in turn used to further develop terms (towards definition?).

Thus Hollywood establishes complicated links between mysticism, history, and gender. Because of the complexity of her arguments this work is perfect for those looking for in-depth readings about French thinkers in relation to the developments in the study of mysticism and gender. For those looking for a general introduction to mysticism, however, or for work that may provide a broad overview of mysticism and gender, this would not be appropriate. This study is ideal for those who already have basic knowledge of arguments in the area of French critical thought.

Hollywood seeks to redefine how we look at particular writings. In doing so, she presents us with traditional interpretations, while offering her analysis in opposition to those interpretations. This is helpful in putting her arguments into context, as well as differentiating her scholarship from previous studies. Her book is a must read for those interested in studies of gender in relation to mysticism, especially in relation to contemporary French thinkers. She provides new readings of these thinkers, particularly of Bataille and Irigaray, and offers fresh insights into the writings pertaining to medieval female mystics. She provides an in-depth study that should lead others to new scholarship in this area.

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Emyr Vaughan Thomas, *Wittgensteinian Values: Philosophy, Religious Belief and Descriptivist Methodology*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001. ISBN 1-84014-853-5. 144 pp. \$59.95 (cloth).

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Famously, Ludwig Wittgenstein said that "[p]hilosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it" (*Philosophical Investigations* [New York: Macmillan, 1953], p. 49). It seems, therefore, that his philosophy might provide the study of religion with a healthy descriptivist methodology, an approach in which the observer's own norms do not interfere with the description of reli-

gion's beliefs and practices. The problem with this approach has been, however, that most of Wittgenstein's philosophical followers who discuss religion seem to operate with a fairly definite understanding of what religion "truly" is, and they consequently talk about religion in a very judgmental way. If their evaluative approach could be disentangled from Wittgenstein's original project, the result would be valuable for the study of religion generally. This book proposes this project but then disappoints as it recommends its own Christian theology and leaves the idea of a descriptivist methodology undeveloped.

Thomas argues that the Wittgensteinian approach makes the idea of self-renunciation central to its understanding of religion, and the Wittgensteinians unpack this idea in terms of five elements. On this approach, then, religion is (1) pursued as an end in itself, not as a means to some other end; (2) it is not pursued for consolation; (3) it is unreflective; (4) it is a perspective or framework on life in general rather than a belief about things in particular; and (5) it does not involve the metaphysical, by which Thomas understands the supernatural. I would add that Wittgensteinians typically reject metaphysics not only in the sense of the supernatural, but also in the sense of claims about the nature of reality as such, that is, claims that are alleged to be necessary and so presupposed by any language game. But this five-part list does capture the view of most Wittgensteinians.

Thomas praises the focus on self-renunciation, but he objects that understanding self-renunciation in terms of these five elements is problematic. The elements distort the study of religion because they lead one to classify as superstitious those forms of faith that are pursued as a means to a non-religious end, that are consoling or reflective, or that involve beliefs about particulars or a faith in the supernatural. Thomas's strategy, one might say, is itself Wittgensteinian and therapeutic: it seeks to free Wittgensteinians from this set of assumptions. Thomas then proposes a different understanding of self-renunciation, one he finds in the novels of the French Catholic writer Georges Bernanos. Bernanos supplies us with a superior sense of self-renunciation, Thomas believes, one in which consolation, reflection, and the supernatural are not excluded.

Thomas then sketches the "roots" of the Wittgensteinian approach. Thomas admits that at the literary and philosophical ideas he covers are not necessarily ones that Wittgenstein was exposed to directly, but they were in the cultural air and, Thomas holds, underlie his position. In this section Thomas produces often dizzying connections of thinkers. In the foreground are the ideas of Tolstoy, Trakl, Rilke, Hoffmannsthal,

and Emerson. Kant, Kraus, Dostoyevski, and Schopenhauer appear. "Some connections of Kierkegaard will also be brought in from time to time" (72). One brief and overburdened paragraph links Hoffmannsthal to Trakl to Mach to Freud (73-4). In the end, Thomas concludes that Wittgenstein's "is a late nineteenth century world-view, heavily influenced by a *fin-de-siècle* form of neo-romanticism, in which the self is infatuated with its own inner integrity and capacity to achieve an independence from all external contingencies" (99). This means for Thomas that "Wittgenstein is not a religious thinker in a Christian sense because of the absence in his life and thought of an unambiguously Christian notion of self-renunciation" (106).

It is an interesting question what kind of religious faith or values Wittgenstein had and Thomas's interpretation is not implausible. But sometimes the connections he points out are too subtle for me to see. For example, it isn't clear how an anti-consequentialist "capacity for detachment from dependence on outcomes" is "only a very short step from" an anti-supernatural attitude in which one is unaffected by "things above, beyond or behind the world" (94).

Thomas is right that a philosopher's writings can be read to reflect a concern for their own self-integrity, and perhaps none more than Wittgenstein's. But what has become of the search for a descriptivist methodology? This book never defines the term, does not show what Wittgenstein might have meant by the idea, nor outlines such a method. It simply replaces one prescriptive understanding of religion with another. That self-renunciation is part of the nature of religion is assumed, and the idea that "religion" is a family resemblance concept is not considered. In this light, a more apposite title for the book would have been *Authentic Religious Virtue: Wittgenstein and Bernanos on Self-Renunciation*.

As a last point, Thomas uses an unwieldy reference system in which he cites complete bibliographic information parenthetically in the text about half the time and uses a system of codes the other half. The codes direct the reader to a key at the beginning of the book, and the key lets one turn to the back of the book for complete bibliographic information. This approach, coupled with the abundance of typographical and grammatical errors, sentence fragments and repeated quotes, give the book an unpolished or even unfinished air. Better editing would have helped.

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