

*God and Evil: A Jewish Perspective.* By David Birnbaum. Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 1989. ISBN 0-88125-307-3. Pp. xxi+266.

*God and Evil* is an ambitious book. It claims to provide, least in outline, a unified philosophical structure that will provide a solution to the problem of theodicy by placing it in the context of a renewed theological vision of human nature, and indeed of the origins and purpose of the entire cosmos.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part is a discussion of the nature of theodicy and a summary of the various types of theodicy. Some of the approaches to the problem of evil referred to would probably not be familiar to those whose reading has been confined to the various Christian theodicies. Birnbaum discusses the suffering of the *tzaddik* or saintly individual, cabbalistic responses to suffering such as the notion of divine contraction or *tsimtsum*, and the response which Birnbaum himself will focus on, *Hester Panim*, or the hiding of the Divine face. Part one closes with a section on the importance of rationality in Jewish religious life that is heavily indebted to Soloveitchik's characterization of "Halakhic Man." The Halakhic individual accepts no authority but the authority of the intellect. Whilst the intellect will be grounded in tradition, such an individual shies away from "leaps of faith." However, Birnbaum seems to be operating with a rather narrow understanding of human understanding, which appears to set the affective in opposition to the rational. This makes it difficult for him to give a clear account of what makes some leaps of faith intellectually flawed and others acceptable.

In fact, Birnbaum himself departs from some of his more narrowly rationalistic concerns when he expounds his own theodicy in Part Two. What makes this section interesting is the way in which Birnbaum weaves together a number of cabbalistic themes to provide a new philosophical and theological framework for what turns out to be a version of the free-will defense.

Birnbaum's discussion is wide ranging. He does not confine himself to an abstract discussion of the problems of reconciling divine omnipotence, omniscience and benevolence with the existence of evil. Such a discussion would neglect the historical theological questions raised by the claim that God has acted in Israel's past, particularly in the Exodus. Birnbaum wants a structure that will allow him to integrate such claims with God's apparent neglect of Israel in the holocaust. He claims that,

As mankind and Judaism ascend in knowledge on the road to fulfilling a primal drive of creation, there is an implicit demand for fuller freedom . . . As mankind ascends in knowledge, implicitly demanding more freedom, there is a proportional contraction (*tsimtsum*) of Divine here-and-now consciousness. This is a primary form of *Hester Panim* which yields man [sic] ever greater freedom, privacy, responsibility, and selfhood with concomitant potential.

Birnbaum's theodicy raises a number of problems. Firstly, I find it odd that, in the aftermath of the events of the holocaust, Birnbaum can be as optimistic as he is about human ascent. Human knowledge certainly continues to grow, but there is as yet little empirical evidence that this alone will contribute much to the achievement of "full human potential." Indeed, the holocaust itself, and our growing capacity to destroy ourselves, either in a nuclear conflagration or by the destruction of the earth's environment, seem to point in the opposite direction.

Birnbaum notes that both the masoretic references and the majority of cabbalistic references to *Hester Panim* see it as a divine punishment. His use of *Hester Panim* is quite different. He points out that the cabbalistic writers saw creation as necessitating a withdrawal or contraction of the divine, and draws a parallel between this and the divine withdrawal involved in *Hester Panim*, which provides the necessary condition for human freedom. However, if the element of divine punishment is removed it becomes difficult to understand the importance that Birnbaum attaches to the destruction of the second temple. Further, whilst Birnbaum's use of *Hester Panim* is new, the explanation of the existence of evil in terms of divine self-limitation is not, and Birnbaum's discussion would have benefited from some systematic consideration of the problems faced by other similar approaches. Does it really add to the free will defense to claim that God allowed himself to be in some sense ignorant of the holocaust? Is the withdrawal of divine knowledge even necessary to human freedom? Birnbaum cites Aquinas as claiming that divine foreknowledge is incompatible with human freedom when in fact Aquinas says the opposite. The quote attributed to Aquinas in the text is from a critical essay on Aquinas by Anthony Kenny, and the footnote where the actual reference to Aquinas is given quotes from one of the objections to which Aquinas replies (see *Summa Theologica* XIV:13. Even the reference to the discussion by Kenny [n. 533] is incorrect

and should read p. 256, not p. 250. A brief sampling of a dozen references turned up three additional errors).

Finally, Birnbaum claims that human freedom is incompatible with the divine presence. But surely this is only so if the divine will is defined in opposition to all other wills, and if human freedom is defined solely in atomistic terms. Birnbaum repeatedly restricts his discussion of freedom to freedom from constraint and the ability to choose whatever one wills. But this is indeterminacy not freedom, and the result of indeterminacy is, as Tillich insists, not freedom but chaos.

Whilst I have pointed to a number of problems with the book Birnbaum himself notes that it is doubtful that any attempted resolution to the problem of theodicy will be fully satisfactory. Still, it is surely of the nature of faith to seek understanding, to clarify its claims and explore its implications. Reflection on the problems posed by the existence of evil is a central part of this task and Birnbaum has pointed to a range of resources that will repay careful study by anyone who would take these problems seriously.

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*Canadian Protestant and Catholic Missions, 1820s-1960s: Historical Essays in Honour of John Webster Grant.* Eds. John S. Moir and C.T. McIntire. New York: Peter Lang, 1988. ISBN 0-8204-0465-9. Pp. xiv+266.

Canada experienced a second wave of missionary consciousness and activity between the 1870s and the 1920s (p. 11). Unlike the first wave, which was an undertaking of the Roman Catholics of New France in the seventeenth century to convert the native population, the second wave was the effort of many denominations, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, and its aims and objectives were numerous. The collection of ten essays in *Canadian Protestant and Catholic Missions, 1820s-1960s* explores the renewal of Canadian missionary activity, the thoughts and motivation behind it and some of its results and implications.

Only two of the essays discuss missions outside of Canada. A strong "home mission" mandate existed to convert people who were not Christians; "on-Christians" included not only native people and