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A Neo-Hegelian Theology: The God of Greatest Hospitality [Book Review]

Molly Farneth

Haverford College, mfarneth@haverford.edu

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important influences. Schuler rightly criticizes critics who assume that Auden could not be religious and “polyvalent” (6) in his poetry simultaneously. He writes, “Emig is right that Auden’s adulthood faith was not synonymous with a univocal, calcified religiosity, but he is simply wrong to presuppose an absolute opposition between Christianity and polyvalence. Although there are strains of Christianity that aspire to univocality and the establishment of a religious and even political hegemony, Auden did not think of Christianity in that way” (6). Schuler rightly points out a too rigid definition of religion in much literary criticism, and he is absolutely correct to point out that Auden’s work troubles those definitions. The problem is, however, that Schuler’s sole focus on Augustine gives the illusion of a univocality that he otherwise challenges.

Indeed, one wonders whether Schuler occasionally desires more of a univocal focus to Auden’s poetry than it is willing to provide. For example, at the end of chapter 3 on “Eros and Agape,” Schuler argues that the mature Auden defines agape love as eros transformed by grace. Schuler writes: “At least, that is what Auden said he believed about love in his most lucid statements on the subject. The fact that he did not always act or write in accordance with these beliefs is obvious and forgivable. He faced strong temptations from what he regarded as a misguided eros, and these temptations were not always sexual in nature” (132). Schuler suggests that Auden has a mature position from which he occasionally strayed when his erotic anxieties became too extreme. Nevertheless, one might ask why we should expect the same kind of systematic integrity to poetry as we observe in theology proper? Why is it necessary to forgive Auden’s poetry? Auden himself would insist on maintaining the imaginative freedom that is poetry’s birthright.

In general, however, Schuler’s book gives us more of a sense of the complexity of Auden’s theological striving. In this, Schuler’s book is a valuable addition to the scholarly literature on Auden and a compelling stimulus for further research. One hopes that more authors will take up the challenge to reexamine the intricate negotiations with religious sources in early to mid-twentieth-century poetry.

EDWARD UPTON, *Valparaiso University*.

SHANKS, ANDREW. *A Neo-Hegelian Theology: The God of Greatest Hospitality*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014. 151 pp. \$104.95 (cloth).

In the *Science of Logic*, G. W. F. Hegel distinguishes between two accounts of divine revelation. The first imagines God planting God’s message in the mind of the prophet. God is an active subject; the prophet is a passive object, a receptacle for the truth that God reveals. This, Hegel writes, “may be regarded as *violence*” (quoted in *A Neo-Hegelian Theology*, 1), akin to the relationship of domination between the lord and bondsman that Hegel describes in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

As Andrew Shanks notes in the opening pages of *A Neo-Hegelian Theology*, however, Hegel gives another account of revelation, a “much less direct and therefore altogether slower, unfolding of divine truth, immanent within secular historical developments as well as more overtly religious ones” (2). In this alternate account, God’s message is mediated by social and historical processes and is discerned and interpreted by fallible human beings. God, prophet, and community are all active in the ongoing process of revelation.

What if Christian theology began with this second account of revelation? *A Neo-Hegelian Theology* is Shanks’s answer to that question. The goal of such a theology, Shanks suggests, is not “propositional truth-as-correctness” but “conversational truth-as-openness.” Such truth, he writes, “demands to be disseminated not by propaganda

The Journal of Religion

means—not by the propaganda of church ideology—but, on the contrary, by authentic liturgy, . . . the ritual provision of no-strings-attached imaginative resources for a slow, meditative self-opening toward the imperatives of perfect truth-as-openness” (69). Shanks’s theology is aimed at keeping conversations going, reconciling enemies, and building solidarity.

Shanks, who is Canon Emeritus at Manchester Cathedral, has reason to worry about ideology and conversational closure. In the first chapter of the book, Shanks describes a series of letters that he exchanged with one of the leaders of the break-away opposition to the Church of England. In these letters, Shanks develops an account of heresy as “whatever derives from, and tends to reinforce, a conversation-closing-will-to-schism” (13). The tone of the letters exemplifies Shanks’s argument. Without either becoming indifferent to or accepting of the position of his interlocutor, Shanks repeatedly finds opening for further conversation. At one point, he writes, “I’m grateful: by publicly accusing my cathedral of collusion with heresy, you have at any rate made me think. There surely is a need for new clarity regarding the general concept of ‘heresy.’ And perhaps you could help me clarify my unfolding thoughts in this regard, by explaining to me why I’m wrong?” (15). This kind of openness—to criticism, judgment, and insight from unexpected places—contributes to the liveliness and originality of both the argument and style of the book.

In an earlier work, Shanks depicted what Hegel calls “the beautiful soul” as “any sort of unbending ethical perfectionism that so rules out compromise as, in the end, to render organized, politically effective solidarity-action more or less impossible” (*Hegel and Religious Faith* [London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2011], 12–13). Hegel’s answer to the beautiful soul is to foreground the practices of confession and forgiveness—the willingness both to judge and to be judged by others—in the achievement of reciprocal recognition. Through practices of confession and forgiveness, truth-claims are made, adjudicated, challenged, and transformed. Such practices, therefore, must be part of the process of discernment that is central to the account of revelation that Shanks foregrounds in this work.

Shanks’s letters exemplify this willingness to judge and to be judged by others. But his more abstract formulation of truth as a matter of openness, rather than correctness, sometimes undermines his Hegelian insight about the importance of making and judging truth-claims. This happens, for example, in his praise for Roger Williams as an advocate of religious liberty. Shanks notes that Williams was “forever in search of a pure Christianity—a form of Christian faith absolutely untainted by any of the impulses that might feed into a persecutory mind-set” (34). But Williams’s search for purity led him to abandon religious community altogether. A Hegelian might ask: by what standards would Williams judge and be judged as a Christian, once he retreated from the communities in which such standards were used and contested? Later, Shanks (following Vincent Lloyd) calls for true theology to move toward liturgy as a “practice without norms.” He continues, “It may follow strict procedural rules, but these rules are nothing other than a strategy for enabling its participants’ imaginative transcendence of mere norm-governed life” (89). Again, a Hegelian might ask: how could the socially and historically embedded practices of confession and forgiveness ever be practices without norms?

Shanks’s theological argument is least persuasive when it defines conversational openness in opposition to propositional correctness. Christians ought to make truth-claims; they ought to say what it is that they believe has been revealed. When they do so, they submit those claims to the judgment of others who share a set of texts, traditions, and practices. The Hegelian insight is not that propositional truth-claims are out-of-bounds, but rather, that people see the truth only through a glass darkly, and that we need the right sorts of relationships and practices in place to be

able to consider truth-claims without standing under the threat of violence or domination.

When Shanks writes that Christian theology ought to be about truth-as-openness, I take it that he is calling for greater attention to what those relationships and practices might be in the Church and beyond. In this, it is a welcome and important project. MOLLY FARNETH, *Haverford College*.

SMITH, GEOFFREY S. *Guilt by Association: Heresy Catalogues in Early Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. xvi+196 pp. \$78.00 (cloth).

How can we talk about the diversity of second-century Christianity now that concepts like “Gnosticism,” “orthodoxy,” and “heresy” no longer seem to work? To be sure, probably a majority of scholars in this area continue to use these ideas without hesitation, but some historians seek new ways of describing Christianity in this period that do justice both to its obvious fragmentation and diversity and to its equally clear impulses to unity and uniformity. “Identity formation” refers to one such mode of post-“Gnosticism” scholarship that studies how Christian writers and groups engaged in interactive processes of self-definition that cannot be reduced to the rejection of heretics by the Church. In this provocative revised Princeton dissertation, Geoffrey Smith investigates how early Christian authors used “heresy catalogues” to establish the legitimacy of their teachings and delegitimize those of others. Even if some of his major claims fail to persuade, Smith offers several insights into a literary form whose early history is murky before the appearance of Irenaeus of Lyons’s *Detection and Overthrow of Gnosis Falsely So-Called* around 180 CE.

The argument of *Guilt by Association* proceeds over four chapters. In the first, Smith shows that the philosophical doxography could not have been the sole model for the Christian heresy catalogue; rather, the Pastoral Epistles established the model of heretics descending genealogically from earlier demonically inspired false teachers (see esp. 1 Tim. 1:3–7, 4:1–3, and 2 Tim. 4:3). Chapter 2 argues that Justin Martyr, whom scholars usually identify as the inventor of heresy and of heresiology, did not in fact compose the famous, influential, but now lost *Syntagma against All the Heresies* (*First Apology* 26.8), but rather promoted a work written by someone else at a time when other such heresy catalogues were circulating. The third chapter then considers what other such catalogues might have been like by examining Hegesippus’s list of seven heresies among the Jews and, from Nag Hammadi, the *Tripartite Tractate* and *Testimony of Truth*. Finally, Smith can then argue that Irenaeus’s catalogue reflects a multiform tradition of blacklisting; that Mark Edwards, Bentley Layton, and I are therefore wrong to use it to identify a distinct “Gnostic school of thought” (Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 1.11.1); and that numerous other historians should not call the Valentinian movement a school based on it. The Valentinians were not a school, as Irenaeus depicts them, but “members of the church” (171).

A concise summary cannot report all of Smith’s interesting ideas, nor can a brief review engage all of his arguments, but here are some questions about each chapter. Chapter 1: Smith rightly notes that philosophical doxography was almost always positive or unbiased, while heresy catalogues were negative and delegitimizing (15). But should not the rise of heresy catalogues be considered in relationship to the simultaneous rise of doxography-like claims to apostolic succession, which are documented for both “orthodox” and “heretics” and which culminate in Irenaeus’s list of Roman bishops (*Against the Heresies* 3.3.1)? Did not such positive, legitimating lists also motivate and shape heresy catalogues? Chapter 2: That Justin claims authorship of