The Genealogy of Violence

Charles K. Bellinger

In the twentieth century, many thinkers have put forward theories that purport to explain the motivations underlying the violent behavior of human beings. This book presents Kierkegaard's thought as offering a way of interpreting violent behavior that is superior to the alternatives. The basic elements of Kierkegaard's psychology are drawn out of his published and unpublished works, concentrating on The Concept of Anxiety, Works of Love, and The Sickness unto Death. Violence, most fundamentally, arises out of human resistance to the possibility of psychological change and growth into maturity. Violence toward others seeks to fend off that potential for otherness within oneself that is entailed by the incompleteness of creation. Kierkegaard's theory of violence is compared and contrasted with Rene Girard's theory, and both thinkers are brought into conversation with Karl Barth and Eric Voegelin. Anabaptism's approach to interpreting the history of Christian violence is taken into consideration. Hitler and Stalin, as key contemporary examples of demonic violence, are analyzed in connection with Kierkegaard's aesthetic and ethical spheres of existence. The book closes with reflections on the Christian doctrine of atonement in light of the preceding discussion of the roots of human evil.

The Predicament of Belief

Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp

Item type: book

Can those who appreciate the explanatory power of modern science still believe in traditional religious accounts of the nature and purpose of the universe? This book is intended for those who care about that question

and are dissatisfied with the rigid dichotomies that dominate the contemporary debate. The extremists won't be interested – those who assume that science answers all the questions that matter, and those so certain of their religious faith that dialogue with science, philosophy, or other faith traditions seems unnecessary. But far more people today recognize that matters of faith are complex, that doubt is endemic to belief, and that dialogue is indispensable in our day. In eight probing chapters, the authors of The Predicament of Belief consider the most urgent reasons for doubting that religious claims – in particular, those embedded in the Christian tradition – are likely to be true. They develop a version of Christian faith that preserves the tradition's core insights but also gauges the varying degrees of certainty with which those insights can still be affirmed. Along the way, they address such questions as the ultimate origin of the universe, the existence of innocent suffering, the challenge of religious plurality, and how to understand the extraordinary claim that an ancient teacher rose from the dead. They end with a discussion of what their conclusions imply about the present state and future structure of churches and other communities in which Christian affirmations are made.

Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil

Brian Davies

This book offers an in-depth study of Saint Thomas Aquinas's thoughts on God and evil, revealing that Aquinas's thinking about God and evil can be traced through his metaphysical philosophy, his thoughts on God and creation, and his writings about Christian revelation and the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. The book first gives an introduction to Aquinas's philosophical theology, as well as a nuanced analysis of the ways in which Aquinas's writings have been considered over time. For hundreds of years scholars have argued that Aquinas's views on God and evil were original and different from those of his contemporaries. The book shows that Aquinas's views were by modern standards very original, but that in their historical context they were more traditional than many scholars since have realized. The book also provides insight into what we can learn from Aquinas's philosophy.

Fortunate Fallibility

Jason A. Mahn

This book deconstructs and reconstructs the fortunate Fall (felix culpa) theme of Western thought, using Kierkegaard as a guide. Dating back to the fifth century Easter Eve Mass, the claim that Adam's Fall might be considered "fortunate" in light of a resultant good has become Christianity's most controversial and unwieldy idea. Whereas the phrase originally praised sin as a backhanded witness to the ineffability of redemption, modern speculative theodicy came to understand all evil as comprehensible, historically productive, and therefore fortunate, while the Romantic poets celebrated transgression for bolstering individual creativity and spiritedness. This book traces Kierkegaard's blunt critique of Idealism's justification of evil, as well as his playful deconstruction of Romantic celebrations of sin. The book argues, however, that Kierkegaard also resists the moralization of evil, preferring to consider temptation and sin as determinative dimensions of religious existence. At least in relation to the assumed "innocence" of Christendom's cultured Christians, the self-conscious sinner might be the better religious witness. Although the book shows how Kierkegaard finally replaces actual sin with human fragility, temptation, and the possibility of spiritual offense as that which "happily" shapes religious faith, it also argues that his understanding of "fortunate fallibility" is at least as rhetorically compelling and theologically operative as talk of a "fortunate Fall." Together, Kierkegaard's playful maneuvers and this book's thematizations carve rhetorical space for Christian theologians to speak of sin in ways that are more particular and peculiar than the typical discourses of Church and culture.

The i/f distinction's ethical import

T. A. Cavanaugh

in Double-Effect Reasoning: Doing Good and Avoiding Evil

This chapter argues the most controverted and important claim of DER: the ethical relevance of the distinction between intent of a harmful means and foresight of a causally necessitated, consequentially

comparable harmful concomitant. It considers misunderstandings of the distinction and argues against the consequentialist claim that the i/f distinction lacks relevance in act-evaluation while it may possess import in agent-evaluation. The i/f distinction has ethical import insofar as it articulates the full significance of the most basic ethical difference, namely, the difference between the voluntary and the not voluntary that establishes the very subject matter of ethics. Moreover, the distinction has ethical significance insofar as it reflects the unique status of persons as ends-in-themselves, a status that refers to and makes demands upon the intentions constituting acts. The chapter establishes the ethical relevance of this distinction, grounding its import both in widely acknowledged features of action as voluntary (in a broadly Aristotelian-Thomistic sense) and in a Kantian focus on the victim as an end in himself.

Does Evil Persist?

Oswald Bayer and Jeff Cayzer

in Freedom in Response

This chapter discusses the concept of evil that does not persist. It is possible to take the idea that evil does not persist as a concept that in philosophical terms posits a guideline for human behaviour. Modern concepts of the kingdom of God are framed according to this philosophy. It persists, only varying the forms in which it appears, forms that theology and philosophy, political science, psychology, biology and behavioural science — including theories of aggression — strive to comprehend.

The Corruption of Sin

Christopher M. Cullen

in Bonaventure

Bonaventure rejects any sort of fundamental dualism between good and evil. He argues that, "a first and absolute evil does not and could not exist because the very notion of First Principle implies supreme

plenitude". Bonaventure follows Augustine in distinguishing between natural and moral evil, or, to use the terminology from Augustine's On Free Choice (De libero arbitrio), the evil of penalty (malum poenae) and the evil of guilt (malum culpae). The former is an evil we suffer, while the latter is a privation of righteousness that we cause. The evil of penalty is just and comes from divine providence.

Providence and Evil

Paul Helm

in John Calvin's Ideas

Calvin's view of God's all-controlling providence is expounded, chiefly from his A Defence of the Secret Providence of God. Ten arguments from this work are identified and discussed. His attitude to 'the problem of evil' is contrasted with that of contemporary philosophers of religion. It is argued that Calvin's idea of providence appears to imply a version of 'hierarchical determinism'. His views (and method) are compared with those of the Reformer Zwingli, and with the Libertines of Calvin's day.

Divine Evil?

Michael Bergmann, Michael J. Murray, and Michael C. Rea (eds)

Numerous critics of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have argued that God, especially in the Hebrew Bible, is often portrayed as morally vicious. For example, historical narratives in these texts apparently describe God as ordering or commending genocide, slavery, and rape among other moral atrocities; and other texts seem to portray God as commending bigotry, misogyny, and homophobia. The main chapters in this interdisciplinary volume fall into four groups: (i) the first three press objections by philosophers to the moral character of God as it is represented in the Hebrew Bible; (ii) the next five offer responses by theistic philosophers to such objections; (iii) the next two after that present additional responses from the perspective of specialists in biblical studies; and (iv) the final chapter provides some general reflections on the conference at which these papers were initially

presented. Also included in the volume are commentators' remarks on each chapter (except the last), along with replies by the original authors.

The Problem of Evil and the History of Peoples: Think Amalek

Eleonore Stump

in Divine Evil?: The Moral Character of the God of Abraham

This chapter discusses the problem of evil as it is raised by the story in the Hebrew Bible in which God commands Israelites to slaughter the Amalekites and possible defenses or theodicies as regards that story. One way to deal with this story is to reject it as non-veridical, either by claiming that it should not be taken as part of divine revelation or by interpreting it to say something other than its literal meaning. This chapter adopts a different approach. It partially describes a putatively possible world which is very similar to the actual world, including the existence of evil, but in which the central claims of Christianity are also true. The chapter then investigates, as a thought experiment, whether the story of the slaughter of the Amalekites could be literally true in a world of that sort. The chapter argues that it could.