and solicitude for, the student's difficulties. Finally, there is a disastrous misprint on page 221, line 10 of the paragraph beginning on that page; "ontological" should be "cosmological."

Having stated these reservations, I return to my earlier conclusion. This text fulfills its title's promise—it does a commendable job of introducing philosophy.

Thinking About Religion:
A Philosophical Introduction to Religion, Richard Purtill.


G. Stanley Kane
Miami University

Richard Purtill and William Rowe have taken markedly different approaches in their textbooks to the introductory study of philosophy of religion. Rowe's book is quite traditional, both in selection of topics and in method of treatment. Purtill's offers some significant departures from standard approaches.

Claiming that "I have found—and other teachers have told me that their experience has been similar—that present-day students have certain difficulties" (xi) with the range of topics usually covered in an introductory textbook, Purtill includes chapters, or major sections of chapters, on the death of God, the historical reliability of the Bible, prayer, Eastern religion, and what heaven, or life after death, might be like, in addition to discussions of more standard topics such as the arguments for the existence of God, the problem of evil, and miracles. The topics in his book are those which, he claims, "I have found to create the most interest and cause the most discussion when they have come up in class" (xii). They are, he adds, topics often suggested by students themselves.

At the beginning of each chapter Purtill uses a device which is designed to stimulate the interest of the student in the topic of the chapter and which helps to bring out the practical implications of the topic. He presents a story or parable that seeks to show the connection of the philosophical issues in question with real-life problems and situations that people commonly encounter.

Purtill suggests that his book be read together with a book of readings, and at the end of each chapter he furnishes references to articles in the anthologies of Baruch Brody (Readings in the Philosophy of Religion) and Keith Yandell (God, Man and Religion) which he suggests can be used as supplementary reading.

The range of topics in Rowe's book is pretty much standard fare. His opening chapter is given over to an explication of the concept of God in western theistic religion. Then he devotes a chapter each to a discussion of the major philosophical arguments for the existence of God: the ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments and the argument from religious experience (including mysticism). Next comes a series of chapters which deal with attempts to refute the existence of God, with a chapter each on the problem of evil, the question of the meaningfulness of religious language, and Freud's account of religious belief. Following this the book moves to a treatment of certain problems that arise in the context of theistic religious belief, with a chapter given over to each of the following problems: miracles, life after death, the relation of divine foreknowledge and predestination to human freedom, and faith and reason. Rowe closes his book with "A Glimpse Beyond Theism," in which he sketches some of the major religious views of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman.

The roster of topics that Rowe deals with looks very much like that with which Purtill claims the present-day student has
trouble. It is worth inquiring, therefore, what leads Purtill to make his claim and whether it would be correct to apply the judgment he makes to Rowe's book. The primary source of students' difficulty with the traditional range of topics is, according to Purtill, the conjunction of two circumstances. On the one hand, the usual philosophical discussion of these topics presupposes some familiarity with western religious belief and practice. On the other hand, students today show a marked lack of knowledge of such matters. This is often as true of people who identify themselves with one of the western religious traditions—Judaism or Christianity—as it is of those who do not. For this reason Purtill's book takes little for granted. Though it gets into some serious philosophical issues, it is written on a very simple level, and it makes a point of explaining for many religious beliefs their background in the life and general outlook of believers in a way that is not often done in a philosophy of religion textbook. A major objective of the book is to impart a sympathetic understanding of religious beliefs and, to a lesser extent, of some alternative views. This last point, it seems to me, is a positive one. Whether one ultimately accepts or rejects religious (or any other kind of) beliefs, sympathetic understanding is indispensable to intelligent critical appraisal, which after all is one of the major tasks of philosophical investigation.

My own experience and that of people I know bear out Purtill's contention that there is a conspicuous lack of knowledge among contemporary students concerning things religious. Does Rowe's book, then, with its more traditional set of topics, run afoul of this problem? To some extent, I think, it does. But Rowe takes some steps that go part way to overcoming it. His introductory chapter explaining the theistic concept of God is a step in this direction. But it is a small step. The chapter proceeds by explicating some of the leading attributes—omnipotence, omniscience, perfect goodness, self-existence and the like—that have been ascribed to God and by indicating something of the rationale for ascribing them. But Rowe does not go as far as Purtill in seeking to show the roots of the beliefs he examines in the life and general outlook of believers. Rowe's book does a little, but not a great deal, that might discourage the impression widely generated by analytic philosophy of religion that philosophers' concerns with religious belief are abstract, theoretical, and remote from the real-life concerns of everyday people.

Is it fair, however, to expect the author of a text in philosophy of religion to include material that would remedy this lack of background knowledge? Clearly, an introductory text cannot give all that it is desirable for students in philosophy of religion to have. And neither Purtill's nor Rowe's book provides both the kind of background Purtill sees as needed and also the careful, detailed analysis and appraisal of beliefs, reasons, and arguments that have been the métier of recent analytic philosophy. Purtill's book is strong in providing the background information, but it is weak in its presentation and treatment of arguments. Rowe's book, on the other hand, does not spend a great deal of time presenting the kind of background information Purtill offers, but he does a superb job of presenting the arguments and counterarguments on the topics he discusses.

A comparison of their treatment of the traditional arguments for the existence of God will highlight this difference between them. Rowe gives four chapters to presentation and analysis of four major arguments: the ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments and the argument from religious experience. In terms of number of pages, these chapters represent almost one-third of the book, and the discussion in these pages is probing and thorough. Purtill covers the ontological argument, the argument from religious experience, and the moral argument, all within the scope of ten pages in his third chapter, and he presents his version of the cosmological-teleological argument somewhat more fully in eight pages in the following chapter. The limits of space which Purtill imposes on himself prevent
him from giving the thorough and detailed analysis of the arguments found in Rowe. This is true not just for the proofs for the existence of God but also for other topics in the book. Though Purtil has trenchant and insightful things to say on many of his topics, his treatment of arguments and criticisms is frequently unsatisfying, leaving major questions unanswered or unexplored. Indeed, on some topics Purtil resorts to merely reporting views that people hold without offering any argument or assessment. On the positive side, Purtil often shows the interrelations among different issues. For example, he connects issues arising out of the arguments for the existence of God with considerations of the nature of religious language, recent death-of-God theology, non-theistic forms of religious belief, and the relation of religion and morality. This has philosophical as well as pedagogical value. When such interrelations are drawn one can often see resources for dealing with problems that isolated treatments of issues leave hidden.

The advantage of Rowe's presentation, however, is that it conveys much more effectively than Purtil's the difficulty, complexity, and philosophical puzzlement in the questions of meaning, truth, and rationality that philosophers ask, and thus it imparts much more of the distinctive character of philosophical investigation.

It is unreasonable, then, to expect, in a fairly short introductory textbook (the only kind that is likely to be fully used in a one-semester course), inclusion of both the kind of background information that will make up for the general lack of knowledge among today's students and a careful, thorough presentation and assessment of arguments. But if we cannot have both, which is to be preferred? The choice is not a happy one. On the one hand, the full significance of analysis and assessment cannot be conveyed effectively without presupposing some background knowledge. On the other hand, philosophers of religion should not have to furnish basic instruction in religion. The particular emphasis each of us selects in designing courses no doubt depends on the sort of students we teach. Doubtless also, we each make our own compromises between the two emphases. For my part I prefer Rowe's approach to Purtil's. Purtil identifies a real problem, but philosophers cannot accept the task of remedying it without giving up something of their own work. Purtil's book, it seems to me, bears this out. If a result of philosophers' sticking with their own work is that students fail to see clearly the significance of that work for religious life and understanding, that is unfortunate, but it is more properly a worry for religious educators than philosophers.

Not only is Rowe's approach, in my judgment, the correct one, but the way he executes his task is superb. His book is the best introductory text in philosophy of religion currently available. Thorough and rigorous in its treatment, it nevertheless covers a sufficient variety of subjects to hold student interest. It is written with a truly exemplary clarity without talking down to students. It presents intellectually challenging material in a fashion that is both concise and understandable to the diligent undergraduate. It is, moreover, on the whole, a very fair and even-handed treatment of the controversies in question (an exception to this is noted below). Though Rowe makes clear his preference for atheism, his is a "friendly atheism," which shows a great deal of sympathy for religious belief and holds that "someone may well be rationally justified in believing that the theistic God exists" (94).

One drawback that Rowe's book has pedagogically is that it is somewhat uneven in level of difficulty. The second and the fourth chapters, on the cosmological argument and the meaningfulness of religious language respectively, are likely to give students more trouble than most of the others. The cosmological argument is a topic on which Rowe has written a book. It is perhaps difficult to distill his knowledge into terms that are readily understandable to beginning students. An added problem with the chapter on the cosmological argument is that it examines the argument
formulated by Leibniz and Clarke. The reason for this is that it is, in Rowe's judgment, the strongest formulation of the argument. Most anthologies, however, in philosophy of religion give one or another of Aquinas' formulations of the argument. This would create some difficulty for a teacher using Rowe's book in conjunction with one of these anthologies.

Rowe's weakest chapter is the last one, "A Glimpse Beyond Theism." There is simply not enough space in the compass of a short chapter to do justice to the topics it considers and to the issues they raise. Understandably therefore, but nevertheless regretfully, Rowe departs in this chapter from his normal practice of presenting and discussing criticisms as well as explaining basic viewpoints and the reasons for them. He is content merely to sketch out the views of Tillich and Wieman as they attempt to develop religious alternatives to a theistic outlook, without providing analysis or assessment of them. The reader thus gets no sense of the philosophical problems stirred up by the thinking of these men.

Purtill's treatment too is uneven. As indicated already, there are frequently places in his book where he does little more than simply report the beliefs and conclusions of various groups, and there are other places where the argumentation is sketchy. But the analysis and argumentation is much fuller in his discussion of the questions of survival and the afterlife. Interestingly enough, this is another case of an author going more deeply into questions on which he has done special research and writing. Purtill makes the depths and complexities of the issues associated with these questions much clearer than he does with some of the other questions he goes into.

An unusual feature of Purtill's book is that he devotes a chapter to speculation about what the afterlife, if there is one, might be like. Part of his reason for doing this is to deal with the problem, as he views it, that the pictures and symbols of the afterlife found in the Western religious tradition no longer have the power they once had to grip the imagination, motivate action, and fire the soul with hope. So he sets about to provide the beginnings of a corrective to this situation. What he says is admittedly tentative and sketchy. I do not have the space to go into his speculations, but his proposals are very interesting and suggestive.

Purtill is right, it seems to me, in seeing questions of eschatology as having major importance to religion and philosophy of religion. The reasons I think so go beyond those Purtill himself gives, though these latter may well be important. One of the most significant features of theism is that if and only if theism is true there is any justification for the expectation or assurance that good will ultimately triumph over evil. For assurance that good will triumph over evil is justified only if there is a being or power that wants it enough (is perfectly good) and is strong enough to bring it about (is omnipotent). (This is not to say that a final triumph of good over evil is possible only in a world that has been created by a theistic God; it is only to say that the expectation and assurance it will occur is reasonable only in such a world.) This fact no doubt goes a long way toward explaining the widespread appeal of theistic religion in human history, an appeal that has been strong in spite of the powerful challenge to it represented by the problem of evil. Indeed this feature of theism is something like the flip side of the problem of evil. While evil makes the existence of a theistic God questionable, it also makes the existence of such a God desirable. If there is a theistic God, the triumph of good over evil will involve the establishment of a good which will make it clear that the existence of evil has been both necessary and worthwhile. It will perhaps also involve the disappearance of evil. (If there is a hell, however, evil will not have wholly disappeared.) Eschatology is the study in which the conception of this great good is developed, and is thus crucial to the very raison d'être of theism. Purtill is correct in making such questions a major concern of philosophical investigation of religion.

I have one serious philosophical objection to make against Rowe. He is not con-
sistent in the way he applies his criteria for evaluating arguments. This can be seen by comparing his assessment of the cosmological argument with his assessment of the problem of evil. In the case of the cosmological argument he concludes that the argument stands or falls with the truth of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), for as he sees it, the argument is valid and its premises follow from PSR. But, he says, we do not know that PSR is true; consequently the argument does not establish the conclusion. Hence the cosmological argument does not provide us with good rational grounds for believing that God exists. When it comes to the problem of evil, he asserts that the final judgment on whether the existence of evil is good grounds for rejecting theism rests on the truth or falsity of the premise that there exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby preventing the occurrence of any greater good (Premise P). Rowe admits that we cannot know that this premise is false. In light of his treatment of the cosmological argument, one expects him then to conclude that the argument here does not establish the conclusion that God does not exist and that consequently the existence of evil does not provide us with good rational grounds for believing that God does not exist. But he does not do this. Instead he pushes a different question: is it reasonable to believe that all instances of suffering lead to greater goods? Claiming that it is not, he then concludes that there are rational grounds for believing that the theistic God does not exist. Now, the question whether certain premises, whose truth or falsity we cannot know, are reasonable is itself a fully reasonable question to ask. But if it is to be asked in assessing one argument, it should also be asked in assessing another. If it is asked of Premise P, then it should also be asked of PSR. This is important, for raising this question about PSR could easily lead to quite a different assessment of the cosmological argument. Rowe's inconsistency here introduces equivocation into his use of the notion of rational justifica-

tion, and this can only lead to confusion concerning the rational basis of belief and non-belief. It is unfortunate that a book which is excellent in so many ways should be marred by this kind of flaw.

The two books under review are suited to different sorts of classroom situations. Where students are particularly deficient in basic knowledge and understanding of religious beliefs, or where they are weak in philosophical aptitudes, Purtill's book could well be helpful. In this sort of setting, its strengths could be put to best use and its limitations would have least effect. Where more rigorous analysis and argumentation are desired, Rowe's book is unsurpassed. I recommend it strongly.

Philosophy of Art,
H. Gene Blocker.
Scribner's, 1979, 278 pages, pbk.

Jane Cauvel
The Colorado College

By stressing the active interchange between theories of art and the actual practice of art, Blocker believes he has found the best way to introduce students to the philosophy of art. He tells us that learning to clarify the ways we talk about art will help us to see issues we had not noticed before and to settle disputes about problems in contemporary philosophy of art. In this work, he demonstrates the ways disputes can be resolved in the interest of common sense and offers the student tools of philosophical analysis for tackling problems in contemporary aesthetics.

Blocker observes that there are large areas of agreement among those involved in the professional world of art and that disputes occur primarily in those gray areas where the boundary of a concept is being contested. But it is these disputes which are of particular interest to the philosopher and they usually arise in the form of challenges to traditional concepts...