

# Book Reviews

David Duchesne, *A Compassionate Calling: Hospitaller Monks and Founding the Order of St John* (Canberra, Barton Books, 2014); pp. xv + 219; ISBN 9781921577208.

Reverend David Duchesne's *A Compassionate Calling* seeks to restore to history some information about the caritative function of the Hospitaller monks between 1070 and 1292 (i.e. the principle of Christian charity, in this case in the sense of Hospitallers providing care for the sick). Duchesne, himself a member of the modern order of the Hospital, claims repeatedly that other histories have neglected the medical and caritative functions of the Hospitallers in favour of their role in political and military events. The book commences by reiterating this straw man argument a number of times, personally naming and shaming the many historians who have allegedly failed to allow for the Hospitallers' non-military functions. Duchesne considers many of the works of prior historians as "germane", and that accusation is echoed in the reviewer's overall perception of the present book. For the most part, Duchesne is keen to overstate the importance of his own work compared to others', and his own subject in relation to others; his grand claims must therefore be down-modulated by the reader. Inherent in the work is also a subjectivity that results from Duchesne's membership of the Order of the Hospital. While empathising with Christian ethics and motivations is often helpful to understanding the Middle Ages, in this case Duchesne's membership of the Order probably informs his tendency to exaggerate the importance of his own work, and devalue others' work.

*A Compassionate Calling* begins somewhat awkwardly with a historiographical survey of books and articles written on the Hospitallers, with a consistent emphasis on where they have neglected to thoroughly discuss Duchesne's own focus. From these awkward beginnings, the book proves to be full of a wealth of historical details, though at times awkwardly described, and only sometimes concerning the caritative functions of the Hospital that the book is supposed to be about. Chapters 1-8 retrace the history of the Hospitallers, which is better sketched in the works of Jonathan Riley-Smith, Rudolf Hiestand, and others. Only chapters 9 and 11 really focus on what Duchesne has claimed to be focusing on. These chapters are where *A Compassionate Calling* provides valuable and new contributions to the otherwise well-trodden story of the Hospital. In Chapter 11, Duchesne brings

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to the Hospitallers the wealth of new knowledge of medicine in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Holy Land, part of a charge led in recent years by scholars like Susan B. Edgington and Piers Mitchell. This knowledge is well contextualised with the practices of Near Eastern physicians.

The editorial team at Barton Books should not be free from criticism either. The many typos, and the persistent capitalisation of nouns, as though the author thought he was writing in German, distract significantly from the reader's experience. On the whole, *A Compassionate Calling* only provides useful guidance in its chapters on medicine and the Hospital's caritative functions. It is neither a groundbreaking work for serious Crusade scholars, nor a good introduction to the topic of the history and role of the Hospitallers.

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Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide and Stefan Brink, editors, *Sacred Sites and Holy Places: Exploring the Sacralization of Landscape through Time and Space* (Turnhout, Brepols, 2013); pp. xii + 281; ISBN 978-2-503-54100-6.

This attractive volume emerged partly from a conference held in Bergen in 2007 that was titled 'Sacralization of Landscapes'. Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide's 'Introduction' covers the interactions of people, nature, and the concept of the 'sacred', with reference to both space and time, and raises the interesting idea that if some landscapes are sacred, then others might be "un-sacred" or "associated with chaos or evil" (p. 9). This contrast between the sacred as holy and (unproblematically) associated with the Christian God and the 'un-sacred' being connected to demons or pagan gods defies the usual binary of the sacred and the profane, the ordinary and everyday that lacks the 'special' qualities of sacred or holy places and things. The nine chapters that follow offer methodological remarks and specific case studies to illuminate these ideas. Veikko Anttonen's 'Landscapes as Sacrosapes: Why Does Topography Make a Difference?' covers scholarly approaches to sacred places, from Mircea Eliade's hierophany to Thomas Tweed's sacrosapes, to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's embodiment and Kim Knott's spatial models. He then sketches some case studies in Finland and the Baltic region, focused on hoard deposition and the forest.

Co-editor Stefan Brink's chapter, 'Myth and Ritual in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Landscape', furthers the examination of the forest and compares

Classical Greek and Chinese approaches to holy landscapes with the medieval Scandinavian case. Charlotte Fabech and Ulf Näsman, in 'Ritual Landscapes and Sacral Places in the First Millennium AD in South Scandinavia', focus on rich archaeological sites like Gudme-Lundeborg, Dankirke, and Helgö, and discuss depositions in wetlands, and the geographical significance of islands, groves, hills and rocky outcrops as prominent features in landscapes, that are often deemed 'sacred'. From natural features they shift their attention to constructions such as temples and churches, idols and grave-goods, charting the change from Pagan to Christian notions of sacrality. Asgeir Svestad's 'Sami Burials and Sacred Landscape: Aspects of the Impact of Materiality on Sami Religious Conceptions and Practices' considers the disposal of the dead and the material cultural items that accompany such rites.

Chapter 6, Gullog Nordquist's 'The Ancient and Sacred Greek Landscape' moves from Scandinavia to the Classical Greek case, and offers a very rich survey of sacred places, with a range of contrasting foci, including the "described landscape" in texts such as Pausanias' *Description of Greece*, mythological geographies that are connected to the activities of the Olympian gods and nature deities, and the landscapes of the underworld, as they exist in texts and rituals. Nordquist details how markers were identified as evidence of the sacredness of a site (trees, rocks, water sources etc), and how tales of ancestors also mapped out territory. After this excellent, lengthy chapter, Bente Kiilerich's 'From Temple to Church: The Redefinition of the Sacred Landscape of the Acropolis' focuses on one Greek site, in the centre of Athens, and describes famous structures such as the Parthenon and the Erechtheion, with a focus on how conversion to Christianity resulted in the "gradual embedding of new values into the ancient landscape" (p. 208).

Chapter 8, 'Crusading and Christian Penetration Into the Landscape: The New Jerusalem in the Desert After c. 1100' by Kurt Villads Jensen, explores the close relationship between conversion and evangelisation, and the making of war on infidels, crusade, noting that "the next step after a crusade conquest was to cleanse the lands of the new mission, washing away evil to sacralize the landscape" (p. 221). He focuses on Christian structures erected in the crusader kingdom, and the idea of the earthly and heavenly Jerusalems, to illustrate this theme. Torstein Jorgensen's 'Insiders and Outsiders: Theological "Landscaping" in Early Medieval Provincial Laws in Norway' returns the focus to Scandinavia, and interrogates early law codes for clues as to the "tension between good and evil powers of the supernatural world" (p. 242). The final chapter, Zoë Opačić's 'The Sacred Topography of Medieval Prague' opens with the funeral procession of Emperor Charles IV in 1378 as described in the *Augsberg Chronicle*. The remainder of the vividly illustrated chapter

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considers sacred buildings in Prague connected to the devout Charles IV, and the ways in which these structures made “the city itself... the stage for ceremony” (p. 277). This interesting book will be useful to students of pilgrimage and sacred spaces in ancient and medieval Europe.

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Marina Levina and Diem-My T. Bui, editors, *Monster Culture in the 21st Century: A Reader* (London, Bloomsbury, 2013); pp. xix + 323; ISBN 978-1-4411-7839-8.

Marina Levina and Diem-My T. Bui's edited volume of essays *Monster Culture in the 21st Century: A Reader* (2013) draws largely on subject matter from contemporary Western fiction (film, television, literature, and videogames) to discuss the role of monstrosity in contemporary culture. They posit, in their introduction, that the book argues on the whole that “monstrous narratives of the past decade have become omnipresent specifically because they represent collective social anxieties over resisting and embracing change in the twenty-first century”, and that “monstrosity has transcended its status as a metaphor and has indeed become a necessary condition of our existence” (1-2). They intend this collection, or reader, to be a contribution to the exciting though not exactly new field of Monster Studies, kicked off with the excellent *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen almost twenty years ago.

Monstrosity has long been a topic for those cultural critics who love to adore what others abhor, and to this end poststructuralists like Magrit Shildrick and Rosi Braidotti, following continental lines laid by writers like Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and Gilles Deleuze, have brought monstrous subjectivity to the fore in groundbreaking papers that have argued for its necessity as an ontological framework for the current age. More recent efforts in this area like Asa Simon Mittman and Peter Dendle's *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (2013) again provide offerings that delve into monstrosity in a variety of contexts and from multidisciplinary perspectives. Levina and Bui's volume lacks the geographic and methodological breadth of the Ashgate companion, which makes its status as a ‘reader’ somewhat questionable, but since most of the content deals with popular culture from the West and contributors are largely scholars of film, media, and literature from America and England, those involved in these fields will find much quality

fodder within its pages. With so many papers on the latest and most significant texts dealing in the supernatural, tales of good and evil, and the presence of the 'other', this volume will also be of interest to those who take these subjects up within the study of history, culture, gender and sex, religion, politics, and the humanities generally.

The book is divided into three sections: Monstrous Identities, Monstrous Technologies and Monstrous Territories. Though the chapters waver in their adherence to this categorisation, in name alone these fields provide an interesting triptych through which we can view the manifestation of the monster in culture. All the usual suspects are present: werewolves, vampires, aliens, and of course zombies, which out of nineteen chapters occupy at least six. I was, I admit, impressed by just how vastly the canvas of the zombie can be stretched when it comes to painting a picture of monstrosity: in one instance, they may be uncoordinated, unthinking, another unflappable, unemotional and driven. Sometimes they are the least morally problematic or horrifying members of the cast, other times they are an unstoppable horde heralding the imminent apocalypse, and in the current socio-political climate, evoke a sense of invasion, war, and terror on behalf of people all too human in their flaws and failings.

One of the most interesting papers in the book also uses the zombie archetype in the most unexpected way—Jeffrey Mantz's article is somewhat out-of-place but nonetheless powerful in its argument, pointing to the apathetic Western consumers of digital technology as the true zombies as they leach resources out of the war-torn Congo, financially (though often unconsciously) supporting a corrupt system, further deepening the digital divide, and closing an ironic circle wherein the minerals mined in the region are used to make those games that have us glued to a screen for hours often, of all things, destroying zombies. One of the only chapters that uses real-world scenarios and consequences as its source base, this is an especially engaging contribution. For those who want a more conventional reading of zombie media, there are papers on *Night of the Living Dead* (1990), *The Walking Dead* (2010-), zombie walks, and the undead in the Wild West, too.

Creative use of the monster as an implicit category comes up in Ryan Gillespie's querying of monstrous language in discussions of economics and finance, the 'us vs them' mentality and 'monster lurking in our midst' tropes in post 9/11 America cinema as analysed by Mary K. Bloodsworth-Lugo and Carmen R. Lugo-Lugo, and in Megan Foley's exploration of Charlize Theron as the sympathetic murderess Aileen Wuornos in Patty Jenkin's 2003 film *Monster*. More explicit monsters are treated in analyses of sex, sexuality, and race in works like *True Blood* (2008-2014) the *Twilight* franchise, *Avatar*

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(2009), *District 9* (2009) and *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009). When thinking about the epistemic boundaries of the fearsome 'other', the uncanny quality of the seen and unseen monsters of *Lost* in chapter 17 make an interesting contrast to the classic yet strictly regimented monsters-by-numbers of games derived from the style set by *Dungeons & Dragons* in chapter 12. This reader would have liked to have seen more work on inanimate and non-anthropomorphic others like the postmodern capitulation of the haunted house in Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), classic cryptids like big cats, Mothman and others that continue to capture the imaginations of local and, with the help of the internet, international imaginations, and the omnipresent trope of killer kiddies that still sends a chill down your spine.

Without attempting to cover as many of the bases as possible, especially ones that seem obviously relevant and well-presented in contemporary media, the usefulness of this volume as a 'reader' is somewhat in doubt. But, as a collection of essays that can each hold their own as an interesting and valuable piece of commentary on particular aspects of monster culture, the book will have broad applications. Other than the opening chapter by Amit S. Rai offering a Deleuzian analysis of monstrous ontology in the work of David Cronenberg and relying heavily on the assumption that readers have a thorough understanding of Deleuze, Bergson, process ontology and continental cultural theory, the following chapters are written for a general audience and can expect comprehensive readership from students and teachers alike.

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Graham Coulter-Smith and Maurice Owen, editors, *Art in the Age of Terrorism* (London, Paul Holberton Publishing, 2005); pp. xii + 281; ISBN: 1-903470-41-2.

The editors' 'Introduction' references Adam Curtis' acclaimed three-part television series 'The Power of Nightmares' (2005), which argues that the September 11 attacks in the United States were pivotal in the identification of Islam as the new 'enemy' in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union over a decade earlier. This powerful book is focused on the making of art concerning phenomena that are in many ways unspeakable. The essays in this collection address various aspects of the creative process when 'terrorism' is the subject matter of the art in question, or when 'terrorism', however defined,

is the proximate cause of the art production. The title of Bernadette Buckley's 'Terrible Beauties' references W. B. Yeats' poem 'Easter 1916', a lament for the dead of the Easter Rising and a celebration of the emergent independent Ireland that this violent event birthed. She meditates on artworks that reference terrorism (Regina Lessner's CD about Ulrike Meinhof, sundry images emanating from Israel including a postage stamp commemorating Abraham Stern and Oreet Ashery's photographic work 'Why Do You Think I Left?' [2002], and a prison mug-shot of Kathy Boudin, a member of the Weathermen) and concludes that "the fate of art in an 'age of terrorism' is therefore to cast art out of the relative isolation of the art world and to subject it to all kinds of intellectual, political and aesthetic scrutiny" (p. 28).

Mary Richards' 'Sewing and Sealing: Speaking Silence' deals with confrontational images of asylum seekers who had sewn together their lips and eyelids in protest against the brutal, inhumane, and unjust treatment they have received from so-called free, democratic, and affluent Western nations. Sewing in both medical and domestic contexts, is "conventionally associated with making and mending" (p. 36). Richards contextualises the actions of asylum seekers in the historical trajectory of body-based performance art (Marina Abramovic and Ulay's piece *Talking About Similarity* [1976], for example, in which Ulay pierces his lips with thread and ties them together, and has questions directed to him). She also discusses hunger strikes unto death, and the reactions of politicians (Australia's Philip Ruddock is referenced), which seek to deny these powerless people the human sympathy that they are crying out for. This chapter is related in content to Gen Doy's, 'Visualising the Invisible? Images of Migrants and Refugees in the New Europe'.

Emma Govan's 'Witnessing Trauma: Theatrical Responses to Terrorism' treats works such as *Happiness* (2002) by performance artist and musician Laurie Anderson and Walid Raad's *My Neck is Thinner Than a Hair: A History of the Car Bomb in the 1975-1991 Lebanese Wars; Volume 1: January 21, 1986* (2001), a set of one hundred photographs, accompanied by Raad giving a lecture "followed by a question and answer session" (p. 54). Ross Birrell's 'The Gift of Terror: Suicide Bombing as Potlatch', while expressed in the language of French theory that is often less than clear, explores the intriguing terrain of explanations of suicide bombings. These include Mark Harrison's economic idea that suicide bombing is the "sole remaining choice ... in a series of more or less failed investments in capitalist identities" (p. 99), and Pierre Bourdieu's notion that symbolic capital should be read "not in relation to private gain, but rather in relation to the indifferent expenditure of gift-exchange" (p. 99).

Birrell's own reading turns on the possible reading of positive

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reciprocity as negative; “the potlatch not so much as an ‘ethic of generosity’ ... [but] as ‘a sort of sublimated warfare’” (p. 99). In between Baudrillard and Bataille, some good points about the emergence of a “*general* economy of suicide-terror” (p. 103). In a review of this length not every chapter can be examined, so I will conclude with some remarks on Khaled D. Ramadan’s ‘Suicide Bombers/Martyrs’ Videos and Site-Specific Art’. He opens with some information regarding the different aesthetics of Middle Eastern and Western suicide bombers’ farewell videos (Middle Eastern examples of the genre have carpets in the background, Western examples have mirrors, and various other small but telling details). An extended comparison with the ‘exit videos’ of the Heaven’s Gate suicides and their spiritual leader, Marshall Herff Applewhite, in 1997 is both unexpected and insightful.

There are 17 chapters, including the ‘Introduction’, in this lavishly illustrated book, and most have something important to say about an extremely difficult subject. The artists profiled are doing creative and courageous work, attempting to respond both ethically and aesthetically to the horrors of the modern world. Thoughtful readers will find much of value in it.

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Steven Churchill and Jack Reynolds, editors, *Jean-Paul Sartre: Key Concepts* (Durham, Acumen, 2013); pp. xii + 244; ISBN 978-1-84465-635-6.

Steven Churchill and Jack Reynolds’ volume is an interesting examination of the core ideas and concepts that formed much of Sartre’s thought throughout his life presented by a range of contemporary scholars. The book is divided nominally into three parts that cover Sartre’s early phenomenology, his ‘middle period’, and then later thought. As Churchill and Reynolds suggest in their introduction, Sartre’s works have yet to be understood as a totality and that we have yet to ‘exhaust’ his philosophical thought. Certainly as a reader coming from the phenomenological tradition there is much in this book that presents new and insightful aspects of Sartre’s work which are normally ruled out of hand.

Part I deals with Sartre’s early phenomenology. The opening chapter by Beata Stawarska is a helpful survey of Sartre’s work during this period oriented around Sartre’s relation to Husserl’s phenomenology and the Transcendental Ego. Stawarska’s introduction is advantageous, as many writers tend to focus on *Transcendence of the Ego* in contrast to *Being and*



*Nothingness*, but she also relates some of the intermediary works in between to both. Towards the end of her chapter things feel a little rushed, and I feel the importance of *Sketch for a Theory of Emotions* is underplayed. This ‘rushed’ quality, however, is true for much of the book, and the main (in fact the only) defect detected is a lack of consideration of this important work. The following chapters by Christian Onof and Steven Churchill then focus in more detail on Sartre’s considerations of the Self, intentionality and the ego during this period of his work. Adrian van den Hoven’s chapter on Sartre’s novels and plays is perhaps the weakest of the volume. This is not to say that it is poorly argued, but the all too brief overview of these works does not satisfactorily relate to Sartre’s other concepts in any depth. This is a shame because, in a book that claims that Sartre has yet to be exhausted, the importance of his fictional work in explicating his philosophical thinking should be given more prominence than a single chapter. The final chapter of the section by Betty Cannon takes much of the ideas already discussed and relates them in a highly informative manner to Sartre’s critique of psychoanalysis and his own proposed existential psychoanalysis.

Part II is focused almost exclusively on the ideas found in *Being and Nothingness* and their development in Sartre’s later thought. The opening chapter by Sarah Richmond focuses on the idea of nothingness and the associated negation that dominates the central theme of the work. Richmond’s introduction to these ideas is fair and highlights some of the issues involved and the criticisms that Sartre has faced from other sources. The following chapter by Soren Overgaard then focuses on Sartre’s theory of ‘*the look*’ which is a key component in his understanding of intersubjectivity. Again, like Richmond, Overgaard notes criticisms of Sartre in this area. The remaining chapters (10-14) of this section are dominated by the consideration of freedom in relation to the ideas of bad faith and authenticity. These considerations best illustrate the turn in Sartre’s thought from phenomenology to existentialism. As such they are worth the attention, but the five chapters given over to this discussion start to feel repetitive after a while. Each does give a different slant on the matter which indicates the malleability of Sartre’s work in this regard but the extensive space given over to this does exclude other topics, like that of the body, which one would expect to find in a book aimed at covering as much of Sartre’s thought as possible.

Part III focuses on Sartre’s politically engaged activities that spring out of his advocated existentialism post-*Being and Nothingness*. William L. McBride’s chapter is a useful introduction to this period and gives a reasonable historical overview of Sartre’s ‘engagement’. The next chapter by Peter Caws focuses on Sartre’s understanding of groups, a consideration certain lacking in

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his earlier phenomenology which focused primarily on personal relations. The next two chapters focus on Sartre and ethics. Here the reader will find the most contentious aspects of Sartre's work, not because Thomas C. Anderson or Marguerite La Caze produce poor arguments, but because much of their work relies on existentialist reinterpretations of Sartre's phenomenological period. These are reinterpretations that those of the phenomenological tradition may struggle to stomach, but must nonetheless contend with, making the chapters of value to staunch phenomenologists as well. In their final chapter, Churchill and Reynolds highlight some of these issues by discussing the contestation of Sartre's legacy and the reaction to it by later scholars like Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard.

However, this final chapter on Sartre's legacy does highlight the key deficit of the book. In discussing Sartre's relation to Husserl and Heidegger, Churchill and Reynolds mention that 'even today [Sartre] promises to make important contributions in regard to contemporary interdisciplinary work on intersubjectivity' (p. 223). Thinking on this made me realise the book is a little too historical and philosophical in orientation. Certainly it covers all of Sartre's key concepts, but for a book written solely by contemporary writers there is not much done to relate this to contemporary issues. So while Sartre does have important contributions to make on work on intersubjectivity, what shape these might take is left to the reader's imagination. And the way in which Sartre approaches this topic is predominantly only the concern of philosophy departments. There is little in this book that relates to what might be called 'contemporary themes' that would interest scholars outside of philosophy. This is not to detract from the book's value, it is a very helpful introduction in many respects and will prove a valuable resource for those unfamiliar with Sartre's work. But for those interested in such topics as 'religion' – for which a Sartrean approach would at least be novel – a little more legwork may be required to get the full value of these concepts.

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Roger Scruton, *The Face of God: The Gifford Lectures 2010* (London and New York, Bloomsbury, 2012); pp. viii + 186; ISBN 978-1-47291-273-2.

Roger Scruton (b. 1944) is a distinguished philosopher, political conservative, and public intellectual, who has been on something of a spiritual journey in recent years. This short, beautifully-written book attempts to convince the

reader, in lay language, that living as if there is a personal divine power or God makes it possible to have a richer, more dignified, existence based on recognition of the personhood of others that are encountered. The first chapter, 'The View From Nowhere', introduces the ideas that underpin the classical proofs for the existence, such as necessary and contingent beings, and the perceived conflict between science and religion, arguing that "we can reconcile the God of the philosophers with the God who is worshipped and prayed to by the ordinary believer, provided we see that this God is understood not through metaphysical speculations concerning the ground of being, but through communion with our fellow humans" (p. 21). The second chapter, 'The View From Somewhere', argues that the scientific worldview is reductionist and often erases the distinctiveness of humans by ignoring the "*intentionality* of the human response" (p. 28). Scruton focuses on the 'I' that humans feel confident to express, following Kant in the view that the ability to say 'I' is a sign of rationality, of the recognition of the freedom and the responsibilities of the rational being, and of the distinction of the 'I' from "all other objects in the natural world" (p. 33). The remainder of the chapter covers the first and second person usages in language, the idea that humans are the only creatures to whom the question 'why?' makes sense, and the issues surrounding the will, weakness of will, intending to do one thing and doing another, and whether free will exists.

Chapter 3, 'Where Am I?', opens with the fact that the God of the Old Testament introduces himself as 'I AM' when Moses asks who he is. So "God responds by identifying himself in the first person... He does not exist only outside the world, with a view from nowhere... He moves in the world, in a somewhere of his own" (p. 53). Scruton suggests that the questions that normally arise in a discussion of God are variations of questions that we ask about ourselves, so if it is asked how do we know God acts in the world, we must answer as to how we know we act in the world. God is a person and a self, as are humans. Scruton asserts that to be a self involves "taking responsibility for one's acts and passions" (p. 62). He invokes Hegel's notion that personal, I-You, encounters "tend towards justice", that we see others as worthy and deserving of the same treatment as ourselves (p. 64). This sets up the remainder of the book; it is argued that scientific views that see human collective acts as being a variant of the collective acts of ants, for example, miss entirely the motivational and intentional dimension of human persons. In Chapter 4, 'The Face of the Person', Scruton advances the idea that the face is a concept that only humans have, that it is "the part of me to which others direct their attention... I lie behind my face, yet I am present in it, speaking and looking through it at a world of others who are in turn revealed and concealed like me"

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(p. 78). This is the key to his argument that much of the worldview of modernity and science deliberately involves defacement: he considers the voluntary nature of kisses, smiles, tears, and argues that being able to produce these physiological effects without the intention behind them is inauthentic, that such things are not kisses, smiles, or tears but something entirely other, and horrible. He considers rape, which he notes is “an existential assault and an annihilation of the subject” (p. 95), and argues that in pornography or other debased sexual phenomena, the “object of sexual interest is being treated as a substitute” (p. 99). Thus it falls short of the I-Thou encounter that is vital for humans. He asserts that while there have always been “sex symbols” (he discusses Botticelli’s ‘Birth of Venus’, which depicts Simonetta Vespucci) the sex symbols of the modern era are faceless, and desecrated.

Chapter 5, ‘The Face of the Earth’, extends this argument to the modern loss of the idea of sacred places, of the Earth as a person that draws humans into an I-Thou relationship. This, Scruton asserts, has led to the despoliation of the planet by rapacious humans. He extends this beyond the natural environment to the built environment, claiming (somewhat controversially, though it is easy to follow the reasoning) that modern architecture, brutalism in particular, results in buildings that have no ‘face’, that are unwelcoming and ugly, un-home-like environs that diminish the quality of life of the humans that inhabit them. As befits a philosopher of aesthetics, Scruton understands beauty as something that “puts a brake on destruction, by representing its object as irreplaceable” (p. 151). The final chapter, ‘The Face of God’, makes an argument that what humans have lost as a result of the loss of the religious worldview has come at too high a cost. He discusses the concepts of sacrifice and the gift, and concludes that humans encounter God “everywhere, in all that suffers and renounces for another’s sake” (p. 177). This, then, is not an argument for the ontological reality of God, but for the necessity of the concept for humans to live rich, full lives. It may not convince many readers, but will have a strong appeal for others.

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Bart Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York, HarperOne, 2012); pp. vi + 361; ISBN: 978-0-06-220460-8.

In an effort to put an end to the increasingly popular activity of questioning Jesus' historical existence, Bart Ehrman makes his case for historicity in *Did Jesus Exist?* This review shall focus on the first part of this book, as latter parts deal with his objections to the claims of the opposing Jesus mythicists, and to his own interpretation of who Jesus really was; here I wish only to briefly examine his positive case for Jesus' historicity, which is the primary reason for the book. Ehrman does well to explain that the historian's task is to establish "what probably happened in the past", and admits that "we cannot prove a single thing historically" (p. 37-38). After clarifying that historians would prefer numerous, contemporary, detailed, and somewhat disinterested sources, which corroborate others' accounts without collaboration having taking place (p. 42), which essentially describes exactly what historical Jesus scholars do not have access to, he concedes that, among other problems, the Gospels "are filled with nonhistorical material, accounts of events that could not have happened" and numerous "discrepancies and contradictions" (pp. 70-71, 179).

Ehrman's views on the most important sources for the Historical Jesus seem to do considerable damage to his case, but there are others. However, the non-Biblical sources are generally overlooked as they (even if authentic) do not tell scholars any more about Jesus than what can be gleaned from the Biblical texts (p. 97ff). Inevitably turning to the letters of the earliest Christian author (pp. 117-118), Ehrman tries to find the Historical Jesus in Paul's writings, which scholars generally understand to be very much lacking in biographical details. He makes much of ambiguous passages that can also work on alternative theories (such as that Paul believes in a purely Celestial Jesus), like 1 Corinthians 15:5 which has the resurrected Jesus appearing to his followers (pp. 119-123), and yet never really explains why scholars should trust what Paul claims. In fact, Ehrman seems ignorant to the curious fact that whenever Paul mentions his sources, they are divine, and to the equally intriguing fact that Paul went out of his way to rule out human sources (Galatians 1:12). But Ehrman knows that the Epistles, which are earlier, discuss the Jesus portrayed in the Gospels, because of his idiosyncratic and dubious method.

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According to Ehrman, the highly questionable, fiction-filled, and relatively late Gospel accounts can generally be trusted, because of the sources underlying them that “obviously” existed, though they do not anymore (pp. 75-79 and throughout). Ehrman invokes not a single historian from outside his own field that endorses the sort of certainty that can be procured from hypothetical sources. Nor is it explained how the content, genre, and so forth, of these hypothetical sources, can be determined. An obvious objection is that, if they existed, these foundational sources might not actually support Ehrman’s historicist views about Jesus. They could just as easily confirm the views of the opposing mythicists, or the more nuanced agnostics (such as myself), many of which think that the original belief in Jesus was the belief in a purely celestial being. Though Ehrman relies on this approach so heavily, he never once argues for its wider support or soundness.

Rather than convincingly explaining why it is irrational to imagine that Jesus was a completely fictional character, all Ehrman achieves is to instruct scholars how not to argue for Jesus’ historicity. He simply offers nothing convincing. That is, of course, except for revealing how desperate the case for the Historical Jesus must be. The cases presented by his more sceptical opponents certainly do not rest on sources that no longer exist (if they ever did). While not as polemical and vulgar as Maurice Casey’s recent effort, *Did Jesus Exist?* adds little of value to the discussion, and does not truly resolve its eponymous question.

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