

desire to find ultimate foundations. The narrative of Wittgenstein's philosophical development is familiar, but what is original to Labron is the comparison with Rabbinic thought, as Wittgenstein moves away from the Greek search for pure forms to the Hebraic observation of the concrete practices with constitute religion.

The project Labron attempts is extremely ambitious involving not just a narrative on Wittgenstein's philosophical development, but an attempt to situate it in the context of a dialectic between Greek and Hebraic thought. As such it should be viewed as the beginning of a conversation, particularly as Labron admits that his characterisations of Greek and Hebraic thought represent only certain elements of those vast traditions, and moreover that he is making no claim of direct influence from Hebraic thought on Wittgenstein. Nevertheless it opens up new avenues for investigating Wittgenstein's philosophy and has the great value of connecting contemporary philosophical questions with Rabbinic thought.

Conversations (even friendly ones) need not end in agreement and I shall end this review by raising two challenges to Labron's narrative. First, there are question marks in regard to his reading of Wittgenstein and his religious point of view. He discusses the saying/showing distinction in connection with Shield's treatment of it in the *Tractatus*, but does not trace its development in the later works. Hence he fails to address those readings of Wittgenstein according to which religion concerns not just particular language games, but the very possibility of language (to equate such a concern to the foundationalism of the *Tractatus* is surely to pre-judge the issue). In relation to this it is arguable that Labron fails to see the continuities between the earlier and later Wittgenstein and overemphasizes the distinctions. To this end some analysis of the influences upon the *Tractatus* and particularly that of Frege on the saying/showing distinction might help to clarify the continuity and changes in Wittgenstein's thought.

The second concern I raise concerns the direction of interpretation between Hebraic thought and Wittgenstein's writings. I noted that Labron makes no claim to represent the whole of Hebraic thought; however, my concern would be that his interpretation has been tailored to fit a certain reading of Wittgenstein. Just as, particularly in the reformed tradition, Platonic Greek thought is contrasted with the God of revelation, so here I wonder if Labron's reading of the Hebraic tradition has been conditioned by a desire to find a neat fit with Wittgenstein's rejection of Greek metaphysics (of course the reading of the Greek tradition is extremely narrow, to say the least). Labron must be thanked for opening up these questions and for providing the start of what promises to be a fruitful conversation.

DAVID GOODILL OP

BLASPHEMY IN THE CHRISTIAN WORLD: A HISTORY by David Nash
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Recent cases concerning allegations of blasphemy – in the unlikely forms of an English satire on the American talk-show *Jerry Springer*, and the naming of a toy bear – make Nash's history of the concept most topical, corroborating the book's contention that blasphemy is once again relevant in the Western world. According to Nash, in chapter one, the point at which blasphemy regained its relevance was Muslim anger at the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in 1988. The fallout made 'blasphemy part of a globalised world, thereby introducing the West to new religious groups claiming the status of insider' (p. 104); these groups requesting blasphemy law be extended to protect them.

Prior to the Rushdie affair blasphemy was increasingly regarded in the West as an anachronism, a throwback to an earlier 'repressive' age. The age in question, and the gradual move away, are well-detailed in the second and third chapters,

dealing with the periods 1500-1800 and 1800-2000. The legal concept of blasphemy is charted by recounting the emergence of blasphemy out of heresy, the former gradually being appropriated by rulers once church and state had been fused together in many countries by the seventeenth century. Epitomising such developments is the judgement of Lord Chief Justice Sir Matthew Hale, passed upon John Taylor in 1675, which identified the laws of England and religion as one: an attack on the latter constituting an attack upon the former (p. 60). From the French Revolution onwards however, ideas of religious tolerance along with an individualism which has its roots further back in the Reformation, meant that, increasingly across Europe, church and state were dissociated. Regarding the Foote case in England in 1883-4, Justice Duke Coleridge expressed the view that (as Nash puts it) 'even hard-edged criticism of the religion [of Christianity] and its doctrines was acceptable. . . provided the intentions of speaker or publisher were honourable' (p. 81). With this shift from matter to manner, blasphemy was subsequently rarely prosecuted in Britain.

One might suppose that with the requirement for the prosecution to find dishonourable intention – something so hard to prove – there would be no more convictions for blasphemy in Britain. Nash shows otherwise, admirably demonstrating the non-linearity and conditional nature of the history of blasphemy as a concept (pp. 183 et 242). Until the *Gay News* case of the late 1970s, there had been no successful prosecution for blasphemy in Britain since the Gott case of 1921. James Kirkup, a poet, was prosecuted for blasphemy for a poem published in the *Gay News* in which a Roman soldier has sex with the dead body of Christ.

Kirkup was convicted despite his alleged intention – to show that homosexuals could be saved – being taken into account. Along with other examples, the *Gay News* case is used by Nash to show how far the identity of the blasphemer has changed. Although blasphemy has had 'an almost ageless connection with. . . drink' (p. 234), yet unlike medieval and early modern cases, the blasphemer is no longer always (or even often) a drunk, but is now an 'artist', critiquing the establishment or advocating radical ideas in a way which causes upset. Similarly the victims of blasphemy – the focus of chapter six – are more robust and articulate today than their medieval counterparts. Mary Whitehouse led the campaign against Kirkup with conviction and skill, in contrast to the medieval victims who 'were frequently paralysed by shock' (p. 207).

Most important was the change in the law effected by the outcome of the *Gay News* case, an effect analysed in chapter five's investigation of the means by which the profane has been controlled. Nash is right to note that in not taking Kirkup's intention into account, 'the laws of England significantly buck[ed] the trend being established elsewhere' (p. 182), even within England at the time for, as Nash's chapter on blasphemy and film, points out, the contemporaneous case of the Monty Python team's *Life of Brian* was not deemed blasphemous (p. 218). While Levy, writing in the early-middle nineties, thought the *Gay News* case was 'exceptional' (cf. *Blasphemy*, p. 543) and 'an anomaly – an effort to prevent Jesus from being kidnapped by the gays', (*ibid.*, pp. 549f), Nash sees the event as evidence that 'the tide of liberalisation was seen to have turned in England' (p. 182). This is a striking difference of interpretation.

The reasons for this relate to Nash's earlier-stated understanding of the Rushdie affair. Whereas Levy treated the Rushdie affair largely as an opportunity to debate whether English common law on blasphemy could and should be extended to protect other faiths, taking in other issues accordingly, Nash sees it as pivotal in relation to wider political issues with respect to 'the modern democratic dilemma' (p. 200), that is, of the liberal tradition of free speech in direct conflict with the state's duty to protect both individual liberties – including religious beliefs, something which became apparent through the Rushdie affair – and general civil order. It seems that Nash sees this dilemma centred 'around blasphemy' (p. 200),

but he does make it clear that the history of blasphemy from the mid-twentieth century onwards 'is in some respects an alternative history of the state' (p. 92). Nash uses blasphemy to analyse contemporary cultural and political conflicts in the West in microcosm, employing this one issue to focus a set which, combined, could be unmanageable in scope.

What justifies Nash's interpretation and approach? These are separate questions, for the former is concerned with the weight he gives to the Rushdie affair, while the latter pertains to the way in which he uses blasphemy as an encapsulation of modern Western concerns. Dealing with the issue of 'approach' first, blasphemy neatly represents the seemingly intractable problem of thoroughgoing free speech versus the perceived need to protect individuals and groups. In the West this is a real issue, and blasphemy is at its centre. Many Christians want protection against the outrage perpetrated by *Jerry Springer: The Opera*. Nash comments that '[t]he medieval conception of damage to the community through damage to the honour of God has here made a surprising comeback' (p. 247). This is similar to the conception of blasphemy which reappeared with the Rushdie affair, albeit from an Islamic perspective. Furthermore, changes in attitude are not merely apparent on behalf of religious believers. In response to the assassinations in Holland of outspoken critics of Islam – politician Pim Fortuyn (2002) and filmmaker Theo Van Gogh (2004) – Dutch authorities have debated whether to revise their penal code to protect Muslims (p. 18), while British parliament passed the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill in 2006 (p. 40).

Nevertheless, Nash may be overstating the differences between the 'before' and 'after' of the Rushdie affair. John Smyth, the prosecuting lawyer in the *Gay News* case, claimed Kirkup's poem 'desecrated' Christ (Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 542), implying the poem damaged the honour of God. Moreover, the Dutch assassinations and subsequent debate over the law, the Danish cartoons, the *Springer* case, the teddy-bear episode, and the British bill of 2006 all occurred a number of years after the Rushdie affair. Were the Dutch and British authorities taking from the Rushdie affair the view that 'religion was a central right and an indivisible portion of identity deserving protection' (p. 105), or was something else the catalyst for this change of attitude spurred by the apparent failure of liberal tolerance?

The more significant event was 9/11 and the ensuing racial and religious hatred directed against Muslims in the West. Since 9/11, relations between Christians, Muslims, and supporters of increased secularisation have been strained by constant exposure under the media spotlight, exacerbated by subsequent terrorist attacks, such as 7/7, and verbal broadsides from key figures, including Pim Fortuyn. This has led not only to the perceived need to protect religions from hate crimes, but also from entrenched Christian and Muslim fundamentalism in some quarters, as exhibited in the reaction of some Muslims to the Danish cartoons and the naming of a toy bear, and also by some Christians to the *Springer* musical. Perhaps 9/11 is a key reason in the difference of perspectives between Levy and Nash, the former publishing his book before, and the latter after, September 2001.

This is not to say the Rushdie affair is unimportant, for the issues it brought up – whether the blasphemy law be should extended to other religions, Islamic anger at the West and how the West should deal with this anger – are some of the most important political and cultural issues the West faces today. Nevertheless, Nash's argument bypasses whether or not the Rushdie affair is pivotal. What is more important is the considerable utility of Nash's approach of using blasphemy as a microcosmic encapsulation of the 'modern democratic dilemma'. Furthermore, by highlighting the conditional and non-linear nature of blasphemy's history, Nash ably shows why we cannot assume that the recent trends towards 'governmental paternalism' is a temporary throwback to less tolerant times.

MATTHEW HARRIS