

ARIUS: HERESY AND TRADITION by Rowan Williams. *Darton, Longman and Todd*, 1987. pp. xi + 348, £19.95.

Those who prefer their heretics drawn in clear, black lines will not like this book; nor will anyone hoping to find a straightforward easy-to-follow account of Arius' theology. Teachers will think twice before recommending it to undergraduate students, who might not, in the first instance, receive the recommendation with gratitude. Nevertheless, it is a very good book. It is also a difficult one. Several reasons for this can be identified: the topic itself, the author's steadfast refusal to pretend that it is easy, and his good humoured but firm insistence that, if we want to achieve some understanding of it, we will have to do quite a lot of hard thinking. There is yet another reason for the difficulty of this book, which is at the same time one of its most engaging features. Professor Williams strives for a sympathetic understanding of Arius as a theologian. He does not do this in the hope of offending pious ears, or even because the rehabilitation of heretics is fashionable. He does it because he believes that "loyalty" to how the Church has defined its norms must contain a clear awareness of the slow and often ambivalent nature of the processes of definition" (p. 25). "To follow through the inner logic and problematic of Arius' thought and that of the later enemies of Nicaea is to discover what it is that 'orthodoxy' has to take on and make its own—to discover the 'Arian' problematic as formative of what we now utter as orthodox". To do this effectively we need "to become 'coeval' with the debate, at some level", "to experience orthodoxy as something still future". (p. 24). This means, of course, that we need to try "to view Arius without the distorting glass of Athanasian polemic intervening and determining our picture of the heresiarch" (p. 234). That, of course, is what makes the whole enterprise so difficult. At times the author's judicious examination, sorting and evaluation of the evidence appears to proceed at an irritatingly unproductive pace: again and again we are reminded of the tentativeness of so many of the suppositions, inferences and interpretations we encounter. But to have been taken through this process does inspire confidence in the conclusions to which we are led.

The introduction, "Images of heresy", provides a brief but engaging discussion of the scholarly treatment of Arius from Newman to the present. Thereafter the work is divided into three parts. In "Arius and the Nicene Crisis" Professor Williams considers the origins and early history of the crisis, the background of the Alexandrian church, and the dating of relevant documents. The discussion of the troubles between bishops and presbyters in the Alexandrian church before the crisis is particularly illuminating: "the beginnings of Arianism lie, as much as anything, in the struggles of the Alexandrian episcopate to control and unify a spectacularly fissiparous Christian body—and thus also in a characteristic early Christian uncertainty about the ultimate locus of ecclesiastical authority itself" (p. 46). Part II considers "The Theology of Arius". Here the scant literary remains of Arius are first examined. Particular attention is given to the extracts from the *Thalia*, of which a translation is provided. Arius emerges as a biblical theologian whose views about the Son and his relation to God's will are the product of systematic thinking about certain scriptural texts. Arius' views are then placed in the context of contemporary theological traditions at Alexandria, Antioch and elsewhere. Arius is discovered to have brought together and drastically reworked a number of profoundly traditional themes. His theology "is conservative in the sense that there is almost nothing in it that could not be found in earlier writers; it is radical and individual in the way it combines and reorganizes traditional ideas and presses them to their logical conclusions—God is free, the world need not exist, the Word is other than God, the Word is part of the world, so the word is freely formed *ex nihilo*" (p. 177). Why Arius should have perceived and sought to eliminate an intolerable incompatibility between sets of ideas which his predecessors and many of his contemporaries were happy to hold together is addressed in Part III: "Arius and Philosophy". It may have been his acquaintance with contemporary philosophy "which

provided him with some of the impulse, and some of the tools, to weld his complex theological heritage into a new and more systematic unity" (p. 178). Understandably enough, this is the most difficult part of the book. The author realises that the "theologically-minded reader" will be tempted to skip it (p. ix). But the effort must be made by those who want to see how it is that "post-Plotinian cosmology and logic are what make Arius an 'heresiarch'" (p. 231). The book concludes with a theological "Postscript" and an appendix of credal documents with brief commentary.

This book will richly reward the effort required to read it, again and again.

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AESTHETICS: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART, by Anne Sheppard: *O.U.P., Oxford 1987. £4.95 paperback, £15 hardback.*

An introductory book is, at least in philosophy, the most difficult of all to write. If one attempts to cover the whole field in a book of reasonable size each discussion will be too thin; if one covers too few topics one fails to indicate the true scope. Further, a dispassionate account of the merits and demerits of a series of common views is not likely to be as interesting as a passionate attack or defence of one of them. That is why philosophy tutors tend to start their pupils on one of the great original thinkers.

But there is a place for introductions and Anne Sheppard has made a very good attempt at this difficult task in the field of aesthetics. The second, third and fourth chapters, after a brief introductory chapter are entitled *Imitation, Expression, and Form*; they are brief delineations of three well known theories of the essential nature of a work of art. One simply cannot convey the interest and excitement to be found in Croce's and Collingwood's own statements of their expressionistic thesis in a chapter of twenty pages which also includes more general matter on the topic of expression, or bring out the intellectual stature of Kant's aesthetics in part of a chapter of eighteen pages; but Ms. Sheppard does her task very well and even manages to include a few telling original thoughts of her own. I have only one serious quarrel with this part of the book. Throughout the chapter on the theory that art is essentially a form of imitation or representation Ms. Sheppard takes Plato as her representative philosopher among those holding this view. In the sense given to 'mimesis' in the early books of the *Republic* mimetic poetry is clearly only one of two types while in Book X he specifically says that his attack is on 'such poetry as is mimetic' and names types of poetry, such as hymns to the gods, that are to be permitted because not mimetic. There is, so far as I know, no 'theory of art' such as Croce and Kant had in mind in the works of Plato. This choice of Plato is the more unfortunate in that the arguments of this chapter are otherwise very well presented.

The latter part of the book is more exciting. It is devoted mainly to a discussion of literature and discusses such topics as criticism, the validity of rival interpretations, evaluation, the relevance of the author's intentions, the notion of artistic truth, and the relation of literary merit to morality. These topics allow some unity to the discussion and Ms. Sheppard clearly is deeply interested and communicates her enthusiasm to the reader; she manages to speak for herself and still inform the reader about many standard views on these topics.

This, then, is about as good an introduction to aesthetics as one could hope for. It is clear and lacks the pretentious parade of superior artistic sensitivity that mars so much writing on aesthetics. If I raise one further issue it is not an adverse criticism of the book, but a philosophical doubt. In general Ms. Sheppard is a unifier; she believes that what is true of one art is true of all arts after obvious adjustments are made and she believes that the fact that we do not have any single term of aesthetic appraisal appropriate to all contexts is not very significant. She may be right; but it is by no means clear to me that the class of works of art is to be defined in any interesting way or even that the poems of, say, Dryden share anything very interesting with those of, say, Blake; also one is sometimes inclined to think that it would be absurd, not just unidiomatic, to call some great works of art beautiful.

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