

an important consideration of the role of Hilary of Poitiers, including powerful arguments about the place and date of composition of his second letter to Constantius II. What emerges is further confirmation of the regional strengths of the Homoians and above all of the central importance of imperial attitudes.

This latter impression is amply reinforced in the section of the book devoted primarily to Ambrose. What is at issue is not just imperial partiality for one or another theological party, but the effects of the studied neutrality practised by the dynasty of Valentinian, at least up until 381. In a carefully argued section on the change of attitude on the part of Gratian, the emperor becomes as much liberated as Ambrose from the intellectually stultifying effects of older views that saw him as little more than a puppet of the bishop of Milan. Both the famous Altar of Victory controversy, here treated briefly, and the conflict over the restitution of a basilica to the Milanese Homoians are made infinitely more comprehensible by the wider political contexts into which they are placed. In particular, a well argued re-dating of a letter from Magnus Maximus to Valentinian II shows that fear of military intervention in Italy by the Gallic usurper played as least as much of a part as Ambrose's convenient discovery of the relics of Milan's only indigenous martyrs in causing the court to back down over the matter of the basilica.

These major episodes are far from being the only parts of Ambrose's career to benefit from Professor Williams' inspection. Many other aspects, such as the reasons for his election are fruitfully re-examined. Many new insights and arguments, for example his probable baptism at the hands of his eventual successor Simplicianus, are offered, and few of them are likely to be resisted. The only criticism that can be made, and it itself is testimony to the author's achievement, is that we are not given more. The task that Professor Williams sets himself, of explaining the real defeat of western Homoianism, is achieved through his account of the events of the years 387 and 338. He thus has no cause to proceed into the final decade of Ambrose's episcopate, and the confrontations with Theodosius I. These need as much freeing from the dead hands of Homes-Dudden and Palanque and behind them of Paulinus of Milan, as did the Arian conflicts. But, while this is by far the best study of Ambrose to be written for a very long time, it was never intended as a comprehensive biographical treatment. Perhaps our author will oblige?

ROGER COLLINS

RENEWING PHILOSOPHY by Hilary Putnam, *Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA. and London, 1992. pp xii + 234p.*

Hilary Putnam's Gifford Lectures delivered at the University of St. Andrews in 1990 are the basis for this wide-ranging, extremely readable book (now out in paperback). Putnam is one of the main players in Anglo-American philosophy and the book provides a useful introduction for theologians and others, both to Putnam's own work and to recent

philosophical concerns (some of crucial interest to theology). Putnam provides vigorous and incisive arguments against scientific reductionism in Artificial Intelligence and Darwinian theories of representation, and offers criticisms of fashionable relativism, irrealism and deconstructionism. In the concluding chapters of the book he presents positive appraisals of Wittgenstein on incommensurability and relativism, and of Dewey's political philosophy.

There are also some intriguing snippets of autobiography. Putnam talks of his 'conversion' from being a scientific materialist to being aware of the importance of what he calls 'the religious dimension of life'. He also mentions his Jewish background and how he endeavoured in the past to keep his faith and philosophy quite separate.

The chapters on Wittgenstein are of particular interest to theologians as Putnam considers the issues of incommensurability and relativism in the light of what Wittgenstein has to say about religious belief. He first explores the differing interpretations of Wittgenstein's writings on the subject. The first (and standard) has been that Wittgenstein is pursuing a strict incommensurability thesis. Putnam, however, disagrees and provides strong textual evidence to support his view. A second common interpretation is that Wittgenstein believes that religious discourse is simply expressive of emotions or attitudes. A third reading is that Wittgenstein is claiming religious language is 'non-cognitive'. Putnam says that Wittgenstein would regard "the first as a useless thing to say, and the second and third as simply wrong." More broadly then, "Wittgenstein is not saying one of the standard things about religious language." (p. 148)

Wittgenstein wants to contrast how words may mean something (slightly or even completely) different depending on the *context* of their use. For example, Wittgenstein says a person may talk of what happens to them in terms of retribution; another person doesn't. He says they think entirely differently. However, they do not *contradict* each other because they have quite different ideas. Religious beliefs also have a regulatory nature. The belief of the religious person is characterised by what Wittgenstein sees as its 'unshakeability'. (Putnam points out this is something that Wittgenstein picks up from his reading of the theology of Kierkegaard.)

But is there enough to protect Wittgenstein from charges of incommensurability? Putnam asks: "Has Wittgenstein simply immunized religious language from all criticism?" (p. 168) Putnam again refers to the texts to try to resolve the issue. He claims that religious belief is not immune from criticism because Wittgenstein presents himself as a non-believer, as, in fact, critical of some religious beliefs. For example, he says that deciding something by ordeal by fire is obviously absurd. So Wittgenstein talks about the possibility of "combating" elements of another culture, combating a language game.

In the end Putnam doesn't present any *theories* for a 'renewed' philosophy. He argues lucidly against scientism, reductionism and

relativism. His positive contribution is in suggesting a different approach to philosophical problems an approach we apparently learn from the reading of 'honest' philosophers like Wittgenstein and Dewey. As a programme for progress it could be considered somewhat vague. However, if *Renewing Philosophy* provides us with no more than a starting point, an intimation of a correct attitude towards philosophical problems, its value remains as a correction to misreadings of Wittgenstein and its powerful criticisms of currently fashionable philosophies.

GILLIAN MCKINNON

THE LATERAN IN 1600: CHRISTIAN CONCORD IN COUNTER-REFORMATION ROME by Jack Freiberg, *Cambridge University Press*, 1995. Pp. xvi + 333, £50.

Sometimes, we can grasp an epoch from a detail. When next in the Lateran basilica in Rome, look at the sequence of marble angels in the transept and notice how they become more agitated and activated the nearer they are to the tabernacle. In this one detail we catch the Counter-Reformation's twin emphasis on devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and on a spirituality of activism. We also begin to understand Pope Clement VIII.

Freiberg's book is a massively learned reconstruction of the efforts made by Clement VIII (1592-1605) to restore to the Lateran basilica its ancient glory and dignity as the *Mater et caput* of all churches. Freiberg has ended the neglect by scholars of the Clementine transept of the Lateran, and shown it to be an eloquent and pivotal statement of Counter-Reformation theology and policy. This is an endlessly fascinating book.

The task Freiberg set himself was to understand how the painted, sculpted and architectural components of the Clementine project emphasised the Lateran's venerable history, honoured the Blessed Sacrament, and celebrated the 1600 Holy Year. With a wealth of detail, numerous photographs and lengthy footnotes he has argued a most plausible case, including the intimate involvement of Clement himself with the whole project. Some conjecture is the inevitable substitute for the lack, or loss, of a written programme of work to be carried out.

The location of the transept could hardly have been in a more important site than the Lateran area: in the pope's own church as bishop of Rome, associated with the emperor Constantine, and for something like a thousand years the administrative and spiritual centre of the Catholic Church. Both the early Franciscans and the Dominicans identified their respective founders as that religious who had appeared to Innocent III in a dream to support the tottering Lateran. The state of the Lateran was, of course, also a metaphor for the general state of the Church.

Clement VIII was definitely not content just to dream idly of