

**THE MAKING OF THE PENTATEUCH** by R.N. Whybray, *JSOT Supplement 53*. 1987.  
Pp. 263. £22.50 (C), £10.50 (P).

It is no easy task to review or provide an idea of the contents of a book so closely argued as this one. Any summary is almost certain to become a misrepresentation of the contents. All the more reason, then, why the book itself should be read, and not only read but studied carefully for it sweeps away much that is familiar. The rocks upon which Pentateuchal Criticism has been based for generations have disappeared and the reader is left in a very rough sea with only a life-belt to help keep him afloat. Of course, some of the rocks have been turning sandy for some time, but it is disconcerting, even so, to find that it is no longer possible to feel any familiar ground on which to plant one's feet.

When I began to teach Old Testament some twenty five years ago I found that my predecessor had spent a whole term dealing with the Documentary Hypothesis concerning the composition of the Pentateuch. My own student notes contained lists of the linguistic and other peculiarities of JEDP which 'proved' their existence and accounted for the discrepancies of style, fact and theology, enabling the student to mark his Bible in different colours so as to facilitate recognition of the sources. Already it was becoming evident that an inordinate amount of time was being spent on this exercise for small rewards. The division of verses and short sentences into phrases from disparate sources not only began to look subjective but seemed also of doubtful value. The rocks were beginning to disintegrate and the process has continued. Now, however, we are being told that there never were any rocks; we only imagined them! The first section of this book clearly points out the fallacies in the arguments for the Hypothesis and goes further by destroying the very presuppositions on which it was based. Those things which had demonstrated the presence of continuous sources are now seen to be characteristics used creatively by a single writer. To the conservative reader this section will seem like manna from heaven, but let him not rejoice too soon.

Sometimes one has the feeling that Professor Whybray is attacking positions that have not been seriously defended for a long time but perhaps this was necessary in a book as comprehensive as this. Rightly he points out that the more the four main sources are sub-divided, as they have been, the more it is being confessed that the Hypothesis is not only inadequate, but wrong. Further, to speak of 'strata' as some have done, rather than of documents is again to deny any *Documentary* Hypothesis. Helpfully, at the end of this first section the author lists eleven points which he has been making in the previous 130 pages.

By speaking of 'strata' we have been able to take on board form-critical and tradition-historical hypotheses without altogether discarding the 'documentary' one. To these Whybray turns in Part II and the next 86 pages or so are given over to the demolition of them. He begins with Gunkel, of course, and with a close scrutiny of 'oral tradition'. The notion that writing was unknown or rarely used in the Israelite period has been shown to be wrong. Modern studies of folklore have shown that stories transmitted orally do not keep their shape but in fact vary according to the context in which they are recited, the skills of the reciter and the participation of the audience. To apply Olrick's laws or Jolles' studies of Icelandic saga to the Pentateuch is shown to be methodologically wrong.

From these general remarks he proceeds to look in turn at the work of Noth and, more briefly, the Scandinavians Engnell, Nielsen and Carlson, Fohrer, Rendtorff and Blum. These need to be treated separately because of the differences between them. Some accept some form of the Documentary Hypothesis alongside the tradition-critical methods, while others deny it. Not unnaturally Noth is dealt with most fully. His reconstruction was obtained by 'piling one speculation upon another' and Whybray gives clear examples of this. He succeeds, too, in showing how Noth interpreted certain passages in such a way as to support his basic presuppositions. The fact that Fohrer who used the same tradition-critical methods can come to radically different conclusions shows how much results are

conditioned by presuppositions and how little the criteria have been evaluated. Rendtorff and Blum certainly discard the Documentary Hypothesis altogether but fail to say whether they are dealing with oral or literary traditions and so, though they go some way, they still do not go far enough. Again a useful summary follows with the points of the argument enumerated.

So, one approaches Section III, An Alternative Approach, with expectations raised, but we are given only 20 pages and a substantial part of this deals with the work of Sandmel, Schmid and Van Seters. Gradually we are coming closer to Whybray's own views for all these have in common the belief that the Pentateuch is the work of one person. In particular there is an interesting discussion of the comparison made by Van Seters between the Pentateuch and the work of Herodotus. Finally we discover that Whybray believes that the Pentateuch was written by a single author who was a national historian at work during the 6th Century BC and who was using folk material, most of which was of recent origin. The only piece which has any historical value is the recollection of the Exodus, though this is now 'buried in an enormously complex body of narrative'.

The whole argument of the book thus moves inexorably to this conclusion by destroying the alternatives. One could have wished for more positive support for his own solution; otherwise it appears as though this is the only possibility left to us. When all is said and done, this too remains a hypothesis, no more capable of proof than any other and, one suspects, open to criticisms similar to those he makes of others. Still, Professor Whybray has done us an enormous service even if it will leave many of us uncomfortable and without any rock to stand on. Perhaps we shall have to be content to tread water!

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**DAVID HUME: PHILOSOPHER OF MORAL SCIENCE** by Anthony Flew, *Basil Blackwell*. 1986, Pp. ix + 189, £7.95 p/b., £22.50 h/b.

*Hume's Philosophy of Belief*, Flew's first book on Hume, appeared a quarter of a century ago. His new production invites comparison with it. The former was a concentrated, critical, chapter by chapter exposition and discussion of the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*. It has acquired an enduring and honoured place in Hume studies. By contrast the new book (whose title misled me into hope that he had done for the second *Enquiry* what his former book had done for the first) is an eclectic gathering of topics which, according to Flew, show Hume at his best or at his most relevant to our contemporary interests. *Philosophical Essays concerning Humeian Undertakings* would have perhaps better described the contents. The contents themselves are stimulating, prickly, and full of perceptive and provoking thoughts: the whole, as one would expect, characterized by Flew's occasionally knotty and frequently memorable prose.

There are ten chapters. The first contains a masterful thumb-nail sketch of Hume's life and works and sets out the objectives which inform the book as a whole. They are: to consider topics of interest wherever they arise in his writings; to treat the topics in the perspective of Hume's concern with moral sciences ('human studies' is Flew's helpful gloss); and to treat the topics with particular regard to 'the fact that almost all his conclusions are, for better or for worse, conditioned and sometimes determined by an interlocking set of Cartesian assumptions' (p. 2). It is this last objective which is the most interesting and rewarding of the three. Flew summarizes the assumptions thus:

First ... that all arguments must be either deductive or defective, since the only sufficient reasons for believing any proposition are (other) propositions which entail it. Second ... that we are (all of us) forever imprisoned behind Veils of appearance, since we can never be immediately aware of any mind-