

# Reviews

**WITTGENSTEIN AND THE METAPHYSICS OF GRACE** by Terrance W. Klein, *Oxford University Press*, 2007, pp. xxi+173, £50.00.

The philosophy of religion in the English-speaking world has been greatly influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein's later work, at any rate by the notes taken by three students at lectures on religious belief that he gave in 1938 and that were edited by the late Fr Cyril Barrett SJ in 1966. In doctrinal theology, however, Wittgenstein's influence is not so obvious. The work of theologians such as Stanley Hauerwas, Nicholas Lash, and Rowan Williams is indebted to their study of *Philosophical Investigations* though that would not be obvious to readers who know nothing of Wittgenstein. From *Law, Love and Language* onwards, Herbert McCabe OP was always much more explicit about his debt to Wittgenstein's emphasis on language as communication, in a general way, in connection with ethics and the eucharist. Now, however, Terrance W. Klein, who teaches at Fordham University in New York, has had the audacious idea of singling out the Christian doctrine of grace for reconsideration in the light of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

There are, of course, many, often conflicting, ways of interpreting Wittgenstein. Klein's interpretation, to say the least, is highly contentious. Christians have nothing to fear, he begins by assuring us, from accepting Wittgenstein's 'now commonplace maxim', namely, that 'the meaning of any word is its usage, not some occult object lying beyond the word' (page xii).

Like many readers, Klein seems not to notice that, according to Wittgenstein, the meaning of a word can be defined as its use in the language 'for a large class of cases — though not for all' (*Investigations* §43, the latter emphasis as in the German original). That remark does not warrant Klein's assertion that, for Wittgenstein, 'the meaning of any word is its usage' (my emphasis): just the opposite.

Even more controversially, Klein asserts that, for the later Wittgenstein, 'the world is language' (page xvii); it is 'the linguistic tissue that forms the world' (page 10, Klein's emphasis); and much else in the same vein. Distinguished philosophers, such as Bernard Williams, have classified Wittgenstein's later philosophy as linguistic idealism. Klein explicitly rejects any such interpretation but says things that tend only to confirm it. 'Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is', he quotes Wittgenstein as saying (*Investigations* §373). Fine — but Klein illustrates this by the following example. You visit a friend just moved into a new house, with as yet no furniture. He tells you to 'pull up a chair', indicating one of the shipping cartons. 'In this context', Klein says, 'it is a chair' (page 16, his emphasis). Klein explains: 'It becomes a chair through the use that my linguistic community has made of it'. This sounds rather like Humpty Dumpty's remark to Alice. According to Klein, 'any small child who has mastered the language' would understand how to respond; she would pull up a carton and sit down. No doubt that is what the child would do — but would she believe that the cardboard box had actually *become a chair*? If not, would her failure be due to being bewitched by the metaphysical doctrine that an object has an 'essence', in this instance that 'the object before [her] participates in the eternal essence of a shipping carton' (page 16)?

Fortunately, Klein's imaginative and original treatment of the doctrine of grace does not depend on this highly controversial reading of Wittgenstein's 'philosophy

of language'. His main concern is to combat what the Jesuit theologian Henri de Lubac identified half a century ago as 'the tendency in Christian theology to picture grace as an object' (page 71). Whether many Christians, or anyway Roman Catholics, ever pictured grace as some kind of 'stuff', may well be disputable, however often the claim has been made. In this respect, anyway, Klein picks up and runs with an indisputably Wittgensteinian insight. As Wittgenstein remarked, it will always be difficult to imagine how we learn certain uses of words, 'if one is adjusted only to consider descriptions of physical objects' (*Zettel* §40, corrected). In other words, if we assume that the meaning of a word is always the thing for which it stands, it will be tempting to picture 'some occult object lying beyond the word', as Klein says.

Grace, however, is not any kind of object; it is an act, according to the biblical evidence (Chapter 2). For Thomas Aquinas grace is not a substance but an accident — a way of talking, however, that needs a good deal of elucidation, helped here by quotations from the work of the eminent American Jesuit philosopher W. Norris Clarke (Chapter 3). Interweaving ideas from an older generation of great Jesuit scholars, Pierre Rousselot, Karl Rahner, and Bernard Lonergan, Klein finally identifies the experience of grace as 'the apperception of being addressed by the world' (Chapters 4 and 5).

Whether this conclusion lies in 'Wittgenstein's Thomistic trajectory', in any important sense, seems doubtful. 'Language games', of which Klein makes a great deal, are introduced as 'functional congeries'; language itself is described as 'essentially the creation of fecund dichotomies', in jargon that would have dismayed Wittgenstein. To the extent that we might be inclined to assume that the word 'grace' stands for some 'occult object', anyway, Klein should have disabused us by the end of his discussion. As the names of the four Jesuit thinkers on whom he relies indicate, however, this book makes an intriguing contribution to the tradition of 'Transcendental Thomism', rather than to 'Wittgensteinian Thomism'.

There are some odd slips. Otto Hermann Pesch, cited several times, is not a Lutheran, as his massive book about the theology of grace in Luther and Aquinas shows. Wittgenstein did not publish 'only two books in his lifetime' (page 11): Part 1 of the *Investigations* is as he left it in 1945, but of course it appeared posthumously. Pierre Rousselot, though a priest since 1908, was serving as an ordinary soldier, not a chaplain, when he was killed in action in 1915 (page 122).

FERGUS KERR OP

**THE MORAL THEOLOGY OF JOHN PAUL II, by Charles E. Curran. *T&T Clark* (London and New York, 2006), pp. xi+262, £17.99**

Notoriously, according to Charles Kingsley, 'Truth, for its own sake, has never been a virtue with the Roman clergy.' It sometimes seems that, according to Charles Curran in his wide-ranging and elusive presentation and appraisal of John Paul II's moral theology, truth is too much a virtue with the late Roman pontiff — at least when it is given precedence over freedom.

Curran writes of John Paul II with little reference to the authority he had as pope, except that he wants to assure us that various papal teachings are not infallible; the pope is viewed as another, though especially prominent and influential, theologian. Curran's book attempts to lay out the theological and ethical presuppositions of the writings of Karol Wojtyła as pope as well as his (more specific) views on intrinsically evil acts, sexual ethics against the background of the complementary natures of men and women and the theology of marriage; also such themes in social ethics as the preferential option for the poor, a revised