

EARLY MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY (480 – 1150) by John Marenbon.
Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983. pp x + 190. £9.95.

It has sometimes been maintained that philosophy, in the strict sense of the word, did not exist in the Middle Ages before the thirteenth century, when the newly discovered works of Aristotle, mediated largely by Arabic commentators, were first assimilated in the Latin world. From late antiquity until the twelfth century there was only philosophy in a broad sense, where speculative reasoning developed in the service of theology. Certainly, after the achievement of Boethius in the sixth century, there is little to report in the seventh and eighth centuries, but this short history has been written in the confidence that,

although scholars were never just philosophers, nor books devoted exclusively to philosophy, in the early Middle Ages philosophical speculation did go on: sporadically and often confusedly in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries, with more sustained assurance in the twelfth (p 95).

In his monograph, *From the Circle of Alcuin to the School of Auxerre* (Cambridge 1981) the author strived to give coherence to some of those sporadic and confused efforts from the end of the eighth century to the beginning of the tenth. He has now ably recounted the longer story of the slow emergence of philosophical assurance before the texts and contexts were dramatically extended by the diffusion of the new Aristotle, the rise of the universities and the foundation of the mendicant orders. The story is crisply told, and scholarly erudition has not cluttered the pages with notes, though the reader will find documentation in a carefully structured and annotated bibliography.

A division into three parts separates the antique heritage, culminating in the work of Boethius, from the beginnings of medieval philosophy in the time between Cassiodorus and Anselm, and the much greater productivity of the years 1100 – 1150. There is a valuable summary of those texts from the ancient world that continued to be influential in the whole period,

Plato's *Timaeus* with the commentary of Calcidius, Macrobius's exposition of Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*. The contributions of Augustine, the Cappadocians and the Pseudo-Dionysius to a Christian Neoplatonism are briefly noted and the content of the old logic, Porphyry's *Isagoge* and Aristotle's *Categoriae* and *De interpretatione* described. The first part ends with a fuller treatment of the many-sided enterprise of Boethius.

Part Two opens with Alcuin and his followers and the seed of the development that led to 'a rational understanding of the world in abstract terms, as a pursuit separable from theology' (p 47). The fruit of Dr Marenbon's research is here deployed with new evidence of ninth-century interest in logic and its applications, stimulated by the Themistian paraphrase of the *Categoriae* and Boethius's *Opuscula sacra*. Increasing interest is being shown in John Scottus Eriugena's *Periphyseon* as the Dublin critical edition proceeds. Its 'Neoplatonic system which reflects, in an altered and somewhat incoherent form, the patterns of thought which had obsessed Platonists from the time of Plotinus, but had almost vanished from the tradition of Western Christian thought' (p 63) awaits a more sympathetic judgment which may dispel some of the apparent incoherence.

Historians of philosophy often attach themselves to the security of names, but this history has the merit of completing the tour of the ninth century with excursions into the little visited territory of glosses, where that security is often lacking. Apart from the exiguous gleanings of logic from St Gall and Gerbert of Aurillac's teaching at Rheims, the tenth and eleventh centuries are represented by the less familiar names of Bovo of Corvey and Adabold of Utrecht on the *Consolatio* and Manegold of Lautenbach's attack on pagan thought. But the crowning figure of the second part must be Anselm of Canterbury. Here the focus is rightly, according to the interest of this history, on dialectical skill. The ontological argument, always a thorny

issue, is discussed succinctly as 'the rational proof of what he already accepted by faith' (p 100), Platonic assumptions being neither analysed nor vindicated by Anselm. A final section here sketches the often neglected philosophical developments prompted by Priscian's grammar, and the linguistic preoccupations of the turn of the eleventh century set the scene for Roscelin's nominalism.

The third part of the history, which is devoted to the first half of the twelfth century, traces the currents of thought in northern France. The principal names are those of William of Conches, Bernard Silvestris, William of Champeaux, Peter Helias, Abelard and Gilbert of Poitiers. The principal developments are the elaboration of a rudimentary physics and cosmology from Platonist sources, while grammar and logic attain greater refinement in the de-

bate on universals and Abelard's dialectical synthesis of the older logical material. Of the dialectical theologians, it is the much misunderstood Gilbert whose expositions of Boethius are praised for their philosophical profundity. A final chapter on 'Abelard and the beginnings of medieval ethics' gives credit to the originality of the *Collationes* and *Scito teipsum*, while drawing attention to parallels for the doctrine of intention in the thought of Anselm of Laon and William of Champeaux.

Readers of *New Blackfriars* may find it salutary to learn that medieval philosophy did not begin in the thirteenth century and that Irish thought had its high-point in the ninth. This well-written account of philosophy before Thomas, and even before Dominic, has much to commend it.

OSMUND LEWRY O P

LOGIC AND THE NATURE OF GOD by Stephen T. Davis, *Macmillan Press Ltd 1983, London and Basingstoke. pp 171. £20.00*

Stephen Davis' latest book is a serious, closely argued contribution to philosophical theology from a conservative point of view. Davis attempts to argue for the coherence of a concept of God consistent with the Bible and, as far as possible, with Christian tradition: the God of his presentation is of infinite duration rather than timeless; contingently rather than necessarily omniscient, omnipotent and independent; foreknows the future free actions of his creatures; is good but able to do evil; can temporarily become non-omniscient; and is rationally believed to be triune, despite the apparent contradiction involved.

Davis rejects God's timeless eternity in favour of temporal eternity. We are held to lack any concept of atemporal causation, or of how a timeless God can react as the Bible depicts Yahweh reacting; and advocates of timelessness are accused of making all times simultaneous with each other. But the latter charge unfairly represents proponents of timelessness as defining it in terms of simultaneity; the Biblical predicates can mostly be translated

into the language of timelessness; and the case of God allows (and perhaps requires) us to modify the notion of causation accordingly. In these matters more regard might have been paid to Brian Davies' paper 'Kenny on God' (*Philosophy*, 1982), referred to on p 32 (a paper now supplemented in the May, 1983 number of this journal). There is, however, a sensible response to an abstruse defence of timelessness on the parts of Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (*Journal of Philosophy*, 1981).

Most of the chapter on omniscience concerns the coherence of timeless omniscience, which Davis disputes. Davis persuades me that a timeless God cannot know precisely the same proposition as is stated by "Ronald Reagan is President now" on 16 June 1982. But he could know that in our world Ronald Reagan is President at the time that any utterer of that statement on June 1982 correctly understands as "now"; and knowledge of this and related kinds is all that is needed for him to decide which world to create and to respond to the actions of his crea-