

**Benjamin W. McCraw and Robert Arp, eds.
Philosophical Approaches to the Devil. Routledge
Studies in the Philosophy of Religion. New York, NY:
Routledge, 2016. 211 pp. \$148.00 (hbk).**

Christopher Woznicki
Fuller Theological Seminary

C.S. Lewis famously said there are two equal and opposite errors human beings can fall into concerning demons and the Devil. The first is to disbelieve their existence. The second is to “feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.”¹ Benjamin McCraw and Robert Arp have edited a volume which manages to toe the line between both of these errors. This volume, titled *Philosophical Approaches to the Devil*, toes the line by including philosophical essays which deal with questions regarding the nature, existence, and purposes of the Devil and demons from a realist perspective as well as essays which seem to consider the Devil (or conceptions of the Devil) as a useful fiction for thinking about topics like ethics, epistemology, and politics. In this review I provide a brief overview of this volume’s contents, followed by an assessment of several chapters.

Having an introduction and fourteen chapters, *Philosophical Approaches to the Devil* is divided into four parts. Part one deals with differing conceptions of the Devil. In chapter one Adam Neal treats the story of the Devil as it is found in traditional Christianity. This chapter is followed by two chapters, by Siobhan Lyons and James McLachlan, on portrayals of Satan in Romantic literature and philosophy. Both of these latter essays use the concept of Satan shaped and molded by Romantic authors like Milton, Blake, Shelly, and Byron in order to reflect upon the nature of freedom, independence, and morality. The final chapter in this section takes its cues from C.S. Lewis’s *Screwtape Letters* and presents the readers with correspondence between Wormwood and Screwtape regarding the Devil’s work in modern academia.

Part two treats medieval and modern perspectives on the Devil. Katherin Rogers examines Anselm’s *De Casu Diaboli* and *Cur Deus Homo*. Concerning the first she shows that Anselm’s book is “really a case study on the mechanics of free will, rather than a discussion of Satanic goings on” (71). Concerning the latter she shows that Anselm has successfully yanked “the Devil off center stage” (75). Kevin Carnahan pens the second essay in this section titled: “The Secret Joke of Satan’s Soul.” Using Anselm’s reflections on the Devil, Carnahan critiques Joshua Greene’s moral psychology. Shifting away from medieval thought, David Reiter, in the third essay of this section, addresses the doctrine of hell in the works of Jonathan Edwards. It is hard

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), ix.

to see how this essay fits within a volume treating the Devil, nevertheless it is included here. Reiter shows that Edwards's doctrine of hell is more than just retributive, it is teleological. The final essay in this section is a revisionist reading of Descartes's demon in his *Meditations*. Giving a close reading of the first meditation, Joshua Hall comes to the surprising conclusion that "the demon is therefore both more powerful and more virtuous than God" (107).

The third section of this book focuses on the Devil and epistemological concerns. Paul McNamara creatively pens an imaginary dialogue between a philosophy student and a psychiatrist concerning the existence of a Supremely Evil Being. McNamara ought to be commended for using the form of a dialogue in his contribution, as this is an under used form within the analytic tradition. The following two chapters lean on Alvin Plantinga's work to reflect on evil and epistemology. James Sennett argues that we need something more than Plantinga's supernatural beings (i.e. Satan and his cohorts) to deal with the Logical Argument from Natural Evil. Benjamin McCraw argues that there may be tools in reformed epistemology which can give warrant for belief in the Devil and demons.

The final set of essays focus on the Devil from the perspective of moral and social psychology. T. Ryan Byerly uses the paradigmatic cases of Satanic temptation (the temptation of Adam and Eve and Jesus) as a way to reflect upon the nature of temptation. Andre Santos Campos reflects on Satan's relationship to God's law and authority in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Goethe's *Faust* in order to draw out two different views on political philosophy of law. Robert Arp, who is also one of the editors of the volume, contributes the final essay in which he argues that it may not be unreasonable to invent the Devil in certain contexts, even though it is likely that he does not exist.

Given the fact that this is a journal of theology, I will focus on three essays that will be of particular interest to theologians.

One essay that will be of interest to theologians, especially those in the Reformed tradition or those engaged in Jonathan Edwards studies, is the David Reiter's "'Behold, It is Cast into the Fire for Fuel': Jonathan Edwards on the Usefulness of the Wicked." Reiter argues against commentators like Jonathan Kvanvig who believe that the the concept of retribution provides Edwards's rationale for why some people are in hell, i.e. some people "*exist in Hell simply and precisely because that is what they deserve*" (96). Reiter believes that Kvanvig has misread Edwards, and that it is actually the case that "Edwards relies in a significant way on teleological considerations in his reasoning concerning hell" (96). By reconstructing Edwards's argument as it is found in his 1744 sermon, "Wicked Men Useful in Their Destruction Only," Reiter shows that according to Edwards those who are in hell are useful for the promotion of the perception of God's glory in his justice, as those in heaven see, and rejoice over, God's just punishment of the damned.

While this is certainly one way to articulate an Edwardsean rationale for the destruction of the wicked in hell, this might not be the only way to do so. God, according to Edwards himself, instrumentalizes the life of human beings for the pursuit of a greater end, namely God's own glory. This is especially appalling if God creates these people for the sake of damning them with the end of displaying his justice. But might there be an Edwardsean way—that is, a way that is in the spirit of

Edwards's thought—to avoid saying that God uses human beings as mere means when he consigns some to hell? There might be. What if, instead of explaining God's primary motivation as his self glorification, we say that God's primary motivation is something more basic, namely his love towards being? If we make this move, which is plausibly in the spirit of Edwards, we might have grounds for saying that some are consigned to hell because the damned have separated themselves from God (i.e. they have rejected his intended end of union) but that God consigns them to hell as a way of maintaining his love towards their being. Buying into this line of thought would necessitate believing that the following three beliefs are genuinely Edwardsean: (1) God's ultimate end is love towards being, (2) existence (or being), all things being equal, is always a good, especially when compared to non-being, and (3) by existing in hell, the damned continue to participate in God's being. If something like the account I have briefly intimated towards here is a genuinely Edwardsean option, then we may have grounds for rejecting Reiter's account which has some unpleasant implications about God's use of human beings as mere means to his ends. The account I propose would still let us say with Edwards that God is glorified by the existence of some in hell, yet he is primarily motivated by love.

A second chapter which may be of interest to theologians is Paul McNamara's, "A Theist's Nightmare." As I suggested above, the dialogue format of this chapter makes for an engaging read. But more than simply being an engaging read, this chapter poses a question that ought to be considered more carefully: Does simply replacing "God" with "A Supremely Evil Being" in classical arguments for the existence of God demonstrate the reality of a Supremely Evil Being? McNamara suggests that the fact that formally equal arguments for the existence of these two beings yields belief in two diametrically opposed omnipotent beings suggests that both arguments cannot be true. He, through the voice of the psychiatrist, concludes that "If the reasoning is parallel in both cases, and the conclusions are incompatible, then the reasoning itself has gotta be flawed..." (131). This seems to be right if there is actual formal parity between the arguments for God and the Supremely Evil Being. However, we have reasons to doubt this. For example, at times McNamara seems to rely on too strong a distinction between "moral good" and "ontological good." In his Supremely Evil Being version of the Ontological Argument, he asks us to conceive of the most perfectly evil being conceivable. This argument requires us to be able to think of a being which is supremely "ontologically good" yet not "morally good." It seems to me that the perfect being theology (in its classical form) doesn't allow us to conceive of such a being. So if we keep with the tenets of perfect being theology, then, *prima facie*, conceiving of a most perfect Supremely Evil Being is an impossibility. Might there be a way to conceive of a Supremely Evil Being that is ontologically perfect and morally imperfect? This is a topic that invites further reflection from perfect being theologians.

A final essay that might be of interest to theologians is Benjamin McCraw's "Reformed Demonology." At the Analytic Theology Section of the Evangelical Theological Society's 2016 Annual Meeting, Thomas McCall responded to the objection that analytic theology is too dominated by Anglo-American concerns. McCall agreed that this is a legitimate concern. He responded by saying that an early

version of *An Invitation to Christian Analytic Theology*² included an entire chapter involving a case study on witchcraft and the demonic, i.e. a topic which is of great concern to Christians in the global South. He stated that analytic theology has the potential for playing a role in the settling of disputes about whether or not something has demonic causes. The sort of epistemological work that McCraw does in this chapter provides a potential starting point for the consideration of the kinds of theological concerns raised by McCall. Theologians working on demonic experiences might want to expand beyond McCraw's argument, which shows that belief in the Devil might be warranted, to show that belief that a particular experience is demonic might also be warranted.

Those who seek to theologize about the Devil and the demonic will also find Adam Neal and Katherin Rogers's essays to be fruitful for theological reflection. However, theologians might find Lyons, McLachlan, and Campos's essays to be less fruitful, as these essays are more concerned with Romantic authors' portrayals of the Devil than the actual Devil. Despite the fact that some of the essays in this volume will be of little interest to analytic *theologians*, it is a volume that should not be ignored by these theologians. There truly is a gap in the analytic philosophical literature treating the Devil. Thankfully this work fills that gap, thus giving analytic theologians a necessary resource for doing analytic theology about the Devil and the demonic.

² Thomas McCall, *An Invitation to Analytic Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2015).