

BOOK REVIEWS

Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language, by Frank Tobin. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986. Pp. 237. Hardbound. No price listed. Reviewed by Richard Evanoff, Showa University.

The thought of the fourteenth-century Christian mystic and scholar, Meister Eckhart, is frequently cited in studies comparing Eastern and Western thought. Rudolph Otto's pioneering study *Mysticism, East and West*, first published in 1926, compared Eckhart's thought with that of the Indian metaphysician Sankara. In a similarly titled book, *Mysticism Christian and Buddhist*, D. T. Suzuki offered comparisons between Eckhart's mysticism and the mysticism of the Zen and Shin Buddhist traditions. The range of comparative studies is sometimes unexpectedly broad: Ananda K. Coomaraswamy's *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, devoted mainly to theories of art in India and China, includes a chapter entitled "Meister Eckhart's View of Art."

Despite the value of these comparative studies and the interest in Eckhart which they have stimulated, what has long been needed is a work which attempts to understand Eckhart's thought on its own terms. This is precisely what Frank Tobin's *Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language* sets out to do and largely succeeds in doing. The book not only examines the central themes of Eckhart's mysticism, but also provides a systematic presentation of Eckhart's frequently overlooked contributions to philosophy and theology. Tobin bases his well-rounded study not only on Eckhart's celebrated sermons and popular works in German, but also on the less accessible, and more scholastic, works written by Eckhart in Latin. Tobin attempts to see Eckhart not only against the background of mysticism which was flourishing in Germany during Eckhart's time, but also in light of the influence of medieval scholasticism, and particularly the thought of Eckhart's fellow Dominican, Thomas Aquinas, on the terminology Eckhart used to express his ideas.

One of the chief merits of Tobin's book

lies in its methodical organization, considering the vast range of original source material he draws on. After an introductory chapter, which provides not only the usual biographical material but also an extremely useful and detailed overview of Eckhart's writings, Tobin proceeds to analyze Eckhart's bold identification of man with God. He shows how Eckhart's use of the scholastic concept of *esse*, being, unravels several paradoxes one finds in Eckhart's work. Creatures by themselves are "pure nothings," but by participating in God's *esse* they experience the "birth of the Son" and themselves acquire a divine nature. The deified creature, referred to as "The Just Man" by Eckhart, comes to mirror the divine image in mystical detachment; through *Abegescheidenheit* the creature "cuts" himself off from his own creatureliness, emptying himself so that he may be filled with God.

Tobin does his most original work in his treatment of Eckhart's use of language. In addition to outlining Eckhart's major stylistic characteristics, he also discusses Eckhart's use of analogy and his distrust of ordinary language in talking about divine matters. Tobin points out that despite the influence of scholasticism on Eckhart's work, Eckhart continued to rely on the non-scholastic tradition of negative, apophatic theology, thus helping to account for the almost inevitable clash with those who later accused him of heresy. Eckhart's view that language must be transcended if one is to get at the core of the divine was for the most part unappreciated by those of his critics who retained a confidence in the precise, unambiguous language of scholastic philosophy.

The Philosophy of W. V. Quine, edited by Lewis Edwin Hahn and Paul Arthur Schilpp. La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1986. Pp. 705. Paper. No price. Reviewed by Timothy McGrew, University of Scranton.

W. V. Quine is an excellent choice for inclusion in the Library of Living Philosophers series. For over fifty years his work in symbolic logic has set standards for pedagogic excellence, and his numerous

writings on semantics and ontology have provided models of clarity and precision.

Following the standard format for this series, this volume begins with a brief autobiography. Twenty-four critical and descriptive essays on Quine's thought have been contributed by other philosophers, and Quine responds to each of these. A complete bibliography of Quine's published work completes the volume.

Quine's autobiography is disappointingly brief. The 44-page essay devotes more time to bibliographical chronology and travel, and less to the origins and development of Quine's ideas, than I would like. True, Quine's full-length autobiography *The Time of My Life* has recently been published by MIT Press, but few readers will have this at hand.

Quine's replies to his critics are highly compressed, directed to (sometimes at) the individual contributors and making few concessions to the nonspecialist. Students of set theory and semantics may already possess the necessary background to cope with the terse shorthand of his rebuttals; yet the volumes on Russell (1944), Carnap (1963), and Popper (1974) each seemed more accessible for the lay reader. Quine also has a habit of referring to his previous works instead of restating his arguments and elaborating on his positions—perhaps an overly optimistic move for a philosopher who so frequently claims to have been misunder-

stood. In any event, prospective readers should obtain copies of *Word and Object* (1960), *The Roots of Reference* (1974), and *Theories and Things* (1981), since he cites these especially frequently.

Most of the essays contributed to this volume cluster around specific aspects of his thought, rather than attempting to critique Quine from a broad historical perspective. There is nothing here to parallel the essays by Black and Nagel in the volume on Russell. Those familiar with Quine's work will find interesting material on modality and necessity in the essays by Parsons, Follesdal, and (particularly) Kaplan. Despite the various discussions of meaning holism and the Duhemian and Quinian theses (Gadhe and Stegmuller, Putnam, Roth, and Vuillemin), I found no reference to either Grunbaum's many critical articles on this or the comments of Imre Lakatos at the end of his essay in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*. The contributions by Gibson, Ulian, Vuillemin and Wang attempt to clarify some of Quine's ideas and their historical development, and in conjunction with Quine's comments these serve to fill in some of the gaps left in the autobiography.

In short, this is a volume for the specialist. If you are ready familiar with Quine's work and want to explore it in greater depth, this makes an excellent starting place.