Jörg Rüpke (ed.)

As the prophet Brian of Monty Python fame teaches us, we are all individuals (except for that one detractor who protests he’s not). According to the editor of the present book, Jörg Rüpke, scholars of the ancient world have for far too long forgotten that we are all individuals and have instead focused on civic, or 
*polis*, religion. This negligence of the individual, it is claimed, has led to a marginalization of ancient religion in the discipline of the history of religions as such and to an inadequate contribution to our understanding of ancient Mediterranean culture more broadly (p. 6). Despite the hint of hyperbole in this claim, the present book gathers an impressive array of accomplished scholars who attempt to elucidate difficult theoretical concepts such as “individuation” and “individualization” in light of a wide range of empirical examples. Overall, the book succeeds in shedding light on the interplay between individuals and society, mostly focusing on the Roman imperial period. The contributions are grouped in seven sections, in addition to the introduction.

“Individualization and Individuation as Concepts for Historical Research,” Rüpke’s extensive introduction, provides much fodder for thought, although it may be that he rhetorically exaggerates the lack of studies aimed at individual religiosity. For example, there is no reference here to A.-J. Festugière’s admirable *Personal Religion among the Greeks* (1954) or *L’idéal religieux des Grecs et l’Évangile* (1932). A number of terms are forwarded as relevant, such as individualization, de-traditionalization, individuation, and socialization. It would have been helpful if these terms had been given clearer definitions, since the present reviewer must admit that he is confused when reading “that the term ‘self’ cannot include the notion of individuation, as developed so far, but can only be an aspect of it” (p. 12). As far as I can gather, this means that the notion of the self is part of the process of individuation when it is the subject of self-reflection or socialization (cf. p. 7). Although the “history of individualization”
is mentioned several times, it is not specifically stated when such processes are thought to have originated. From the selection of essays it seems that the Hellenistic and imperial periods are presupposed. Every book must have some chronological limits, but it would still be interesting to know what the editor thinks of Festugière’s ascription of personal religiosity to Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, or indeed any mention of the famous Delphic maxim “Know thyself.”

The first section focuses on “Historical Change,” starting out with Corinne Bonnet’s “The Religious Life in Hellenistic Phoenicia: ‘Middle Ground’ and New Agencies.” Demonstrating a healthy skepticism to the explanatory power of such terms as “syncretism,” “Hellenism,” etc., Bonnet shows the complexity of religious life in Phoenicia and points out that one cannot simply posit the conquests of Alexander as the start of Hellenism: cross-cultural engagement had been going on for much longer, to the degree that Bonnet is skeptical of even the existence of discrete “Greek” and “Phoenician” cultures in the area. Bonnet rather sees the individual emerge as the agent who is able to innovate in cultures where traditional structures are losing power. This is reasonable, but it begs the question of the individuality of those agents who preserve or challenge the status quo in periods when ancestral traditions are not substantially threatened. Are they somehow less individual than in turbulent times, somehow prisoners of ossified cultural patterns? It is a recurring feature in a lot of the chapters of the volume that individual agency is ascribed to the rebels against tradition rather than its carriers, a perspective that might have been problematized.

John A. North’s “Disguising Change in the First Century” follows up with a contribution discussing the way that religious change in first-century BCE Rome can be connected to the question of individualization. His approach is to discuss communal change, individual change, and the question of *superstitio*, with specific short passages from diverse Roman source materials. This is a very fruitful way to go about it. North ends on a note of caution, distinguishing between two types of “identity”: that of membership in a discrete religious group and that of an increased sense of self-awareness and religious choice. As he points out, it is not yet clear how these two conceptions might be related. Another important methodological problem he emphasizes is that our impression of a change of attitudes at the beginning of the imperial era might be due to the sources at our disposal, and that individual conceptions of the gods might have been prevalent long before this.

Next is Clifford Ando’s “Subjects, Gods, and Empire, or Monarchism as a Theological Problem,” who criticizes the influential locative-utopian axis of religion suggested by Jonathan Z. Smith to explain the onset of otherworldliness of several religious developments of the imperial age. Ando seems to