

## *Book Reviews*



Benjamin W. McCraw and Robert Arp, eds., *Philosophical Approaches to Demonology*. Routledge Studies in the Philosophy of Religion. Routledge, New York/London, 2017. 298 pages. ISBN 978-1-138-20549-9.

Taking on the topic of demonology is daring in the current philosophical climate. Most contemporary analytic philosophy is naturalistic, and philosophy of religion usually limits the discussion to God. Other supernatural beings are rarely taken seriously. This book aims to change this by “present[ing] distinctively *philosophical* approaches to demons and demonology” (1). McCraw and Arp do not elaborate on what constitutes a distinctively philosophical approach and what makes it different from historical, theological, or other approaches. The book is divided into four parts. Some papers explicitly discuss the epistemology of (belief in) demons or moral questions. Other papers discuss how influential philosophers or religious traditions used to think about demons. While this last group also touches on metaphysical questions, these contributions would also fit well in a historical approach. Below, I will first discuss the book’s introduction, and then I will discuss all chapters critically, ending with some general reflections on the book.

McCraw and Arp give an excellent introduction to the topic, discussing demonologies in Greco-Roman times, Near Eastern societies, Abrahamic religions, and non-Western societies. They point out various similarities—e.g., demons are always considered invisible and more than human—and some important differences. Further, they discuss how changes in theology can explain some of the differences. For example, monotheism in Abrahamic traditions led to a negative portrayal of polytheism and thus to a negative portrayal of all supernatural beings other than God. As a result, demons were now considered evil, whereas older traditions portrayed them in a more favorable light. McCraw and Arp also do some metaphysics and examine the nature of demons and what they do. They try to be as neutral as possible and not to elevate one particular tradition. They note that belief in possession (i.e., demons

taking control over a person) occurs cross-culturally, adding that, contrary to common belief, possession is not inherently valued negatively; it is merely considered “unusual.” Other phenomena discussed here are exorcism, demonic illness, witchcraft, and temptation. In sum, McCraw and Arp’s introduction gives a good, broad overview of historic views on demons and lays out some well-known phenomena connected to demons in more detail. As good introductions tend to do, this one raises many more questions than it answers. As a result, it could be very useful for further work on demonology.

*Part 1: Demons in Christianity.* Benjamin McCraw’s paper is on the demonology of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. He notes that both adhere to a privation account of evil where evil is the lack of something in *x* which *x* ought to have. As a result, Augustine and Aquinas cannot allow beings with an intrinsically evil nature; therefore, they believe that demons have the same (uncorrupted) nature as angels. The main difference between Augustine’s and Aquinas’ demonology is that Augustine sees demons as corporeal whereas Aquinas does not. McCraw adds the caveat that Augustine’s demonology is not as systematic and coherent as Aquinas’ and Augustine sometimes appears to deny demonic corporeality. In my opinion, McCraw is a bit too harsh on Augustine, because few thinkers are as systematic and coherent as Aquinas, and Augustine wrote for a different audience. McCraw discusses many phenomena related to demons that he touched on in the introduction, such as temptation and possession. He successfully shows that demonology was once a serious philosophical endeavor and that any future philosophical discussion of demonology should be mindful of its rich history.

Like McCraw, Seamus O’Neill’s paper is also on Augustine’s demonology, but he compares it to that of Apuleius. The main focus of this paper is the controversy over whether demons have bodies. O’Neill argues that Augustine is not as ambiguous on this issue as many believe. Augustine held the view that demons have an aerial, material body. Apuleius held a similar view. O’Neill also discusses the controversy over where demons reside. This paper is above all historical; and it is not made sufficiently clear why this topic is of relevance for current philosophical reflection. Therefore, it does not appear to fit well with the book’s program set out in the introduction.

Shandon Guthrie argues for a “coherent and supported philosophy of demonology with which to understand both the ontology of demons and their mode of operation” (70). Concerning their ontology, Guthrie argues that demons are probably immaterial beings. He gives two arguments. Firstly, he claims that demons are described as being immaterial in the Bible. Although Guthrie rightly observes that demons are described as not being bodily constituted like humans are, he fails to note that this description is compatible with