

Kate Kirkpatrick, *Sartre and Theology*. Bloomsbury, 2017.

*Sartre and Theology* is the latest, welcome addition to T&T Clark's successful *Philosophy and Theology* series, which looks at the theological relevance and reception of major philosophers, especially within the European tradition. Like several recent books in the series, Kirkpatrick divides her account into three main parts: Jean-Paul Sartre's theological formation (chapters 1-3), theological themes in his work (chapters 4-5), and his theological reception (chapters 6-9).

Chapter 1 gives an overview of Sartre's life and work, pointing particularly to unpublished or -translated texts that draw on Christian images or themes, including Sartre's 1927 Master's thesis (*memoire de diplome d'études supérieures*) on the imagination, and his 1940 Christmas play *Bariona*, which was written and performed at his prisoner-of-war camp.

Chapter 2 points to theological sources that Kirkpatrick expects to have influenced Sartre during his philosophical formation: Pascal, Alain, and Henri Bergson, whom he later recalls having read at age 18; the Christian mystics, especially Tauler and Teresa of Avila, on whom he drew in a lost section of his Master's thesis; and the 17<sup>th</sup>-century interpreters of Augustine – including Bérulle, Descartes, Jansen, Pascal, Malebranche, and Fénelon – who formed part of Sartre's study for the *agrégation de philosophie*. Kirkpatrick's attention here is primarily on the way these theologians employed language of nothingness in their accounts of freedom and sin.

Following this discussion of theological sources, Chapter 3 gives a brief overview of literary sources with theological themes that Sartre must have read and, in some cases, engaged with: the French *moralistes* of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and the 'dramatists of sin' of the 1920's – François Mauriac, Georges Bernanos, and Paul Claudel. As before, Kirkpatrick is concerned to give a sense of the suffusion of Sartre's reading with theological and, particularly, hamartiological concerns.

Chapters 4 and 5 draw out theologically entangled themes in Sartre's two most theologically influential works, *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and 'Existentialism is a Humanism' (1945): anxiety, bad faith, being-with-others, and the incompatibility of freedom with a creator. Kirkpatrick's main aim in these chapters is not so much to offer her own assessments as to delineate the concepts that exercised Sartre's theological interlocutors. The remaining four chapters of the book are devoted to these theological engagements: Protestant (ch. 6), Catholic (ch. 7), Orthodox (ch. 8), and liberation (ch. 9).

Chapter 6 argues that both Barth and Tillich explicitly responded to Sartre. In Barth's case, this response is explicit, but strictly limited to an excursus in the famous section on God and Nothingness (*Church Dogmatics* §50) which also discusses Müller, Schleiermacher and Heidegger. To Kirkpatrick, this section presents a 'conundrum' (p. 135), because its acknowledgement that something may be learned from Sartre betrays an inconsistency with his Christological method. I am not sure this worry is justified: Matthias Wüthrich's careful reading of *CD* §50, which situates Barth's gesture to Heidegger's and Sartre's flawed yet significant confrontation with nothingness within his larger response to the interwar intellectual mood, seems to me to offer a satisfactorily consistent reading of Barth's approach. In Tillich's case, the response to Sartre is more diffuse and less obviously than in Barth's directed at Sartre specifically, rather than existentialism more generally. At the same time, Tillich's response is far more substantial, since he regarded the existentialist mood as a genuine response to the predicament of fallen existence, rather than, like Barth, a further entanglement in its self-deception.

Chapter 7 treats Gabriel Marcel, whose private and public challenges to Sartre's insufficient attention to 'communion' are well known, and Karol Wojtyła, whose response to Sartrean themes Kirkpatrick presents as 'mediated by Marxist discussions of alienation' (p. 181). For both Catholic thinkers, Kirkpatrick argues, Sartre's account of existence rang true as a partial but not as a full description of existence: one in need of reframing and correction by attention to the dynamics of love. Chapter 8 shows a similar interpretation at play in the Orthodox theologies of Christos Yannaras and John Zizioulas, for both of whom Sartrean selfhood represents a state of alienation to be overcome by participation in divine love.

The theological use of Sartre discussed in chapter 9 – that of James Cone's black liberation theology – is starkly different. Cone, alone among the theologians discussed here, deploys Sartre's account of freedom as a positive theological resource rather than as a foil. Finding himself defined as a *thing* rather than a person, Cone's black man is confronted with the Sartrean realization that he must seize his own freedom and declare himself a person – an act nobody else, especially not white society, will perform for him. For Cone, this act is theological because it is, at the same time, 'the manifestation of God's activity' (p. 200).

*Sartre and Theology* is quite consciously a map rather than a full picture: Kirkpatrick introduces but never exhausts her materials. For the Sartrean interested in theology, the book draws attention to otherwise neglected aspects of his formation and work. For the theologian interested in Sartre, it acts as a guidepost to the possibility of further work. It is carefully researched and for the most part clearly written: we owe Kirkpatrick a debt of gratitude.

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Judith Wolfe is Professor of Philosophical Theology at the University of St Andrews. She is the author of *Heidegger's Eschatology* (OUP 2013), *Heidegger and Theology* (T&T Clark 2014), and numerous articles, and co-editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Christian Thought* (OUP 2017).