

## Reviews

*The Biology and Psychology of Moral Agency.* By WILLIAM A. ROTTSCHAEFER.  
Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998. xi + 293 pages. \$59.95/ £37.50.

This is unquestionably an impressive and important book on moral agency by William Rottschaefer, Professor of Philosophy at Lewis and Clark College. Most of it is concerned with how moral agency is acquired and put into effect, although the later chapters deal with broader questions about the justification and status of moral values. Rottschaefer develops a naturalistic approach, drawing on psychology and evolutionary biology. Not everyone will be convinced that his approach is adequate, but there is no doubt that he marshals a powerful case. Even those who do not like his conclusions will recognize that he is worth debating with. At numerous points he clarifies the issues and sharpens the argument.

The first chapter considers how relevant psychology and biology are to moral agency. It is characteristic of Rottschaefer's clear thinking that he offers a helpful list of six possible kinds of relevance, starting with those that almost everyone would accept and moving to more controversial ones. There will not be much dispute about the contention that the human sciences provide information that is relevant to moral decision making or that they shed light on the development of moral capacities. Things get more controversial with the idea that scientific findings can lead to a critique of common sense about morality. (I would accept that they can do so in principle, while still maintaining that in practice many such critiques are unconvincing.) Next there is the idea that we can move from science to the formulation of moral norms, something for which Rottschaefer does not argue very explicitly, although he is sympathetic to it. However, he does argue that from understanding how moral agency works we can make inferences about the nature and function of morality. Finally, there is the question of the contribution that the science of moral agency can make to the "vision of a meaningful human life." I have set all this out in detail because it illustrates the kind of careful conceptual analysis that makes this an impressive book.

The next three chapters are concerned with the basis of moral agency in evolutionary biology. As far as I can see, there is nothing controversial in claiming such a basis. How could it be otherwise? However, methodological problems make it difficult to fill in the details. Rottschaefer points to some interesting divergences about morality between sociobiologists: whether biology serves morality, whether morality serves biology, or whether the two are in conflict. It seems to me that these different positions are not as incompatible as they look at first sight and that there may be some truth in each of them. Rottschaefer favors the view that biology serves morality, as represented by E. O. Wilson, although he is acute in pointing out that Wilson does not say much about how moral capacities are put into action

and that Wilson's position is really just a plausible story with little evidence to support it. To remedy these deficiencies, Rottschaefer turns to Martin Hoffman's excellent research on the development of empathy. This augments his position helpfully, but I think it still leaves him doing little more than speculating about many aspects of the origin of moral capacities. I was surprised that he did not make more use of Michael Ruse in these chapters.

Then come three chapters on the psychology of moral agency. I was surprised that Rottschaefer devotes a chapter to B. F. Skinner. Although I have no problem with the idea that conditioning plays a role in the acquisition of many human capacities, including moral ones, Skinner's approach seems to me unhelpful (a) because he deliberately ignores the cognitive aspects of conditioning for which there is now overwhelming evidence, and (b) because a Skinnerian approach to morality floats above the evidence about how moral agency actually operates. However, Rottschaefer moves on in the next chapter to Lawrence Kohlberg's work on moral development and Albert Bandura's social-learning theory, both of which are more promising. Rottschaefer is fully aware of the view held by some that the latter is not relevant because it does not deal specifically with morality. He has some useful reactions to offer in addressing that criticism, although they are perhaps not as decisive as he thinks. It seems also to me that he too readily accepts the relevance of Kohlberg's work. I would suggest that Kohlberg deals only with the development of the intellectual understanding of morality and scarcely impinges on other crucial aspects of moral agency, such as guilt reactions and behavioral control. The final chapter in this section deals with neuropsychological questions and argues, on the basis of a form of supervenience or strong emergence, that brain processes leave room for moral agency. Rottschaefer is fully aware of the objection that higher supervenient levels of moral agency may be written off as mere epiphenomena. He argues back in an attractive way, but what he says will not be the last word.

Finally, Rottschaefer broadens the picture and considers wider questions about morality, and it is probably these last three chapters that will be of most general interest to readers of *Zygon*. The question here is essentially how far understanding moral agency takes us toward understanding morality itself. Developing a naturalistic account of how moral agency is acquired and operates is one thing, but one might still object that this tells us little about the nature of morality itself. Rottschaefer does not shirk these important questions and steers an interesting course. On one hand, he wants to develop a naturalist account of morality. (*Integrationist* is his preferred term for his position, although he certainly eschews non-naturalist approaches.) On the other hand, he is committed to a form of moral realism and resists both reductionism and eliminativism in considering morality. He reconciles realism with naturalism through a strong form of emergentism, roughly stating that morality is a relational phenomenon that emerges naturalistically but that, having emerged, is really morality and not anything else. One of the attractive things about his approach is the way in which he lets his philosophical positions be guided by the scientific facts. For example, he thinks that the purely philosophical debate between moral realists and nonrealists has become sterile, but he is influenced by scientific research on the development of moral beliefs that supports an important role for moral facts.

This is an important and sophisticated book that has broad-ranging implications. If you are interested in morality, evolution, reductionism, naturalism, or the

general relationship between science and philosophy, there is much in this book that will engage your attention and from which you will learn.

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*Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia.* By RUSSELL T. MCCUTCHEON. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997. xiii + 249 pages. \$32.00.

*Manufacturing Religion* opens with an epigraph from Ivan Strenski's *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth Century History*: "Instead of there being a real thing, myth, there is a thriving *industry*, manufacturing and marketing what is called 'myth'" (p. 3). Russell T. McCutcheon, an assistant professor in the Department of Religious Studies of Southwest Missouri State University, points out that religion, too, is "manufactured." However, the dominant discourse has made "the scholarly claim that religion is sui generis" (p. 3), and this "can be understood as one of a number of potent strategies for domination" (p. 23), which has "explicit political implications" (p. 144).

McCutcheon's first two chapters "examine the scholarship of Mircea Eliade to identify the discursive strategies that privilege ahistorical essences over contextually embedded practices" (p. 24). He then considers other sites of the discourse: the body of secondary literature around Eliade, popular introductory religion textbooks, and "The Category Religion in Recent Scholarship." Finally he argues that "the sui generis claim not only makes possible but simultaneously camouflages the ideological slippage from description to normative claim" (p. 158) and "concludes with a call for increased naturalistic theorizing in the study of religion."

The "sui generis discourse" assumes that "religion is . . . an autonomous experience of self-evidently numinous power" (p. 207). It is antireductionist and assumes that "certain aspects of human life are free from the taint of sociopolitical interaction" (p. 22). In this discourse "religion is . . . strictly personal, essential, unique, prior to, and ultimately distinct from, all other facets of human life and interaction" (p. 26) and "religious experiences are their own cause and belong to their own unique category" (p. 35). Thus it is "a perspective that privileges religious phenomena by removing them from the realm of theoretical and materialist analysis" (p. 124) and is "a political program based on privileged access to supposedly ahistorical values hidden in their data" (p. 70). "It is conservative, elite, romantic, hegemonic, regressive, ahistorical, and domesticating" (p. 73) and involves an "undefended preference for sympathetic and descriptive insiders' accounts" (p. 122). The sui generis discourse "understand[s] the scholar of religion as . . . in no way interested in sociopolitical theorizing" (p. 143). It is this "widespread injunction against theorizing" (p. 205) that McCutcheon wants to remedy.

A problem here is that "sui generis discourse" becomes a catch-all for everything McCutcheon dislikes in scholarship on religion. He confuses the issue by equating the discourse with too many extreme tendencies. Although his survey of the field is impressive, his conclusions are not well established. Given the "explicit political

implications” of the discourse and McCutcheon’s claim that “there are a vast number of . . . examples in the study of religion of how such protective strategies are deployed by dominant powers to ensure their continued influence over others” (p. 177), the reader expects decisive examples. McCutcheon describes historians’ using values and categories invented by Sikh elites “to discredit specific beliefs and rituals’ of other members of the Sikh community” (p. 132, quoting Harjot Oberoi, *Construction of Religious Boundaries*, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 32). He gives the example of the reaction to the politically motivated suicide of several Vietnamese Buddhists in 1963 in which “social and political contexts are of little relevance” (p. 172). He mentions sati, the practice of widow burning in Hindu India, and he cites Huston Smith’s explanation of Confucianism as “effectively manufacture[ing] a stereotyped native who is distinct from, and less than, the modern rational and individualistic Western human being” (p. 179). However, Oberoi points out a specific example of the abuse of insider judgments, not of the autonomy of religion. In the case of the Vietnamese monks, there is a fallacious progression from claims that religious data cannot be fully explained in terms of economic and political facts to a complete exclusion of such facts in the understanding of religion. Attempts to present sati as an exclusively religious act have failed to isolate it from the realm of the sociopolitical. His reading of Huston Smith is procrustean, because Smith portrays the Chinese as a people for whom “reason was replacing social convention and self-interest outdistancing the expectations of the group” six centuries before the Christian era (p. 178, referring to Smith, *The World’s Religions* [HarperCollins, 1991], 162–63). Thus the examples consistently beg the questions, Is the “sui generis discourse on religion” a coherent phenomenon? Does it necessarily contribute to oppression?

Eliade is McCutcheon’s main example of the “sui generis” scholar. However, recent work has questioned Eliade’s location in this discourse. There “is an attempt to show that Eliade is not a theologian but a humanist. . . . *Homo religiosus* . . . is . . . an existentially and historically situated being” (William Paden, review of *Reconstructing Eliade*, Bryan Rennie, SUNY Press, 1996, in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 9:3, p. 315). While the separate elements constituting his “sui generis discourse” are not negligible, McCutcheon’s argument does not clearly establish either its unity or its general status in the field.

The argument is flawed but has value. It is readily accessible and informative. It is also commendable that in “applying tools from literary critical studies, ideology critique, and the sociology of knowledge to the modern academic study of religion” (p. 74) McCutcheon introduces the work of contemporary critical theorists. Despite this timely introduction, a lack of critical rigor is manifest in three related areas:

1. McCutcheon holds naturalistic theorizing to be an unproblematic category. He seems quite unaware of the problematic status of “nature.” Even so, the fact that he has recognized (pp. 35ff., 189) the problematic and socially constructed nature of “history” should be enough to warn him of the difficulties of a “natural history.” He affirms that “there is no single, privileged narrative” (pp. 187ff.) but clearly wants “A Natural History of Religion” (pp. 201ff.) to be the privileged narrative in this field.

2. McCutcheon says that “not only theological and philosophical but political and social factors lie behind some scholars’ reluctance to explain religion as a product of human desires, actions, and associations” (p. 73). He considers that “the conclu-

sion that ‘ultimate reality is a non-material reality’” is a “theological assumption” (122f., quoting Ross Reat and Edmund Perry, *A World Theology*, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991, p. 1). Thus he does not distinguish between idealist philosophy and theology.

3. He rejects a priori the reality of ideal, nonhistorical entities. Considering Aristotle’s dictum that only real causes have real effects, and recognizing McCutcheon’s contention that the *sui generis* discourse has real effects, the reality of “manufactured” entities cannot be so simply denied. A valuable insight might be seen in what McCutcheon considers a pernicious effect: “the *sui generis* claim not only makes possible but simultaneously camouflages the ideological slippage from description to normative claim” (p. 158). Religious traditions permit the move from description to normative claim, from fact to value, from “is” to “ought,” by means of the social construction and reification of ideal entities. This is a part of the puzzle of the origin of values that should be carefully analyzed rather than simply rejected.

McCutcheon’s plea for an increase in theorizing that is testable, falsifiable, and naturalistic is admirable (despite the unacknowledged theoretical problems inherent in these very categories). However, to reject the works of so many earlier scholars because of the presence of the “*sui generis* discourse” in their thought is to neglect a source of theory. It is commendable that in any appeal for theorizing about religion there is a concomitant appeal for sensitivity to the social and political realities that are the empirical effects of culturally constructed traditions. It is all too easy to theorize about belief systems in a sociopolitical vacuum, but to inflate that failing into a conspiracy theory does little to advance his case. In fact, McCutcheon’s claim that naturalistic theorizing ought to be the basis of our understanding of religion—presumably because “nature” is the exhaustive and final revelation of what is really real—can be seen as his own attempt to make a normative claim based on the reification of an abstraction.

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*The Practice of Technology: Exploring Technology, Ecophilosophy, and Spiritual Disciplines for Vital Links.* By ALAN DRENGSON. Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1995. viii + 218 pages. \$59.95 (\$19.95 paper).

Alan Drengson is a philosophy professor at the University of Victoria (British Columbia), the author of three published books of poetry, an aikido expert, and a student of the ideas of E. F. Schumacher, Gary Snyder, and Wendell Berry. This introduction to the author, though incomplete, nevertheless is suggestive of the contents of *The Practice of Technology*. Drengson’s thought is philosophically deep and expressed with clarity; he presents a rationally compelling argument that manages to be poetic and inspirational at the same time.

Drengson’s point of departure is in his concern that we have an environmental crisis (pollution, depletion) at the heart of which “lie the technology practices of the West, with their associated technocratic worldview” (p. 2). Among the elements of this worldview and these practices are the quest for “power-over” control and a

division of human beings into parts and the world into fragments. Drenegson tries to steer us not against technology per se but rather toward a technology that is holistic, wise, and in harmony with the environment. Seeing technology in terms of practices, then re-visioning these practices within an ecosophic worldview, is Drenegson's aim. Critical to such a worldview is a rejection of anthropocentrism and an embrace of spiritual wisdom, narrative, and community.

Drenegson's argument proceeds in two parts. First, he gives a historical and philosophical overview of technology practices. *Technology* is defined as "the systematic organization of techniques and skills, so as to produce some product, by means of reorganizing a raw material or some other appropriate medium." A technology practice is an organized activity having four dimensions: (1) technical skill and knowledge, (2) organizational structure, (3) cultural purposes and values, and (4) resource use, raw materials, and the environment (pp. 30–31). Clearly, in such a definition, technology practices are not value neutral.

Drenegson boldly argues that "we are now in a transition leading to more mature forms of technology practice," which will be characterized as "appropriate-ecosophic practices" (pp. 51ff.) This transition is driven by "the twin threats of . . . atomic weapons . . . and the slower death of the biosphere and nature" (p. 69). We have the knowledge and skills to make the transition, but do we have the vision and determination to do so? Drenegson is hopeful.

In part two, Drenegson describes a vision of technology practice as an ecologically wise, spiritual discipline. Technological developments are limited by the structure and laws of nature, by human nature and social conditions—despite our modern hubris that recognizes no bounds. Unfortunately, we are educated in technological development without any holistic attention to spiritual or ethical matters. We learn calculative thought but not meditative thought.

Progress is today viewed quantitatively rather than qualitatively. "It is critical to enlarge our conception of *progress* by placing science and technology subordinate to harmony with nature and the meaning and purpose of life. We must emphasize mature, whole persons in community rather than self-centered consumers and competitors" (p. 145). It is within such an ecological philosophy that technological imagination and innovation will be positive forces.

Drenegson's strategy is focused on reforming our educational programs to include more holistic perspectives—so as to promote character and community and to relocate what is now a fragmented, specialized skill acquisition into a broader, integrated philosophical and spiritual formation. He seeks to reclaim the spiritual resources of the great religions and to rebuild our larger stories within which meaning and wisdom can be found.

Drenegson makes his case with grace and insight. His book would make great required reading for students (and faculty) in engineering, computer science, and other technology programs. An insistent voice in the background, however, keeps chanting "naive" and "utopian" in my ear! I would rather not believe this voice but fear that there is some truth in these words. Perhaps some grand—or gradual—catastrophe will one day drive our technology leaders to embrace Drenegson's ecosophical perspective. Perhaps there will be a growing movement among our universities to insist that our students engage with the human, spiritual, and ecological dimensions of their work. Perhaps some of our religious communities will explore and teach the implications of their faith for all of life and work. In the meantime, however, the demands of short-term-profit-oriented business and highly

specialized, all-absorbing technological study and work are likely to combine with our worship of autonomy and power as the ultimate moral values—and frustrate the transition to Drengron's era of appropriate-ecosophic technology.

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*God and Creation: An Ecumenical Symposium.* Edited by DAVID B. BURRELL and BERNARD MCGINN. Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1990. 328 pages. \$29.95.

Thirteen papers in this volume discuss aspects of the meaning of creation in the three Abrahamic-monotheistic traditions. They were presented at a second ecumenical symposium, in the fall of 1987, on God and Creation and are divided into public lectures and group-discussion papers. Each of the latter comes with a response that is, in some cases, more germane, insightful, and engaging to the topic than the papers themselves are.

The first three papers are public lectures that reflect on the appropriateness of the neoplatonic emanation schema for the formulation of belief in the creation of the world. Can that schema accommodate belief in a created universe? Representative philosophical scholars from each tradition show the extent of its appropriateness. Focusing on Genesis 1:1, Seymour Feldman sees incompatible interpretations of it by Gersonides, Albalag, and Abravanel as indication that the language of Scripture is sufficiently open to accommodate diverse readings, including that of a divine craftsman whose nature is to be productive eternally, to create. In Aquinas, David Burrell finds an Aristotelian distinction between two modes of knowing: theoretical and practical. Through that distinction Aquinas is able to affirm that God's knowledge of individuals is coextensive with his active power and, hence, that divine creation is more like a production than a purely intellectual emanation. This shift from the speculative to the practical could not have taken place, according to Burrell, without a discrimination between essence and existence, introduced by Ibn Sina. Fazlur Rahman's paper elucidates Ibn Sina in its argument that God's creative activity is purposive and expressive of God's generosity, which is eternal. But according to Rahman, it is the theory of contingency, which Ibn Sina introduces, that does justice to the dogma of a created world.

Next, a background paper by John Kenny introduces philosophical monotheism and precedes the nine remaining papers, each of which is specific to a religious tradition and its concern about God and the world. Its contention is that the Hellenic and Abrahamic traditions are inclusive and exclusive theism respectively. It argues, further, that although one is nondemiurgic and the other demiurgic the two are nevertheless related by their accommodation of classical metaphysics and their efforts to articulate philosophical monotheism.

For Judaism, Lenn Goodman correlates with the idea of creation three values that he considers part of the meaning of that idea: goodness associated with contingency, intelligibility with purposiveness, and newness with freedom. Although they tend to evidence creation, they in no way guarantee what Goodman would like—a creator worthy of worship. Tamar Rudevesky looks to the response by Maimonides

and Gersonides to three post-Aristotelian arguments that favor eternal creation to understand the issue of God's activity in time. Maimonides thinks the three share a mistaken conception of divine predicates. Gersonides, focusing on time, distinguishes two notions of "instant," duration and division, and applies the former sense of the instant of Creation to support scriptural witness. David Blumenthal asks whether God's creating the universe makes any difference in terms of concrete human action. He thinks it does with respect to nationhood, kingship-servanthood, and actualizing human good, and ties Creation interestingly to narrow socioideological concerns rather than to ontotheological ones.

A theology of disclosure is part of the Christian sense of Creation and helps Robert Sokolowski to see the being of other persons as God's gift and, thus, an end in themselves. This too is a theological-exposition base on dimensional differences with respect to interpreting appearances. Bernard McGinn asks whether Christian Platonists believe in Creation. He concludes, looking to Eckhart and Duns Scotus, that the God-world relation is distinctly different from other kinds, inasmuch as the more the divine is transcendent, the more it becomes immanent. Finally, Langdon Gilkey argues for including the idea of nonbeing in the consideration of both God and Creation to understand some of the fundamental puzzles of Christian theology—for example, How is God as being able to share in human weakness and suffering?

For Islam, Eric Ormsby presents how al-Ghazali appropriates the notion of contingency in a Sufi context to serve as a guarantor of the efficacy of divine agency in the world. Divine will is a "superadd" to divine nature; the world is one of many equal possibilities from a divine perspective; and contingency as createdness-in-time takes on the hue of an existential concept that reconciles action and knowledge. Al-Razi on knowing God as Creator occupies Jane McAuliffe. Her contention is that Al-Razi employs a structural analysis to tie together the divine command to worship and the notion of a creator God, to underscore that the summons to worship the One who creates is known through reason. Azim Nanji, staying with Creation and emanation, looks at Ismaili thought (al-Kirmani and al-Sijistani), which explains that the process of creation occurs at different levels—spiritual and material—and that the symbolic mode of expression is equally crucial in comprehending God's word and creation.

Thin on Muslim scholars speaking for their tradition, the volume implicitly raises a serious question about creation as a resource for reflections in the Islamic tradition: the theme does not seem to occupy contemporary thinkers in Islam as it does Jewish and Christian ones. Why is the constructive side missing? If this is not in reality the case among Muslim thinkers, neither the organizing of the symposium nor the edition of papers helps to show its contemporary relevance in the Islamic tradition. Altogether, though, the volume provides some insightful dimensions. One of them is clearly Ibn Sina's distinction between existence and essence. Relative to divine creation, the distinction is crucial not only for philosophical monotheism but also for doing justice to the religious consciousness that is specific to each Abrahamic tradition.

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