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BATAILLE, GEORGES. *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*. Translated by MARY DALWOOD. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986. 280 pp. \$10.95 (paper).

It is difficult to read Georges Bataille (1897–1962) apart from his role as a precursor to much of contemporary French thought. Jacques Derrida's most important early essays, as he himself has pointed out, "are situated *explicitly* in relation to Bataille, and also explicitly propose a reading of Bataille" (*Positions* [Chicago, 1981], p. 106), while Jürgen Habermas, on the other side of the fence, has recently interpreted the entire "French Path to Postmodernity" by tracing the influence of what he considers to be Bataille's ambitious but failed attempt to offer a radically anti-Hegelian critique of reason (see *Der philosophische Discurs der Moderne* [Frankfurt, 1985]).

The controversy revolves around a highly enigmatic character. During his lifetime, Bataille, while making a quiet living as an archivist at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, authored a series of (initially anonymous) pornographic novels and an eclectic but powerful output of essays on aspects of French anthropology (in C. Lévi-Strauss, R. Callois, M. Mauss), the psychological structure of fascism, the history of religions, and the philosophy of Hegel, especially as interpreted by A. Kojève in his famous lectures of the 1930s. His last major work, *L'erotisme* (Paris, 1957) (the shortened substantive of the title is neither explained nor utilized in the text) opens by examining the intimate tension that exists between, on the one hand, the taboos that typically shroud the extreme phenomena of birth and death, sexuality and mortality, reproduction and putrefaction, and, on the other hand, the forms of transgression that permit and often even prescribe the breaking of these taboos. It is precisely these latter states of excess, and the impure and heterogenous elements that are associated with them, that most interest Bataille and that account for his apparent eclecticism. For eroticism appears as much more than just a sexual category, capable as well of encompassing phenomena in religion (mystical ecstasy, sacrifice, festivals), literature (poetic exultation, linguistic aberrations), sociology (the marginalization of prostitutes and the insane), politics (war, fascism), psychology (delirium), and, finally, philosophy. "In essence, the domain of eroticism is the domain of violence, of violation" (p. 16).

Out of these many directions of Bataille's thought, two are worthy of emphasis here. The first concerns his interpretation of the sacred. In the more familiar works of M. Eliade, it is the *manifestation* of the sacred—its irruption into the terror of history and its repetition in myth, ritual, and symbol—that transforms chaos into cosmos, that founds the world and establishes its orienting center. For Bataille, on the contrary, the sacred is neither a paradigm to repeat nor a myth to live by but a heterogenous and violent power whose *exclusion* is necessary in order to guarantee the organized calmness of our daily existence. For Eliade, the sacred is archetypal and cosmicizing; for Bataille, it is erotic and chaotic.

These two visions of the sacred, in turn, can perhaps be seen as instances of two largely opposed modes of contemporary thought: Eliade's thought is hermeneutical, while Bataille's is, for lack of a better term, "deconstructive" and leads directly to the otherwise diverse work of Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze. Those interested in the "religious implications" of the latter would do well to examine Bataille's pioneering speculations. Bataille's

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version of the Nietzschean critique of reason lies in the observation that the excessive experience of states of transgression can never be reflected on or grasped except by acts perpetrated outside of thought: "Such an experience dislocates us and excludes calm reflection, its essence being to put us 'beside ourselves.' It is difficult to imagine the life of a philosopher continually or at least fairly often beside himself. . . . Philosophy thus finds itself in an impasse; without discipline it could accomplish nothing, and yet in that it cannot embrace the extremes of its subject—the extremes of the possible, as I have called them, the outermost reaches of human life—it is doomed to failure" (pp. 260, 259). This is what Bataille sees as the blind spot of Hegelianism and of philosophy in general: dialectic reason is unable to encompass these senseless moments of excess, sacrifice, and extravagance without sacrificing its own normative status, without surrendering the identity of the thinking subject. In this paradox lies either the genius of Bataille's thought (Derrida) or its decadent failure (Habermas).

Appended to the main text are several essays, including two influential pieces on the Marquis de Sade, whose immense writings pushed to its logical consequence the Enlightenment concept of an absolutely sovereign type of individuality. This translation, originally published in 1962, has long been unavailable, and we are indebted to Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights Books for reissuing it.

DANIEL W. SMITH, *Chicago, Illinois.*

SWINBURNE, RICHARD. *The Evolution of the Soul.* New York: Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1986. vi + 323 pp. \$45.00.

Richard Swinburne, who recently went to the Nolloth Chair of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion at Oxford, is well known through his major trilogy *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford, 1977), *The Existence of God* (Oxford, 1979), and *Faith and Reason* (Oxford, 1981) as an extremely high-powered philosopher working with a rather conservative Christian theology. His Gifford lectures, now published in this book in conjunction with the trilogy, show an impressively wide range of interests and competence. As in the trilogy, he is writing here in an area in which almost any statement is controversial. Probably not many readers will agree with everything that he says. But, nevertheless, all will be challenged by his formidable treatment of major disputed issues. I have space here only to refer, as a sample, to Swinburne's argument for the soul as a nonmaterial entity.

He rejects the mind/brain identity theory on the familiar ground that the properties of such mental states and events as sensations and beliefs, desires and thoughts, are manifestly different from the properties of the physical states and events in the brain with which they are said to be identical. Electrochemical cerebral events may cause, say, the color-sensation red but are not identical with it. Swinburne reaffirms this standard dualist assertion in the light of the intense discussions of the last twenty years by rebutting or absorbing the accounts of the identity of differently named or described entities offered by a number of contemporary writers.

As always tends to happen in prolonged philosophical debates, the issues involved in the mind-brain identity proposal have become ever more complex and subtle as the literature has multiplied. But the standing commonsense