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## Book Reviews

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Lex BAYER and John FIGDOR. *Atheist Mind, Humanist Heart*. Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014. 178 pp.

Three books about contemporary reflection on God have recently drawn the present reviewer's attention: Thomas J. Clark's *The Subject and the Question of God: A Postmodern Catholic Reflection*, Karen Armstrong's *The Case for God*, and the current volume under review. The most disappointing book of the three is Bayer and Figdor's *Atheist Mind, Humanist Heart*. While I understand the point they wish to make, their approach is often superficial and adolescent.

*Atheist Mind, Humanist Heart* attempts to answer two questions: "What should one believe after abandoning faith?" and "What are the positive principles of atheism?" The authors' solution to both is suggested by the book's subtitle: "Rewriting the Ten Commandments for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century".

What I had hoped to find in this book was a philosophical discussion about real, human experience, and the subjective construction of symbols of the real. And among those symbols 'God'.

Co-authors Lex Bayer and John Figdor met at Stanford University. Bayer is culturally Jewish. He spent his childhood in South Africa, and was formally educated in engineering and technology entrepreneurship. Figdor, a New York native, was raised in the United Church of Christ and studied at Harvard Divinity School. Currently he is the humanist chaplain serving the atheist, humanist, and agnostic communities at Stanford University. He speaks regularly around the United States on humanist topics.

Bayer and Figdor assert, correctly I would say, that one-third of young adults in the US under the age of thirty consider themselves nonreligious. They do indeed belong to a growing number of Americans, of all ages, who are not at home in any traditional religious institution. My first red flag about Bayer and Figdor, however, came with their equating nonreligious with atheist. Their book in fact is packed with biases and conclusions that seem to me not only peculiar, but often tortured, and occasionally ridiculous.

The authors do indeed arrive at their own set of 'non-commandments', and they encourage their readers to construct their own set of non-commandments. One can

consult the website [atheistmindhumanistheart.com](http://atheistmindhumanistheart.com) for further assistance. For the curious, here are the Bayer-Figdor non-commandments:

- i. The world is real, and our desire to understand the world is the basis for belief.
- ii. We can perceive the world only through our human senses.
- iii. We use rational thought and language as tools for understanding the world.
- iv. All truth is proportional to the evidence.
- v. There is no God.
- vi. We all strive to live a happy life. We pursue things that make us happy and avoid things that do not.
- vii. There is no universal moral truth. Our experiences and preferences shape our sense of how to behave.
- viii. We act morally when the happiness of others makes us happy.
- ix. We benefit from living in, and supporting, an ethical society.
- x. All our beliefs are subject to change in the face of new evidence, including these.

Their non-commandments can be an invitation to a deeper discussion about ethics and reality. Sadly, however, their book will not be very helpful in this regard.

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Bidyut CHAKRABARTY (ed.). *Non-Violence: Challenges and Prospects*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014. 413 pp.

Bidyut Chakrabarty teaches at the Department of Political Science of the University of Delhi. The point he and the other contributors to this book make is that non-violence is a powerful political influence and an effective means of articulating a distinctive voice of protest, whether it is led by Mahatma Gandhi in India, Nelson Mandela in South Africa, or any number of contemporary activists.

This anthology consists of three parts. The first deals with the theoretical articulation of the idea of non-violence, drawing from the writings of early apostles of non-violence: Leo Tolstoy, Henry David Thoreau, and Mahatma Gandhi. In their non-violent challenges against the perpetrators of violence, Gandhi as well as Martin Luther King, Jr. drew heavily from the thought of both Tolstoy and Thoreau.

Part two focuses on non-violence in religious texts; but the concern of the authors is to understand the politics of non-violence as the outcome of strategic calculations that can be equated with the wrestling tactic of ‘jiu-jitsu’, in which, as contributor Gene Sharp stresses, a sense of timing is of key importance in political mobilization. “To be effective, the nonviolent resisters must apply only their own weapons system,” writes Sharp. And he continues, “These ‘weapons’ or specific methods of opposition and pressure are capable of changing selected social, economic or political relationships of power [...] with primary attention devoted to the potential impact of noncooperation” (149). In this section also, editor Chakrabarty reviews the thought and tactics of Gandhi;

but here his comments, in view of what was earlier presented by and about Gandhi, appear slightly redundant.

The third part of the book focuses, as case studies, on various non-violent experiments and experiences in India and Iran. Eight articles examine the processes associated with the articulation of non-violent movements against the state in not so favourable circumstances. In the case of Iran, how the country is perceived by outside powers as well as how it defines its own role in the region is a significant variable for revolutions based on the principle of civil disobedience. Why Iran's non-violent movement has not succeeded in toppling the Iranian regime is multifaceted; and despite its use of historic and proven civil disobedience techniques, the Green Movement has had to confront a formidable and ruthless enemy in the political environment. As Bernd Kaussler points out in his concluding article, the various stakeholders of Iranian non-violent resistance (labour syndicates, trade union members, clerical dissidents, intellectuals, human rights activists, reformist politicians, and the country's youth) found themselves suffering detention and punishment in the streets, as the leaders of the opposition failed to formulate a platform for radical political change. An important contemporary case study!

In this quite helpful collection of thoughts about non-violence, I would have liked to see at least one contribution dealing with today's conversation on violence in the context of current developments in the Middle East. Nevertheless, this scholarly collection does succeed in its aim of familiarizing the reader with the evolution and nature of nonviolence as an ideology and as a political strategy. A book worthy of its existence.

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Guy FLETCHER and Michael RIDGE (eds.). *Having It Both Ways: Hybrid Theories and Modern Metaethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 302 pp.

*Having It Both Ways* is a collection of papers on hybrid theories of normative thought and language. As the editors Guy Fletcher and Michael Ridge explain in their introduction, hybrid theories either state that normative claims *express* both belief-like and desire-like mental states or that normative judgments are *constituted by* both belief-like and desire-like components, where the 'or' is an inclusive or (ix). So hybrid theories combine pure cognitivism and pure noncognitivism at the level of *moral semantics*, claiming that normative language serves both to describe properties and to express desire-like attitudes. Or hybrid theories combine pure cognitivism and pure noncognitivism at the level of *moral psychology*, claiming that moral judgments are mental state types with belief-like and desire-like parts.

Fletcher and Ridge write that "[the] new millennium has seen a blossoming of interest in hybrid theories in this sense" (ix). This is true, with for instance David Copp's "Realist Expressivism: A Neglected Option for Moral Realism," as one of the seminal articles in this area of philosophy (*Social Philosophy and Policy* 18 [2001]: 1-43). But at least since R.M. Hare's 1952 *The Language of Morals*, we have had a view on the table according

to which ethical terms have both descriptive and evaluative meaning. A descriptive theory of meaning explains the meaning of a term by reference to the description that competent speakers associate with that term. An evaluative theory of meaning explains the meaning of terms by reference to the speech act of, at least in Hare's case, *prescribing*. According to an evaluative theory of meaning, a term like 'good' has meaning in virtue of the fact that we use it to commend. Hare thought that in calling Sophie 'good', we are not *just* commending her, we are also describing what it is in virtue of which she is good, for instance the fact that she possesses the properties of being kind and generous. This looks like a hybrid theory at the level of moral semantics.

If we have had Hare for so long, then why has the blossoming of interest in hybridism only coincided with the turn of the millennium? We can hypothesize that although Hare's *prescriptivism* formed an important part of the philosophy curriculum during his career, Hare has neither persuaded others – “an occasional ‘we prescriptivists’ was always uncertain of reference” – nor left any disciples (see Anthony Price. “Richard Mervyn Hare.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). Plus those dissatisfied with cognitivist theories turned quasi-realist, embracing the philosophical project of earning the right to move from a purely noncognitive semantics to speak of normative discourse in a realist manner.

The appeal of contemporary hybridism is that it claims to solve the Frege-Geach problem that pure noncognitivists, including the quasi-realists, cannot seem to solve, while at the same time steering clear of pure cognitivism and its problem with normative motivation.

Take moral discourse as an example of normative discourse. Cognitivists have a problem with moral motivation, at least if we accept a broadly Humean view in the philosophy of mind according to which desires motivate and beliefs do not motivate. For then the belief-like states that normative claims express or that normative judgments are constituted by do not motivate and the source of moral motivation must lie outside of the moral judgment itself, for instance in a standing desire to be moral. This motivational externalism is problematic for at least two reasons. First, it entails that people can do everything right when they make a moral judgment (perhaps they are appropriately sensitive to all the morally relevant aspects of the situation by correctly weighing up their different normative weights in order to reach the right all-things-considered moral judgment) and yet fail to be motivated even a little to act on this judgment. This seems strange. Second, given *ought-implies-can*, cognitivism can be argued to entail, implausibly, that we can exempt those with a limited or absent desire to be moral from their duties. This also seems strange, especially if such people cannot rationally move from this state in which they lack a desire to be moral to a state in which they do have that desire (Nick Zangwill. “Externalist Moral Motivation.” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 40/2 [2003]: 143-154).

Noncognitivists have trouble explaining the logical validity of arguments that contain embedded moral claims such as ‘if stealing is wrong, then it is wrong to get your little brother to steal’, where the moral claim ‘stealing is wrong’ is embedded in the larger if-then construction (the objection traces to Peter Geach's “Ascriptivism.” *Philosophical*

Review 69 [1960]: 221-225). The problem is that moral claims cannot be said to express desire-like states when embedded in non-assertoric contexts (that results in a nonsensical sentence), so arguments that seem valid, for instance because they apply *modus ponens*, in fact equivocate.

A hybrid cognitivist-noncognitive theory, because it combines elements of both cognitivism and noncognitivism, seems to provide the solution. One and the same theory can explain the motivational power of moral judgments or claims (by appeal to their desire-like features) *and* the ability of moral judgments or claims to feature in deductively valid arguments without equivocating (by appeal to their belief-like features).

Can we really have it both ways? The 12 papers in *Having It Both Ways* are all devoted to this question. The first seven papers, conveniently grouped under “Part One: Optimism about Hybrid Theories” argue that we should answer in the affirmative. The final five papers in “Part Two: Pessimism about Hybrid Theories” argue for a negative answer. The optimists include Mike Ridge, Daniel Boisvert, David Copp, and Stephen Finlay. Among the pessimists we find Stephen Barker, Laura and Francois Schroeter, and Mark Schroeder.

*The Optimists.* Eriksson’s contribution entitled “Hybrid Expressivism: *How to Think about Meaning*,” though the final paper in the optimist camp, takes us back to Hare. Eriksson starts from Hare’s prescriptivism and aims to show that it can solve the Frege-Geach problem. So we get optimism: Eriksson has the prescriptivism of Hare, so moral motivation seems unproblematic, *and* given the view’s descriptivist elements he can secure the result that we do not commit the fallacy of ambiguity in logically valid arguments with moral content.

However, though Eriksson states that “[...] given that a speaker who asserts that donating to charity is right is both commending and describing, it seems plausible to think both a belief and a desire are expressed,” we can question whether this *really is* plausible (151). For the mere fact that we have an expression relation does not guarantee motivation. In 1935 A. J. Ayer, an emotivist, talked about moral judgments as ‘ejaculations’ of emotions, which invites a causal interpretation of the expression relation according to which moral judgments express the mental states that those who make moral judgments are in (*Language, Truth and Logic*. New York: Dover, 103). And a causal interpretation of the expression relation guarantees motivation if utterers of moral judgments are in a motivational state, but as we learn from Boisvert’s contribution, this account will also be implausibly relativistic (41). Non-causal accounts of the expression relation sever the all-too-intimate relation between whatever state we may be in when we make moral judgments and what states our judgments express, thereby avoiding relativism. But the price they pay is the loss of precisely this necessary relation between motivation and (the act of making) a moral judgment.

We must note in this regard a potentially dialectically forceful difference between the relation of *s-expression*, which takes sentences and propositions as its relata, and that of *a-expression*, which takes acts of making a moral judgment and mental states as its relata. I found this idea most clearly discussed in the contribution of Bar-On, Chrisman, and Sias, and the terminology of s- and a-expression is theirs (230). Yet though their

defence of s-expression has the virtue of theoretical neutrality in moral semantics, hybrid theorists of normative judgment are unlikely to embrace it because it does not allow them to continue to claim that cognitive and noncognitive elements “constitute two parts of the meaning of ethical sentences” (243). For this reason, Bar-On *et al.* prefer to call their view ‘neo-expressivism’ rather than hybridism (243).

Turn to Eriksson’s solution to the Frege-Geach problem. The first step is to focus on the descriptive meaning of the moral term in question, which, recall, for Hare captures what it is in virtue of which an object of moral assessment deserves to be called, e.g. wrong. We then note that this part of the term’s meaning does not change when we move from non-embedded to embedded contexts. Thus we can have logical validity without equivocation.

One of Eriksson’s challenges, as he himself notes, is to explain why those who accept the premises of an argument that takes *modus ponens* are committed to accepting not just the descriptive content of the conclusion but also the motivationally efficacious attitude that the conclusion must express just as well as the argument’s first premise (152). He appeals to the supervenience of the evaluative on the nonevaluative; reaching and then exploiting the thesis that accepting the first premise of *modus ponens* “commits the judger to disapproving of other acts that are judged to [merit the same ethical assessment]” (153). Eriksson’s contribution aims to meet this and other challenges, partly building on his earlier paper “Homage to Hare: Ecumenism and the Frege-Geach Problem” (*Ethics* 120 [2009]: 8-35). As I see things, one important contribution to the debate that Eriksson makes in *Having It Both Ways* is that he connects questions about hybridism to foundational issues in our thinking about meaning (159-169). In fact most of the chapters in this volume do this.

*The Pessimists.* One very interesting paper, I find, is Schroeter and Schroeter’s “Why Go Hybrid? A Cognitivist Alternative to Hybrid Theories of Normative Judgment.” It aims to “explain the distinctive action-guiding role of [...] normative judgments” with a new cognitivist account of normative judgment according to which “[...] the semantic function of normative predicates is just to attribute a property” (248). What’s new about the account is its dependency on a novel model of concepts: the binding model (253). The claim is that although being motivated to act in accordance with one’s normative judgments is not a strict necessary condition for conceptual competence, motivation is not semantically irrelevant and “[...] the relation between normative judgment and motivation is not purely external and contingent” (269). So although the paper does not say much about why a hybrid theory is unlikely to work, it does argue that we don’t have to hybridise cognitivism and noncognitivism to explain normative motivation.

Part of what justifies Schroeter and Schroeter’s claim that cognitivism can account for internalist intuitions about motivation is their rejection of strict motivational internalism (SMI): “A subject does not count as competent with our shared normative concepts unless she or he is appropriately motivated to act in accordance with her or his normative judgments” (260). (‘Shared’ because the binding account specifically concerns concepts that do not just figure in private languages, if these exist to begin with). We reject SMI not just because it violates the commonsensical wisdom that people can be

conceptually competent and yet temporarily unable to muster the motivation to act in accordance with their positive atomic judgments that contain normative concepts. We also reject SMI for a theoretical reason grounded in the role concepts play in grounding stability of topic in thought and talk. We need to ensure that most of us are talking about the same thing under the heading of various normative concepts: with Allan Gibbard we want normative concepts to allow us to “put our heads together” in thinking how to live (*Thinking How to Live*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 260). But we also do not want to impose preconditions for conceptual competence that are so strict that too many of us are *ipso facto* excluded from rational debate about, say, morality. This includes the sceptics, as we may want to learn from them, and we certainly want to keep open the option that they learn from us (261). For a different defence of forms internalism that are not implausibly strong, see Ryan Hay’s contribution “Attitudinal Requirements for Moral Thought and Language: Noncognitive Type-Generality”.

At least two dialectical points are worth bearing in mind here. First, both the result that we don’t have to explain the very strong relation between the act of judging morally and motivation that SMI postulates, but something weaker, and also the result that we can explain this relation with a cognitivist theory, depend on purchase we get from the binding theory of concepts. And although I find that this theory has convincing elements, we have to wait for further research to gain more confidence in it. Second, as Schroeter and Schroeter note, according to their account the link between normative judgment and motivation is explained at the level of thought, not at the level of language. But this precisely goes against one of the core elements of the research programme of many hybridists, *viz.* to explain moral motivation at the semantic level. Copp makes use of a comparison between moral predicates and pejoratives (see his contribution “Can a Hybrid Theory Have It Both Ways? Moral Thought, Open Questions, and Moral Motivation”). Boisvert does this for moral predicates and slur terms (see his chapter “Expressivism, Nondeclaratives, and Success-Conditional Semantics”).

This is a good book. Its papers may not all be immediately accessible to undergraduate students or the generally interested reader, and the absence of a uniform terminology (different writers use the same terms differently, or use different terms for the same thing) further complicates matters. But what is most important is that this book contains papers of very high quality about an exciting topic in metaethics and metanormativity more generally. There is a lot to be learned from a detailed study of the possibility and plausibility of hybrid theories of normative thought and language. It is hoped that the publication of *Having It Both Ways* triggers further research in this area.

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Helen FROWE. *Defensive Killing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 227 pp.

Since the publication of Michael Walzer’s seminal book on just and unjust wars, but also due to the growing implication of European states in wars, the question of war has given



rise to an exceptionally large number of books and articles in the last two decades. If some of these publications tackle the question of the *ius ad bellum*, others have as their topic the *ius in bello*. Helen Frowe's latest book belongs to the latter category and aims at giving a comprehensive account of legitimate defensive killing. With authors like Jeff Mc Mahan, Noam Zohar and Cécile Fabre, Helen Frowe, who works at the University of Stockholm, is one of the leading contemporary theorists of just war questions. Note that in a former issue of *Ethical Perspectives* (22/2, 2015), I already reviewed a collection of articles on just war that Helen Frowe co-edited with Gerald Lang.

Frowe's account is comprehensive in the sense that it tries to show that defensive killing in war situations does not obey rules that are fundamentally different from the rules governing defence-killing in non-war situations. Hence also the structure of the book. In the first part, Frowe develops a general theory of legitimate defensive killing, and in the second part of the book, the conclusions of the account are applied to war. Frowe's account purports to be non-consequentialist and to take account of a variety of principles. In what follows, I do not intend to present a detailed discussion of all the arguments developed in this rich and stimulating book, but only to point out what seem to me the most important theses of the author. As Frowe remarks herself at the very end of her book: "Many people will be uncomfortable with the conclusions of this book" (213). In fact, many people will, like myself, feel uncomfortable with, for example, the conclusion, explicitly drawn by the author, that Red Cross personnel helping injured soldiers may be legitimate targets for attack. In what follows, I will try to show how Frowe reaches conclusions like this. But I will also show that while Red Cross personnel, according to Frowe's account, may legitimately be targeted *in principle*, there are contingent reasons that make it difficult to target them without provoking unjustified collateral harm.

One of Frowe's basic premises concerns the status of the obstructor, i.e. of someone who happens to be in your way when you try to achieve a goal. This obstructor should not be seen as a mere bystander, but as a threat (22). If s/he were a mere bystander, it would be illegitimate to kill him or her, even if his or her killing were to save your life. Bystanders or onlookers are not involved in the situation – and you are not allowed to involve them by exploiting them as a shield. If mere bystanders are not a threat, obstructors are at least an indirect threat, as they reduce the possibilities the victim has to escape from some danger. In Frowe's view, threats, whether direct or indirect, whether voluntary or involuntary, may be legitimate targets, i.e. may be legitimately killed if killing them is the only way to avert some serious injury to oneself.

The basic and general result of Part 1 of the book is stated in the summary of chapter 3. According to Frowe, a person who "[...] intentionally fails to avail herself of a reasonable opportunity to avoid posing an unjust threat" (86) may be killed, provided the avoidance in question is not too costly to the person. An example here is the pedestrian on the bridge. Suppose you are fleeing from someone who wants to murder you and the only route of escape is a bridge over a river: On the bridge, there is a pedestrian who reasonably believes that there are dangerous crocodiles in the river. The only way for you to save your life is to throw the pedestrian into the river. May you kill the



pedestrian? According to Frowe, the pedestrian is not liable to defensive killing, as he or she is not intentionally failing to avail him or herself of a reasonable opportunity to avoid posing a threat (85).

Scenarios like these are manifold in Frowe's book. At its very beginning, the author notices that using invented examples is a good way to test intuitions and principles (4). These test cases give us a first and intuitive grasp of what is permitted and what is forbidden, and theorizing will come later, the aim of the latter being to find principles that will systematize our intuitions.

The problem with the invented examples is that it is difficult to set them out in such a way that they contain all the relevant information. Let us come back to the case of the pedestrian. Suppose that the pedestrian has good reasons to believe that there are crocodiles in the river, but that you, who are running for your life, know perfectly well that the river is crocodile-free. Thus, there is an epistemic asymmetry between you and the pedestrian. From his or her point of view, it is an unreasonable cost to jump into the river. From your point of view, this is not the case. An omniscient observer, as for example the person who has set up the scenario, knows who is right and who is wrong, but the involved persons do not – or they do not agree on the question because of the informational asymmetry (and we suppose that they do not have time to discuss the matter between themselves). This opens the possibility for a situation in which both are subjectively right, though only one is objectively right. From a subjective perspective, the pedestrian may think that he or she may legitimately kill me if I try to throw him or her into the river, as I reasonably think that I am fighting for my life – I have a reasonable belief that not throwing him or her into the river will lead to me being killed by my pursuer. And from an equally subjective perspective, I may legitimately kill pedestrian if he or she fights for his or her life and hinders me from fleeing. Such a situation corresponds to a position often found in the context of early modern just war theories: a war subjectively just on both sides. And this leaves open the possibility for an excuse.

In the second part of her book, Helen Frowe applies the general results of the first part to the case of war. And here, the main focus is on non-combatant liability (chapter 6) and non-combatant immunity (chapter 7). Non-combatants are liable to defensive killing if they are engaged in an unjust war and if they contribute to the war effort. By their contribution, they obstruct the way to victory – so to speak – for those fighting for a just cause. They thus fall under the category of the obstructor who, if certain conditions are fulfilled, may be legitimately targeted. Such non-combatants include those persons providing medical help to combatants. As a matter of principle, medical personnel cannot claim immunity if they help soldiers fighting for an unjust cause. Chapter 7 relativizes not so much the principle as such, but its application in the concrete world. Frowe mentions the “[...] combined difficulties of identifying liable non-combatants and attacking them without causing collateral harm,” saying that this “provides non-combatants with fairly widespread immunity from attack” (197). The difficulty does not only seem to be an epistemic one, i.e. it is not merely the case that we have a clear concept of who is to count as a liable non-combatant and that the problem consists in determining whether person X fulfils all the conditions. I think that

it is the concept itself that is problematic. Thus, are parents who are looking after their 15 year old child liable non-combatants? They know for sure that the child will join the armed forces in what they consider to be an unjust war. Yet they continue to look after the child. Would their duty not be to neglect the child and let him or her die – supposing that he or she needs his or her parents to survive to the age of 18, when he or she will be accepted into the army?

To conclude: Frowe’s book is a thorough, well-argued and original analysis of a vexing problem. The book’s merit is to try to give a unified account of justified defensive killing. The conditions for justified defensive killing are the same, whether in peace or in war. Frowe convincingly lays out her position, and even if, as she says herself, one may feel uncomfortable about her conclusions, this feeling should be taken as an opportunity to reconsider our own intuitions and pre-reflective evidences. The book is to be recommended to anyone interested in just war theory and who is not allergic to the kind of thought experiments that have populated applied moral philosophy since a now well-known trolley started to run amuck.

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Marion HOURDEQUIN. *Environmental Ethics: From Theory to Practice*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015. 256 pp.

Marion Hourdequin’s introductory textbook *Environmental Ethics: From Theory to Practice* offers a broad overview of environmental ethics. Consonant with its title, the first half focuses on various ethical approaches and the second on implementation and action. I will begin with a few thoughts on a dominant theme of the book before discussing the chapters in more detail.

The great strength of the text is the variety of ethical approaches on offer. Particularly welcome are environmental applications of Chinese philosophy and an extended discussion on feminist ethics. But even more marginal suggestions, such as bioregionalism and artistic engagement with the environment, get almost as much space as the most influential ethical systems. I found this equanimity refreshing, levelling the playing field for students new to environmental ethics to quickly develop a sense of different approaches. I also found the analysis of three prominent ethical systems (utilitarianism, virtue ethics, and Kantianism) to be very fair-minded.

This fair-mindedness may be a consequence of Houdequin’s favoured theory, ‘relational ethics’, which is extremely ecumenical and holds that we should attempt to “consider all of the relationships” (214). The relevance to environmental ethics is that we can expand the scope of ‘all’ beyond human beings to sentient species and beyond sentient species to plants and perhaps even to non-living environmental entities.

According to relational ethics, we consider ourselves as embedded within our relationships, relationships that inform or determine how we ought to make ethical decisions. However, after discussing her view (211-214), she concludes from a discussion of

Zhuangzi imagining himself to be a butterfly that “we ought not to take our own perspective too seriously” (216). (She endorses similar types of perspective-taking in discussions of Aldo Leopold [78] and Arne Naess [79-80].) Taken literally, this stands in strong tension with the view that it is *our* relationships that matter (which are naturally a function of *our* perspective). Her point, however, is meant to be that we need to be able to stand apart from our perspective – where ‘our’ could be individually or culturally or historically situated. This is a very natural suggestion to make, but I suspect it may often not be of much help – especially in the context of environmental ethics.

If we take the relational view, she claims we could, for instance, take the perspective of the butterfly. I believe she would also endorse taking perspectives of other non-human animals, and perhaps even non-living entities, such as ecosystems. I suppose Houdequin thinks that adopting the butterfly’s perspective will allow us to see how our actions affect it. However, I do not think that taking such a perspective helps us to discover our impacts. It would help the butterfly more for me to scientifically compare the impacts of different pesticides, for instance, than to picture life floating on the breeze. In other words, it will require empirical knowledge of the world to be able to determine what effects our actions will have, especially in the context of the environment. Introspection or projection may not be the best guide to our effects on non-human beings. So, while I welcome her emphasis on more relationships, I am less sure of how we are meant to act in light of these relationships.

I now turn to the structure of the text. The first chapter emphasizes that scientific practices require value judgments. While this may not be contentious among philosophers (or scientists!), it is worth stressing in an introductory text. She suggests, for instance, that economic cost-benefit analyses assume that “If the economic costs of taking a particular action exceed its economic benefits, one ought not take that action” (9). She sensibly notes that certain values may be more opaque because they are more commonly shared, but that a better understanding can be developed through the consideration of alternatives. At the end of the chapter, Houdequin briefly introduces metaethics, tentatively suggesting that universalist moral realism is encouraging for environmentalism because “[...] a metaethical view that allows for some distance between what people believe to be right and what actually is right seems to make room for the possibility of moral progress” (23). It was surprising to find a discussion of metaethics in a book of applied ethics, especially as this brief discussion is too sketchy to make any substantive points. First, taking a metaethical position does not seem necessary for the other positions in the book. Second, it is unclear why she needs to conjoin universalism with moral realism. This risks confusing introductory students since the relativism/universalism and irrealism/realism debates are often viewed as orthogonal.

The second chapter I found the strongest. Houdequin weighs some of the strengths and weaknesses of three prominent ethical systems: utilitarianism, Kantianism and virtue ethics with particular focus on their applicability to, and concern with, environmental ethics. She acknowledges the historical respect that utilitarians have offered for other animals as well as the intuitive pull that Kantianism has in making certain types of action morally impermissible. She notes that Kantianism has historically been less amenable to

environmental ethics, since it emphasizes human rationality. This is true, although Christine Korsgaard has recently argued (e.g. in the 2014 Uehiro Lectures) that animals are not of lower moral standing simply because they lack rationality. In terms of virtue ethics, Houdequin suggests that modern environmentalists can expand virtue ethics to include gratitude and simplicity, and that virtue ethics has helpfully emphasized moral education and development.

In the third chapter, Houdequin begins her defence of her own view by considering arguments that these three ethical systems are anthropocentric. I especially appreciated her inclusion of Goodpastor's argument that hedonistic utility is not of fundamental moral import since sentience and hedonic states may be merely evolutionarily advantageous traits (68). The purpose of this chapter is to increase the range of valuable objects (e.g. ecosystems) via relational theories (including Chinese philosophers). However, some points – e.g. that ecosystems 'produce' value, so we should think of them as *having* value (74) – are less convincing. It anthropomorphizes ecosystems to claim that they 'produce' or 'foster'; it may be equally plausible to say instead that they form the (potentially necessary) background conditions for objects or animals that are themselves valuable.

The fourth chapter closes the theoretical first half of the book. An extended and interesting discussion of ecofeminism emphasizes (i) feminist concerns with dualism; (ii) their impact on our thinking about the environment; and (iii) to what extent feminists must subvert gender binaries in addition to or before tackling environmental considerations. The second half of the chapter discusses intragenerational and intergenerational justice.

The fifth chapter begins the second half of the book on applications. Fittingly, the chapter includes concrete examples of environmental schemes: 'new urbanism' tries to form less sprawling and more liveable cities, and agricultural schemes bring seasonal or sustainable produce to members – Houdequin also includes a helpful reminder that local does not equal sustainable (126). A particularly interesting suggestion from Peter Kahn is that we get inured to environmental damage because it happens over generations, each accepting their initial state as normal (129). The rest comprises a discussion of sustainability with an emphasis on the under-determination of how and when sustainability should apply.

The sixth chapter discusses climate change. It introduces the debate over discounting, several of the important reasons why climate change is a wicked problem, the most relevant issues of justice, and the moral challenges of geoengineering. The chapter does an excellent job in selecting the most relevant philosophical questions, but suffers slightly when discussing discounting (although it is far from alone). An important point it misses is the distinction between pure utility discount rates and consumption discount rates. For instance, discounting the value of experiences or years of life (pure utility discounting) is contentious, both in philosophy and in economics; however, discounting consumption in a growing economy may be thought of as a straightforward way of incorporating the opportunity cost of capital.

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The seventh chapter examines restoration and rewilding. A variety of views on restoration are considered, from Robert Elliot's claim that it 'fakes' nature to Eric Katz' claim that it is another way of controlling nature. Even if one wishes to restore in a historical manner, it is still unobvious how to determine the appropriate state to 'return' it to – or even if it should be a state, rather than a set of system dynamics. An interesting discussion of ecological 'historic range of variability' emphasizes these dynamics, such as forest fires that regularly clear out dead biomass (172-173).

In the final chapter, Houdequin discusses two ways of engaging with our values before turning to a short defence of her own view. The first way is grounded in the pragmatic tradition, which is antitheoretical and practice-driven. The focus here is to take practices and discourses seriously as initial data and then work on or within them to change (198). The second way is to communicate via literature and art.

I hope the impressive variety of views touched on in this relatively slender volume is clear, although I have not been able to explore all of the topics covered. While I would have appreciated more specific explications of her own view, Houdequin's book serves as a solid and broad introductory textbook to environmental ethics at an intermediate or senior undergraduate level.

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Angela TARABORRELLI. *Contemporary Cosmopolitanism*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015.  
142 pp.

*Contemporary Cosmopolitanism* is part of a series of books in Political Philosophy and offers a closer examination of the reappraised concept 'cosmopolitanism'. Taraborrelli, professor in Philosophy at Sapienza, University of Rome, starts her book with a brief reflection on cosmopolitanism's roots and history. Her outset is a cosmopolitanism of Kantian origin in its ethical-moral version and its political-legal version. In general her book reflects the importance and the complexities of cosmopolitanism in relation to social and political justice at the global level.

The author recognizes that there are many different cosmopolitanisms. To resolve this methodological problem she justifies her selection for this book by stating that all "[...] share a common ethical orientation that is characterized by three elements: individualism, universality, and generality" (xiv).

Taraborrelli distinguishes three main forms of contemporary cosmopolitanism: moral, political-legal and cultural. Accordingly, the book is divided into three main parts, each offering a compact overview of its main representatives in dialogue with each other. Every section starts with a short introduction by the author and ends with some objections. In the first part, the author explores the possibility of moral cosmopolitanism through the work of Charles Beitz, Thomas Pogge and Martha Nussbaum, among others. How can we establish social justice and equality in a global context and what does this

imply on a national and transnational level? The second part questions what is needed for the creation of a *cosmopolis*, or a global common structure, on a political-legal basis. This section makes reference to authors like Mary Kaldor, David Held, Daniele Archibugi, Seyla Benhabib and Boaventura de Sousa Santos. The third part entitled “Cultural Cosmopolitanism” is rather compact in comparison to parts one and two. However, again Taraborrelli discusses a wide range of authors, among them Anthony Kwame Appiah and Homi Bhabha. This part introduces a more dynamic and global approach of the individual (identity) and takes into account a cultural perspective, for example, and the idea of the ‘self’. Special reference is made to the book *Cosmopolitanism* (Carol A. Breckenridge *et al.* [eds.], Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002) as opening up the discussion on new alternative theorizations of cosmopolitanism, such as Walter Mignolo’s ‘critical cosmopolitanism’.

Thus Taraborrelli interweaves in her book the many different debates about cosmopolitanism that reflect contemporary society. By doing so she offers a number of definitions, a broad range of authors, and a very clear and sound overview of various perspectives. More importantly, she shows the relevance of this concept for ongoing discussion about topics such as human rights, international relations, democracy, globalization processes, the State, individualism, multiculturalism, and especially the idea of ‘belonging to human kind as a whole’. *Contemporary Cosmopolitanism* is a very concise book, but it works as an introduction or a basis, and stimulates the reader to read more about this topic.

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Lisa TESSMAN. *Moral Failure: On the Impossible Demands of Morality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 281 pp.

Lisa Tessman is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Binghamton University in New York State. This reviewer finds her latest book on moral failure a logical development from her 2005 book *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (Oxford University Press), where she asks what traits ought to count as virtues when the connection between a virtue and its bearer’s flourishing may be ruptured under conditions of oppression.

In *Moral Failure*, Tessman asks what happens when ‘I must’ collides with the realization ‘I can’t’. Bringing together philosophical and empirical work in moral psychology, she examines moral requirements that are non-negotiable and that contravene the principle that ‘ought implies can’. In some cases, two non-negotiables conflict in a dilemma. One of them becomes impossible to satisfy yet remains morally binding. Here Tessman draws examples from the life experiences of Nazi concentration camp survivors. In a dilemma situation like ‘Sophie’s Choice’, where a mother must choose whether her son or daughter is to die, all options are unthinkable – choosing the son, choosing the

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daughter, or allowing both to be sent to their death. Moral failure is inevitable. Her perspective is that morality is fundamentally tragic.

After offering conceptual and empirical explanations of the experiences of impossible moral requirements and the ensuing failures to fulfil them, the book considers what to make of such experiences and, in particular, what role such experiences have in the construction of value and of moral authority. Conforming to the constructivist account that *Moral Failure* proposes, some moral requirements can be considered authoritative even when impossible to fulfil. The book points out a tendency to not acknowledge the difficulties that impossible moral requirements and unavoidable moral failures create in moral life, and traces this tendency through several different authors, from scholarship on Holocaust testimony to discussions about ideal and non-ideal theory, from theories of supererogation to debates about moral demandingness, and to feminist care ethics.

By the end of the book, I was not convinced by Tessman's arguments that moral life is filled with inexhaustible, impossible moral requirements. The book is also an interesting combination of rationality and (if I may say it) irrationality. On the one hand it is faithful to rational reflection about the real experiences of real agents and is attentive to empirical social science. On the other hand it embraces 'sacred' values that are not negotiable and are beyond rational examination.

*Moral Failure* articulates a view that is both extremely demanding and yet not demanding at all. Demanding because even the impossible can be required, and yet not demanding because impossible actions, by definition, can never be realized. One really does not have to do them, only feel bad about not doing them.

Moral failure is indeed all around us. If it is not the failure to live up to impossible requirements, then at least it is the failure to live up to the possible ones.

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Allen THOMPSON and Jeremy BENDIK-KEYMER (eds). *Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change: Human Virtues of the Future*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012. 344 pp.

Science has alerted us to the impact of humankind on the planet, each other, and all life. This dramatically confronts us with questions about who we are, our relations to nature, and what we are willing to sacrifice for various possible futures. We should confront this as a fundamental challenge to our values and not treat it as if it were simply another technical problem to be managed (198).

How might we *flourish* in a new global climate? This question is the core question in *Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change: Human Virtues of the Future*. The question itself is



loaded in two ways. Firstly, it is anthropocentric: the ‘we’ presumably refers to (future) human beings? Secondly, the subtitle of the book makes it clear that virtue ethics is chosen as the normative ethical framework: which virtues can stimulate human flourishing when there is a different global climate? Eighteen authors present their views on this topic. The authors argue that technological solutions to the climate crisis are not sufficient and that there is a need for a fundamental change in the human-nature relationship. The first part of the book is aptly called: “Adapting Humanity”. However, the main focus of this part is on nature restoration. It is not clear why nature restoration should be the main focus, because there are many ways to adapt to climate change, among them the concept of ‘sustainable cities’. The authors agree that nature should be restored as much as possible. One point of debate is: To what should ecosystems be restored? Should there be historical fidelity? Or should we aim for ecosystems that are resilient and can cope with changing climate conditions?

The editors Allen Thompson and Jeremy Bendik-Keymer propose what they call a ‘humanist view of adaptation’. What the authors mean by this is somewhat vague and they do not refer to any literature of the humanist tradition, such as contemporary humanists like A.C. Grayling or Paul Kurtz. The editors seem to mean by humanism that there is a focus on the concept of ‘human flourishing’. It is humanistic also in the sense that it is anthropocentric (and thus speciesistic). The core moral value, according to the editors and the contributors, is human beings, who should be able to flourish and a resilient natural environment is instrumental for this. The circle of morality does include future generations of human beings.

Dale Jamieson is clear about the urgent need to address climate change in his chapter “Ethics, Public Policy, and Global Warming”. He states: “Science has alerted us to a problem, but the problem also concerns our values. It is about how we ought to live, and how humans should relate to each other and to the rest of nature” (188). Jamieson points out that in many scientific and public debates the ethical dimension is neglected: “It is a striking fact about modern intellectual life that we often seek to evade the value dimensions of fundamental social questions” (194). He addresses the role of individual life style choices: “Many small people doing small things over a long period of time together will cause unimaginable harms” (196), to which Bendik-Keymer adds: “[...] reasonably decent character is not enough to prevent us from acting wantonly” (273). Our value system, our morals and our virtues are not adapted to this: “Our current value system presupposes that harms and their causes are individual, that they can readily be identified, and that they are local in space and time” (194). Indeed, there is an urgent need for new virtues. Jamieson suggests: simplicity and conservatism. That sounds nice, but what does this entail in real life?

The book addresses two types of adaptation. Firstly, nature restoration, and secondly, the promotion of virtues suitable for a life in a new, less human-friendly, climate. Bill McKibben has coined the term *Eaarth* – the title of his 2011 book – by inserting an extra ‘a’ to stress the anthropogenic factor on the planet we live on. We have moved on from the Holocene, to the Anthropocene. Secondly, the book emphasizes the need for human virtues that enable us to cope with the changed setting on our planet. The book

argues that adaptation should not only be about fixing problems, like trying to restore nature or conserve animal species in zoos, but that there is a need for a deeper and more fundamental change in our virtues. One major problem with virtue ethics is that it only works when (i) people uphold the ‘good virtues’ and (ii) a vast majority of the people uphold these values. Obviously, if people uphold the wrong values, the outcome will be undesirable. But how do we know exactly if a set of environmental values will be suitable for climate change? Secondly, if there is no majority of the people upholding these values, the environmental problems of climate change will still be there. For example, if by some kind of miracle, the whole world were to live up to a set of environmental virtues, except for say the United States, there would still be enormous environmental degradation. This is the free rider problem; it only works if everyone does it. But what is the incentive to embrace environmental virtues?

It does not seem logical that the book focuses solely or mostly on (anthropogenic) climate change. Climate change is, unfortunately, just one aspect of an unprecedented anthropogenic global environmental crisis. Even if we were able to adapt to climate change, there is still an environmental crisis, because of pollution, deforestation, biodiversity loss, overfishing, and ocean acidification etc.

About half way through the book it occurred to me that there is an elephant in the room. None of the authors writes about the virtue of veganism. Animal agriculture is one of the major contributors to the environmental crisis, including climate change. Why is it that the authors engage in theoretical reflection when there is such a simple and obvious (partial) solution? If humans were to eat lower down the food chain it would decrease our collective ecological footprint tremendously. The subtitle is *Human Virtues of the Future*. So one would expect that these virtues would not only deal with adaptation to climate change, but that they would be virtues for ethical living in a general sense. This book shows that the moral circle is expanding to include future generations in ethical consideration. But there is no reflection on what would be the criterion for inclusion in the moral circle. By including future generations of human animals but excluding non-human animals, the authors take a speciesistic stance; they are discriminating against non-human animals. Chapter 6 by Keulartz and Swart is called “Animal Flourishing and Capabilities in an Era of Global Change”. The authors address animals in captivity, but they ignore animals in factory farming. There is no animal flourishing in factory farming, there is only animal suffering. Breena Holland is explicitly anthropocentric in speaking about a ‘dignified human life’ in the chapter “Environment as Meta-Capability: Why a Dignified Human Life Requires a Stable Climate System”.

Another unnoticed and unaddressed elephant is population ethics. The population of human animals on the planet is growing and is expected to keep growing for some time. Also the average ecological footprint is on the increase. This means that the impact of humans on the planet is expected to rise. How can we and future generations cope with climate change when the planet is even more crowded?

In conclusion, this book is quite academic. Reading its various papers was not a pleasurable reading experience (at least not to me). The question is: does this book help to solve the environmental crisis? I don’t think so. The authors seem more interested

in working on an academic puzzle than engaging their concern for solving the enormous problems in reality. As I have argued above, the authors ignore at least two elephants in the room: population growth and veganism. Both of these represent possibilities towards sustainability, but the authors offer no clue in this regard. The encouragement of green virtues is without clear guidance for what to do and what not to do. Virtues are no guarantee of moral behaviour; not even a guide. One first needs moral values (like the liberal ‘no harm’ principle), and then one can see what values encourage adherence to this moral guidance. It is painful to notice that environmental philosophy – at least in this book – is not of any help.

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Josh WEISBERG. *Consciousness*. Cambridge: Polity, 2014. 174 pp.

To be honest, reading this book was both helpful and disappointing. It was helpful because it provided a concise and lucid overview of the current situation in the debate on consciousness. It was disappointing because it nowhere questioned that very situation. I will return to this point at the end of my review.

Weisberg is enthusiastic about his subject and does not shy away from expressing himself accordingly in his writing – at times in combination with a statement of his own ‘guarded optimism’ concerning ‘strongly reductive views’ (145; a telling example from page 46 reads: “For my part, I think it’s super amazing that we might ‘just’ be a physical system. I find it incredibly inspirational to think of myself and the rest of humanity in this way.”). Through such comments, and through his overall style of writing, the book acquires a personal, at times somewhat jovial feel. Nevertheless, Weisberg is quite capable of putting himself in the shoes of defenders of all the various views he describes, and knows how to present the most important arguments in a concise and convincing manner, even if at times his phrasing is somewhat sloppy (compare, for instance, the conflicting characterizations of physicalism on pages 2 and 3).

The book comprises 8 chapters, 15-20 pages each, the first of which is introductory in character, while the others run through the main positions in the contemporary debate. The respective chapter headings read: “Mysterianism”; “Dualism”; “Nonreductive Views”; “The Identity Theory”; “Functionalism”; “First-Order Representationalism”; “Higher-Order Representationalism”. The order of the chapters is not arbitrary: Weisberg takes them to run “from the least reductive to the most reductive” (17). In what follows, I will move through all seven of these chapters in turn (thus focusing on the helpful side of the book), and then reflect on the book as a whole (thus explaining what I find disappointing).

Chapter 2, “Mysterianism”, starts with Colin McGinn’s ‘permanent mysterianism’: the view that we are simply unable to understand how mind and body relate. We then move to ‘pessimistic temporary mysterianism’, which includes the views of (the earlier) Thomas Nagel and Joseph Levine. Neither think such an understanding can be obtainable

unless we manage to extend our current conceptual and scientific approach. Finally, we are presented with ‘optimistic temporary mysterianism’ of Patricia Churchland, who thinks that we will get to a proper understanding once we have a better grasp of the brain than we now have. (And here one starts to wonder to what extent this chapter really is the ‘least reductive’.)

Chapter 3, “Dualism”, starts with a nod to Descartes only to move on quickly to property dualism, motivated largely by Chalmers’s famous Zombie argument. Dualists of the interactionist variety have to make room for consciousness’s non-physical influence on physical systems in ways that do not violate the physical laws – which requires giving up causal closure (according to one understanding of that notion). Among the options discussed, there is the idea that consciousness is what makes the quantum-mechanical wave function collapse. Dualists of the epiphenomenalist variety do not face such problems of making room for non-physical influence, but face the converse problem of explaining how consciousness can ever become manifest in behaviour. The most pressing worry for these views is that adding consciousness as a “primitive” seems to be “a very non-Copernican addition to our basic ontology” (51).

Chapter 4, “Nonreductive Views”, deals with monistic views. It starts with ‘Russell’s Gap’ (54): physics tells us about the causal roles of fundamental particles, but not about what they are intrinsically like. (Here Weisberg is somewhat sloppy, especially when explaining Russell’s Gap in terms of dispositional properties and their categorical bases – see 56.) So perhaps consciousness fits into this gap, either as a basic feature of matter down to the smallest particles, yielding panpsychism, or as emerging from the particles’ ‘neutral’ (i.e. neither physical nor phenomenal) intrinsic natures, yielding neutral monism. Both views threaten to slide back into either dualism or physicalism: they require spelling out what the supposed micro-psychical or neutral features of matter are in such a way that they are indeed neither physical nor dualist, and they require some story as to how such small psychical or neutral building blocks combine to form the unified consciousness of, say, a human being – where that story must differ from analogous stories that could be told on the basis of a purely physical ontology.

Chapter 5, “The Identity Theory”, takes us to the first reductive station. Its core is the mere claim of identity – consciousness *just is* physical; there is nothing more explanatory to say. Weisberg thus calls this view ‘weakly reductive’, and contrasts it with functionalism, which provides more in terms of explanation (see the next chapters). On the identity theory, the identity is brute, motivated merely by “inductive pressures to simplify” (80). One salient problem for such a view is multiple realizability, which motivates functionalism (but empirical findings are mentioned that may counter this worry). The chapter contains discussion of many more intricate issues – phenomenal concepts, Ned Block’s distinction between access-consciousness and phenomenal consciousness, etc.

Chapter 6, “Functionalism”, concerns the attempt to identify the functional role of consciousness, in terms of its “input, output, and interaction profile” (93). Weisberg discusses Baars’ famous ‘global workspace theory’ as an example (97ff.), but takes the category of functionalist theories to be much broader – he even includes Alva Noë’s

‘enactivist’ theory of consciousness therein (100), which does not always make for a good fit with the rest of the chapter. Apart from familiar issues concerning ‘China brains’ and the like, Weisberg’s worries for functionalism include first and foremost the claim, central to Chalmers’ Zombie argument (but also to Block’s resistance to a functionalist analysis of ‘phenomenal consciousness’), that consciousness is simply not a functional concept, so that functionalism can only get off the ground by “changing the subject” (102). And another worry concerns the dispositional character of the account: why should, e.g. *availability* to the global workspace “make any difference to how things seem to a subject” (104)?

Chapter 7, “First-Order Representationalism” (FOR), differs somewhat from the others. It is supposed to cover representation-based versions of functionalism, which Weisberg develops with the help of the idea of *transparency*. In its strongest form, transparency implies that “[...] we’re *never* directly aware of our mental states, even in introspection; rather we’re only aware of the properties those mental states represent” (114). But not all such states are conscious: they are only conscious if they are available for cognitive processing. This ‘ordinary’ functionalist element, which in fact constitutes the core of the view, makes one wonder what exactly differentiates the resulting views from those covered in the previous chapter. (The answer is that this chapter is more like a stepping stone to the next, where representation plays a much more central role.) In any case, Weisberg here introduces some fairly complex ideas concerning representation (in particular, Dretske’s views), but the presentation is so compressed that it becomes quite ‘impressionistic’ indeed (111).

Chapter 8, “Higher-Order Representationalism” (HOR), starts with the ‘transitivity principle’ (127): a mental state is conscious only if its bearer is *conscious of* the state, where to be ‘conscious of’ a state is explained in representational terms. The state that plays the relevant role of representing a target mental state can be either a distinct state (thought-like or perception-like) or it may be the target state representing itself, resulting in a self-representational theory. The upshot is that “[...] a mental state is conscious when I’m aware of myself as being in it in a suitably immediate way” (130). Concerns related to this sort of view include the puzzle over how a non-conscious state can make another non-conscious state conscious; the problem of higher-order misrepresentation (do I merely seem to be conscious if I represent myself as being in a state that does not exist?); and the worry that the transitivity principle is, again, merely a way of changing the subject.

As my brief summary indicates, Weisberg’s book is suitable reading both for those new to the topic and for those who need an update on the latest developments. At the same time, the book as a whole is symptomatic for the kind of approach that the contemporary debate takes towards the issue of consciousness – and that approach is, alas, woefully fixed on a quite narrow and questionable philosophical picture. The starting point is the “[...] scientific view that everything happening in the universe is ultimately a process involving the basic forces of nuclear attraction, electromagnetism, and gravity, in various combinations” (13). Furthermore, it is assumed that “[...] a tentative consensus – or at least a mild optimism – has emerged concerning the prospects of a naturalized

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theory of representation” (108). In effect, it is thus asserted that we can understand what it is to harbour mental states ultimately in terms of nuclear attraction, electromagnetism, and gravity; and the problem of consciousness thus becomes the question “what has to be added to a mental state” – in the described sense – “to make it a conscious state” (12). These are, more or less, the beaten philosophical tracks of the contemporary consciousness debate, which Weisberg’s book never leaves. An exceedingly narrow physicalist ontology is assumed, and then the question becomes whether or not we need to squeeze in some spooky non-physical stuff in order to understand consciousness.

Given such premises, it is not surprising that the only two ways of not pessimistically resigning into mysterianism are (i) the desperate move towards dualism or panpsychism, or (ii) the ostrich triumphs of speculative reductivism. The debate thus cries out for a thorough reflection on its philosophical underpinnings. And it is not as if there was a lack of suitable alternative ideas around – for instance, what if we start out with a different take on the ‘scientific view’, such as the pluralistic view developed by Stanford School people like Nancy Cartwright and John Dupré? And what if we start out with a different metaphysical view, such as a metaphysics of powers, or a neo-Aristotelian metaphysics of substances (to mention just a few venues that I would find it interesting to explore)? Considerations such as these are what made this book, apart from being helpful, also a disappointing read for me.

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