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## BOOK REVIEW

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Martin, Craig. 2021. *Discourse and Ideology: A Critique of the Study of Culture*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic. 296 pp. ISBN 9781350246287 (pbk). \$31.45.

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I am a fan of Craig Martin's work. I actively assign parts of his 2017 *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion* in my religious studies courses and utilize theoretical and methodological insights from it in my lectures. I also utilize ecolinguistics as an approach to analyzing discourses related to human/nature interactions in my religion and nature scholarship and teaching. I therefore jumped at the opportunity to read and review Martin's new book, *Discourse and Ideology*, so that I could benefit from his theorizing on the titular subject matter, learn more about how discourses shape ideology and power in society (hopefully with crossover into human/nature theorizing), and see how his use of theory has matured over the last few years.

Martin clearly articulates that, at its core, “this book is about which categories are most useful for understanding the world” (p. 26). The book explores these categories, specifically via critiquing “realist” approaches to understanding the world, where these see the world-as-itself and this forms the basis of all truth claims; versus his own methodological and theoretical approach to understanding the world, that of poststructuralism, where the assumption rather is that our knowledge of the world is always shaped by discourses. On the latter, Martin explains how “categories do not appear to us in the phenomenal field” (p. 37), but rather there is contact with the world such that “which things appear to us depend in part on the categories or vocabularies one uses to bring into relief what is of interest to us in the phenomenal field” (p. 28).

The first parts of the book explain its purpose, starting premises, clarify key terms and vocabulary, and present an intellectual history for the rise of poststructuralism. Here Martin critiques extant scholarship for its misreading of what poststructuralism is and does, and especially the misreading of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. Martin revisits the work of these three scholars and in doing so helps to create the theoretical and intellectual context for the latter chapters of the book where he slowly builds and models his own theory and method of discourses and ideologies. At its core, Martin's book is about categories of knowledge, and how these are shaped by the discourses and ideologies behind knowledge regimes, where all humans use discourses as they make sense of the varied data of the phenomenal (and within that, the social) world. Martin is clear that it is not all language games, though, in that he is “a poststructuralist *and* an empiricist” (p. 11). One

of Martin's underlying points, and thus, a key part of why the book project matters to him, is that "the function too often ignored [by scholars] is *discourse's ability to encourage affective sympathies and antipathies in persuaded audiences*" (p. 77; italics in original).

A key insight of Martin's occurs when he explains how objects in the phenomenal field are individuated by discourses, and that this process is shaped by the antipathies and sympathies the wielder of the discourse has for the object/subject/community/facts as these are consciously or unconsciously entailed in the assumptions, ideologies and standpoints of the person or group utilizing the discourse to describe the phenomenal world under discussion. This leads to a pivotal chapter of the book, chapter 6 "Recrement", where Martin summarizes how discourses constitute social formations that are in turn impacted by the ideologies contained in discourses. He then critiques the concept of "belief", and how as a key category in religious studies it is a flawed category tethered to "credorationalism" (p. 177), when the reality is that recrement ("public claims" [p. 200]) shapes public behaviors much more than stated beliefs do: "the claim that some forms of discourse are recrement helps us to explain a wider range of empirical evidence than does credorationalism ... treating recrement as if it were equivalent to actual belief would be a serious analytical mistake" (p. 201).

The overall method of the book is one of excavating a deep intellectual lineage of post-structuralism (and its predecessors) to develop clarity on categorial concepts and terms that academics need to get right (p. 39). Given the pages of summarizing the theories and arguments of multiple other scholars, the bulleted-lists that summarize his various arguments, and the focus on getting theory right, the audience for this book is other scholars in the humanities and graduate students (i.e., it is definitely not an undergraduate-focused book). A key question I had throughout the book is "can/will the field of religious studies apply his theory and method?" as getting through the book is somewhat arduous—it is not a quick read. Nor is it always a clear read, given the copious amount of pages spent rehashing and unpacking the theories and arguments of others, and pages spent building up applied examples of various aspects of his arguments. I found myself often getting lost in the weeds as he would spend ten pages bogged down on articulating the context of a point that he would then quickly summarize in a bulleted review—here I think a more proactive editor could have helped to trim a lot of the book or have helped to repackage parts to be more digestible.

That said, the payoff of sticking with the book and its value to the field emerges towards the end, where Martin points out that "It takes a great deal of time and effort to bring one's unconscious, unreflective affective responses into alignment with one's conscious, cognitive commitments" (pp. 227–28). This statement occurs within a larger poststructuralist analysis of discourses around race and privilege in the US, where "much like implicit bias, unconscious cognitive processes may function to disadvantage minorities in ways completely independent from conscious prejudice" (p. 234); those cues contained within discourses matter "because *the group that gets to determine which cues are hegemonic gets to determine what identities are received as normal in society*" (p. 236; italics in original). These insights, and the entirety of the labor put into the book, coalesce around the insight that "the social critic interested in relations of domination" (p. 244) needs to pay attention to how ideology and discourse work in society in shaping how certain groups are perceived, and thus treated, within the larger process of how humans claim to know the phenomenal world and thus the place(s) of subject(s) within that world. This brings me back to my reflection upon reading: will the field of religious studies take Martin's method and theory seriously and see the benefit of applying it, regardless of the subdisciplines of religious

studies? As Martin explains, “As far as I can tell, those discourses and ideologies we might call religious appear to function similarly to those discourses and ideologies we don’t normally call religious ... as should be clear, this was a book not about religions but rather about discourses and ideologies. The method and theory outlined here could be used to understand any discourse or ideology, religious or not” (p. 253). It would be to the betterment of religious studies, if all scholars were to use the insights and method of discourse analysis around ideology as modeled by Martin in his book. I think if Martin were to condense the book down into a longer journal article, with an applied section at the end, then what he has accomplished in this book would be more accessible and easier to engage. Regardless, the import of what Martin accomplishes in this book should not be understated, and I strongly encourage scholars to spend time within its pages, to see how Martin’s insights may benefit their own research and teaching.