

Book Reviews

Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity, by Talal Asad. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003. Hbk. ISBN 0-8047-4767-9. \$50.00. Pbk. ISBN 0-8047-4768-7. xii + 269 pp. \$19.95.

For months Talal Asad's *Formations of the Secular* has lain me down to sleep night by night. It has been a good soporific, which doesn't automatically place the book in bad company. I had a seminary professor who commended St. Thomas's *Summa* on the same grounds, and St. Thomas hasn't done badly for himself across a millennium. But, alas, Asad is no St. Thomas, and *Formations of the Secular* is no *Summa Theologica*. The book is almost entirely a collection of essays or articles published elsewhere plus two previously unpublished public lectures. Some of these chapters commend themselves more strongly than others, but they are so poorly integrated as a whole, that with only an exceptional line here or there, one could pick the book up without its front matter or covers and think one were reading a journal such as *Implicit Religion*, with essays by entirely different people only very generally centered around a topic area. One cannot help but think that the publisher was anxious to have a work for its 'Cultural Memory in the Present' series that would at least occasionally—and in one lengthy final chapter especially—address issues related to Islam.

Three theses in the book may contribute something worthwhile to our study of *Implicit Religion* nonetheless, each of which addresses a specific social construction.

The first of these is his treatment of *secularism* itself (my italics). Asad treats the word 'secular' very much as Edward Bailey has in a number of places: as 'the absence of religion, whatever that is'. But he then goes on to make a distinction between *secularity*, which he sees as a condition or state where religious considerations happen to be absent, and *secularism*, which he sees as a condition where religious considerations are controlled, hence marginalized. The condition of 'religious freedom' in secularist politics, for example, is such that no one religion may assert truth claims over another in respect to the political order, hence any religious claim to truth about the political order or social relations governed by the political order is systematically extirpated from the 'freedom' to which religion is purportedly entitled. *Secularism* in practice moves from 'the secular' as a religious concept to nationalism as a political

agenda, which is an implicit religion in terms of superordinate values. The nation becomes precisely the integrating construct for the behaviors of its citizens and trumps 'religion' as the practical set of ultimate truth claims for which men and women will live and die. His tracing of '[t]he genealogy of secularism...through the concept of the secular' is a succinct summary of the growth of the new religion of the nation and of nation-state authority, in which he points out, reflecting a strongly Weberian strain, that '[R]eligion consists not only of particular ideas, attitudes, and practices, but of followers... And so too with secularism. We have to discover what people do with and to ideas and practices before we can understand what is involved in the secularization of theological concepts in different times and places' (pp. 192-94).

Although coming prior to this discussion in the book, the important result to which Asad points as the outcome of secularism is the doctrine of 'human rights', which commentators as variant as Hannah Arendt and Malcolm X have noted in very different ways 'depended essentially on being citizens of a nation-state' (p. 142). Specifically, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* 'seems to assume a direct convergence of 'the rule of law'...with social justice... [and] If that is the case, *the rule called law* in effect usurps the entire universe of moral discourse... [N]ot only does *The Declaration* equate law with justice, it also privileges the state's norm-defining function..., thereby encouraging the thought that the authority of norms corresponds to the political force that supports them as law'. And he points out in a powerful observation embedded in a footnote, for example, that *The Declaration* 'has been more useful for punishing criminals convicted of genocide than for preventing the crime'. Though often sprinkled with high-sounding rhetoric, human rights in practice have no higher referent than the political definitions of a state or an association of states. Persons, in fact, have no rights apart from participation in a particular nation state. They are out-law—excommunicated, as it were, from the Universal Church of Internationalism, a polytheistic religion wherein individual nation states vie among themselves in a hierarchy of superordinate power which specific human beings can only ever partially comprehend or influence.

The final topic of potential interest is a discussion of the social construction of pain and torture *vs* incarceration, wherein public physical pain and torture are condemned as inhumane (a violation of 'human rights'), while incarceration is privileged. Leaving aside cases wherein a person within either of these conditions dies as an unintended result of the punishment, Asad points out that incarceration has the function of removing the offender from social influence, whereas physical pain and torture leave the individual free as a social actor. To the extent that these methods of punishment are tied to social control, the removal of the offender also removes social influence. The political heretic, whose errors can come not only in direct criticism of specific leaders and their policies, but also in challenges to the socioeconomic constitution of the system,

is far more neutralized by being removed and contained than by being displayed. Asad argues that as one moves from personal rulership, where the display of raw power was part of the justification for rulership, to corporate rulership among nation states, the removal of the 'offender' from the putatively participatory system of political action allows the system to move unhindered. The issue of crime and punishment cannot be separated from that of human rights, and in turn the construction of human rights cannot be separated from power interests, both within and between nation states. This being said, one may nevertheless point to cases such as that of Nelson Mandela, wherein it would have been in the state's interest to neutralize him far more than it did, and ask whether in fact it is not the case that at least in some situations *The Universal Declaration* does not connect to alternative dynamics within the social construction of human rights toward ends more consistent with a superordinate rhetoric of human worth that rises above the purely political aspirations of nationalism.

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On Meanings of Life, by Jerome Eckstein, New York: State University of New York Press, 2002. ISBN 0-7914-5482-7. 165 pp. \$17.95.

A post-modern rejection of meanings which are 'public and objective' leads to a preoccupation with private, subjective meaning. Deeply felt personal explanations of reality tend to religious attitudes which are implicit rather than explicit. Eckstein draws attention to 'a heavy subjectivism widespread in various parts of culture' (p. 32). His own position is rather different, however. He describes it as belief in 'metaphysical dignity'; 'Metaphysical dignity is' [to quote Rilke] 'affirmation of life and death that encourages us to "try to achieve the fullest consciousness of our existence"' (p.137). It consists in 'the courage to be' in spite of the failure of explicit religion. Eckstein admits that such a commitment is 'metaphysically lonely—but it is at least preferable to the danger of religion that is explicit: most of us cannot understand the minds of terrorists who murder harmless and innocent people. I suggest that they do so in part because of an overwhelming meaning of life....' (p. 123).

Such an 'overwhelming meaning', says Eckstein 'is bound to be dangerous'. He cites Durkheim's sociological analysis of suicide in order to support his argument about the pressure on the individual of meanings which are both

public and intrusive: suicide as the limiting case of action taken with regard to the loss of a sense of personal meaning: where meanings are powerfully and consistently asserted their destruction can be fatal: 'I suggest that Durkheim's suicide had one overwhelming meaning of life—that which had been deregulated or disintegrated' (p. 122). As a post-holocaust Jew, Eckstein claims to know what he is talking about in this respect, and his words are convincing.

It is not surprising, then, that this beautiful and moving book argues powerfully in favour of balance and compromise in human affairs, not only between public and private life-meanings but between religious conservatism and the willingness to adapt to changes in social and political circumstances—at a more fundamental level between clarity and confusion, understanding and ignorance, despair and hope, life and death. Eckstein's personal implicit religion leads him to compromise between these extremes while giving him the courage to do so without reducing the intensity of the proposition. The faith consists in the use of the word 'and', thus avoiding any kind of homogenesis, any reassuring synthesis of ideas. It is a faith of uncertainty rather than an uncertain faith, and as such it is deeply religious.

All the same, it is very different from what he describes as 'the search for primordial wholeness through life meanings' (p. 118). Eckstein's solution is far more personal and individual than this. For him 'primordial wholeness' involves a degree of certainty which lies beyond the reach of mankind and has done for almost three millennia—ever since the period between 800 and 200 BCE, identified by Karl Jaspers as the 'axial' age of human cognitive development, when mankind lived unselfconsciously at peace with the rest of the universe, each person sublimely unaware of her or his individuality. The urge to discover one's own personal philosophy, says Eckstein, dates from this epoch-making personal transformation in human awareness, when every question found its answer in terms of one or other mythic story about belonging. Since then, however, the theme of separation, of individual difference, has characterized our awareness of the world we inhabit, leading to the formulation of countless personal worldviews, each uniquely different from all the others, but essential to the person concerned because of its ability to act as a link between an individual and the 'primeval wholeness' of life within the womb.

This, however is our safeguard against the kind of all-embracing mythic wholeness which promises its subscribers the peace of mind which belongs to existential certainty.

For Eckstein, however, this kind of certainty is terrifying. The danger it represents is closely associated with the kind of existential certitude which is fatal for humanity, the fanaticism which gives rise to holocaust. In the post-axial age, humanity's real righteousness is more truly expressed in uncertainty, the separation which engenders relationship with the unknown as unknown

and expresses itself as hypothesis rather than dogma. This kind of faith is always disturbing, because of its lack of explicitness. The search for personal meaning will always appear less attractive than the benefits of simply accepting ready-made solutions as if they were one's own; at the centre of life's meaning is a yearning 'To believe in religious inerrancy or moral infallibility, or fixed cosmic purpose, or perennial philosophy' (p. 77); religious response that is creative, however, depends upon uncertainty, the possibility of finding out that one is, and has been, wrong about things—even the most important ones.

This concentration upon creativity, seen as the refusal to enforce arguments and impose solutions, may be the reason for this book's leisurely pace. What appears as discursiveness is in fact a kind of confidence, the willingness to let ideas emerge without forcing, and to make one's points by allowing other people's experience to do so for one. It is an indirect approach which makes a good deal of use of poetry, in this case the tersely explicit Rainer Maria Rilke and the implicit poetry of rabbinic utterance. Thus the tone of the book itself brings home its central message, namely the danger which lies in life's 'not having more than one meaning'.

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A Religion of Nature, by Crosby, Donald A., Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2002. ISBN 0-7914-5454-1. 200 pp. \$18.95.

If the idea of God or gods as the focus of worship is too problematic today there is an alternative: nature itself can serve as a supreme object of faith. Donald Crosby is a religiously-inclined philosopher who has moved from the Christian convictions of his early life to a firm faith in nature itself as ultimate, holy and a fit object for religious concern and devotion.

This book systematically makes a case for a religion of nature with particular attention to the philosophical and religious conceptual problems raised by that notion. Though aware of numerous other 'nature religions' (primal and indigenous spiritualities, paganisms and pantheisms, naturalist elements in Taoism, sun-worship and the like) Crosby does not attempt to develop historical pedigrees or parallels. Nor is he drawn into current theologising about ecology and the sacredness of nature as created, since his religion has no theistic element, whether transcendent, immanent or in any other way related to the world. Instead, Crosby examines a faith directed at nature itself. As a viable religious option he is prepared to comment on its merits and scrutinize it to the best of his abilities as a philosopher and contemporary thinker. It is an admirably frank and clear headed project.

After a short Part 1 sketching the author's own personal odyssey, Part 2 deals with metaphysical and philosophical issues raised by the very notion of nature. Chapters 2–4 form a lucid progression through a series of conceptual questions: what do we mean by nature? Is it permanent or changing? Why speak of nature rather than, say, universe, cosmos, or world? In what relation do the natural sciences stand to nature?

Are there values in nature? Crosby considers arguments for and against, giving examples such as life itself, diversity, creativity, splendour, beauty, power, practical and moral values and disvalues. What is the significance of human bodily existence, immersed in nature in so many intimate ways? What are the duties of humans towards nature, and what makes these not just prudential and ethical but profoundly spiritual and religious? Chapter 5 recognises the distinctiveness of humans and at the same time stresses the importance of seeing human cultures and civilizations as themselves set 'squarely within the natural order, not outside it or over against it'.

Part 3 then moves on to religious issues, aiming to deal with objections and spell out further implications. In Chapter 6, using a view of religion advanced in his earlier work on theories of religion, he offers six 'role-functional' categories designing central functions of religious objects: uniqueness, primacy, pervasiveness, rightness, permanence, and hidden-ness. Nature, he then seeks to show, can perform all these roles and thus can be an appropriate focus of religious concern. While there is something tailor-made about that demonstration, Crosby's pragmatist reasonableness comes back into its own in Chapter 7 which deals with major objections to a religion of nature. Here moral and metaphysical questions about nature's alleged wastefulness, cruelty, indifference, lack of intentionality and conscious awareness, and contingency, are faced with honesty and answered with conviction. Chapter 8 then wraps up the book with some final reasons for considering nature 'the principal source of good for all of its creatures, including human beings'.

One chief objection to his project which Crosby himself admits is a practical one: the seeming lack of a historical embodiment for a religion of nature and the absence of established institutions offering communal support, leadership, ceremony, myths and symbols and the like. 'I miss being part of a community of tradition and ritual whose faith is similar to my own: there is no First Church of Nature in my neighbourhood' (p. 11). He hopes that others may take up the task of 'putting the vision of a religion of nature into practice on an institutional scale'.

Readers aware of implicit religion research might be able to help him at this point. For instance, while there may be no local Church of Nature, there is a garden centre in every modern shopping mall, horticultural and organic lifestyle magazines on every news-stand, 'backyard makeover' TV programmes almost every night of the week; to say nothing of the enormous global industry of agriculture and good production. The whole body of traditional practice,

common knowledge and professional expertise in the past and nowadays associated with 'cultivating our gardens' (whether for subsistence survival, commercial farming, or recreation and pleasure) could well be argued to bear the marks of a thriving implicit religion of nature just waiting to be demonstrated!

Crosby's choice to tackle conceptual and philosophical issues rather than, say, to explore the actual embodiment of a religion of nature in everyday modern life, may seem an unappealing approach to some readers of *Implicit Religion*. However his thoroughgoing discussion of nature itself and his reflections on its religious possibilities make this a particularly satisfying book to read and ponder.

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Ball, Bat and Bishop: The Origin of Ball Games, by Henderson, Robert W., Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001. ISBN 0-252-06992 7. Pbk. 220 pp.

Games (which we now play for fun) are in origin 'grim supplications to various deities... vestigial remains of religious rites of ancient times' (pp. 3-4). The teams (usually two) represent ritual and serious embodiments of the fundamental dualisms of Good and Evil, Life and Death, Fertility and Sterility, Order and Chaos. *All* ball games, the author assures us, descend from 'an ancient fertility rite observed by priest kings in the Egypt of the Pyramids' (p. 4). Initially 'played' only by kings and priests, games were part of the magical rituals of the religions of the Ancient Near East and of the Greece and Rome of Late Antiquity. The oldest game was polo, played by teams of thousands of warrior-horsemen. The Moors brought these various games into Europe; and 'upon the adaptation of the pagan ball rite into the Easter Christian ceremonies hinges the subsequent development of the bat and ball games so familiar to us today' (p. 36).

The author was for many years a senior librarian at the (very excellent) New York Public Library and the author of *Early American Sport* and *Tennis Origins and Mysteries*. Leonard Koppett, who contributes a very amusing Foreword to this book, was a sports writer for the *New York Times* and author of *Koppett's Concise History of Major League Baseball*. The nature and origins of baseball (which are apparently, or were when this book was written, a matter of some controversy in America) receive over sixty pages of discussion, while cricket and football get four and three pages respectively. The author is, in effect, seeking to locate baseball within his (perfectly plausible) general account of the origins and functions of games, teams, referees, balls and bats.

This is a most readable and affable book; and its general thesis must be true: baseball was no more invented *ab initio* in 1839 in Cooperstown, New York State, by Abner Doubleday, than cricket was invented by the MCC or football

by the FA (Rugby is of course a different matter): and the profound hostility of English Puritans to ‘games’ demonstrates quite clearly that such activities were serious social ceremonies rather than mere pranks by the lads. Whether Pharoah would recognize, or be pleased with, his ludic progeny is another matter.

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Webs of Reality: Social Perspectives on Science and Religion, by Stahl, William A., Campbell, Robert A., Petry, Yvonne, and Diver, Gary, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002. ISBN 0-8135-3106-3. Pbk. 192 pp. \$22.00.

The authors seek here to present a more holistic view of the science/religion enterprise—one that will reveal ‘a seamless web’ tying together science, technology, religion, and ethics. Essential to achieving this aim, they argue, is to bring the social sciences into the discussion, for only then, they insist, will we be able to see the social causes that lie behind the science/religion dialogue itself (p. 13), and, consequently, be able also to provide the foundation for a view of science that combines both mystery and objectivity (p. ix). The framework within which the authors present their views is, in a sense, Weberian, in that they use Weber’s categories of soteriology, saintliness, magical causation, theodicy, and mystery as religious lenses through which to interpret ‘the tension between objectivity and mystery’ (p. 20) in our understanding of science. They devote a section of the book to each of the given categories.

Two chapters are devoted to the category of soteriology: one to the history of the development of science (chapter 2), which they see as a ‘history of progress and victory over superstition’ until the end of the nineteenth century but a more humble relationship to religion over the past century, and one (chapter 1) to ‘scientism’—that is, to the mythic view of science that, when compared to religion, reveals it to be ‘no more or less a human practice than is religion’ (p. 32). Combined, the two chapters intend to provide the grounds on which to proceed with a demythologization of science (p. 36).

Under the category of saintliness the authors review ‘The Iconography of Science’ (chapter 3) and ‘The Newtonian Revolution’ (chapter 4), and argue that scientists have gained the standing of secular saints (with Newton as foremost among them), which, in their view, lends an inappropriate authority to science. With a social scientific analysis of this process of secularization, they continue, it becomes clear that ‘sainthood’ and ‘authority’ are gained only at the price of the suppression of the fact that both religion and magic played a major role in the life and work of the founding figures of the modern scientific

disciplines. Consequently, they argue, science is not superior to religion in regard to its relationship to magical thinking.

In chapter 5 ('Magicians, Reformers, and Scientists'), chapter 6 ('As If By Magic'), and chapter 7 ('Technology as Magic') the authors continue this argument, insisting that the boundaries between natural and magical causes is not as great as it has been taken to be. They argue, that is, that whether viewed from a substantive, functional, or symbolic perspective, science, like religion, has a magical quality to it. And this, it appears, is caused by scientists, like the rest of humanity, seeking an ultimate explanation for life (p. 87); scientists, that is, apparently attempt to 'tap into a deeper, mythic understanding' of so-called natural and socially constructed realities (p. 121) that takes them beyond the visible, surface reality of the world.

The category of theodicy is covered in a single chapter entitled 'The Moral of the Dinosaur' (chapter 8), in which the authors claim that scientists—ever aware of suffering and death—attempt to find meaning in these 'limit situations' (p. 154) and, consequently, implicitly embed religious ideas in their scientific theories. And that tendency in scientific thought, it is suggested, shows a similarity rather than a divergence between the two modes of thought.

Four chapters are devoted to the final Weberian category of mystery. In 'The Science Wars' (chapter 9) they argue that truth can only be found in the tension between the mystery of salvation and the objectivity of science; not in the suppression of one by the other (p. 159). In chapter 10 ('Naturalism, Science, and Religion'), therefore, they argue that even though the scientific view of the world is very important, 'other approaches to reality also need to be included in our lives and in our understanding of the universe' (p. 179). Rejection of the metaphysical naturalism of 'scientism', as they put it, will prevent the sciences from 'claiming all of reality for science [alone]' (p. 180). And, as they maintain in chapter 11 ('History and Hermeneutics'), since the emergence of quantum theory, it is clear that science is necessarily a dialectical activity (p. 183); relying on a hermeneutic approach to knowledge, they therefore claim, will allow us to go beyond 'the false dichotomy of objectivism and relativism' (p. 194). Chapter 12 ('The Centrality of Dialogue') then presents an argument in support of the claim that we must seek the truth through dialogue rather than in the quest for certainty exemplified in the science wars (p. 196).

In the Preface to this work the authors rightly point out that the support of the Templeton Foundation for the teaching of courses on science and religion in colleges and universities around the world 'turned what had been a small, sputtering discussion over the relationship between the natural sciences and religion into a large international debate' (p. vii). They also rightly point out that this debate has not, for the most part, included the voice of the social sciences. Their contribution here (which they describe as 'the Toronto approach to the science-religion dialogue' [p. vii]) succeeds in bringing that voice into

the dialogue. They have managed, moreover, to fulfil their promise of making the metaphor of 'the seamless web' (of science, technology, religion, and ethics) the unifying theme of the book. In my judgement, however, they do so by conflating, without justification, the notions of knowledge and meaning, and they have not, therefore, succeeded in providing a persuasive account of science as an enterprise that combines both mystery and objectivity.

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The Spirit Lives: A Personal Journey from Loss to Understanding through Religious Experience, by Turner, David H., New York: Peter Lang, 2002. ISBN 0-82-4-5761-2. Pbk. 185 + lx pp.

This book—essentially a comparative exercise in the ethical stance of several religions—has the unusual and attractive quality of being written from the perspective of autobiography. David Turner, professor of anthropology at the University of Toronto and an expert on aboriginal people, explored several religious traditions during the course of depression and breakdown, following the death from cancer of his five-year-old son Iain in 1988: the Christianity of a Trappist monastery in New Brunswick, the Hinduism of Bali, the mix of traditions in north India, the Buddhism of Japan, and the indigenous religion of his Canadian homeland, as well as the Aborigines. Turner prefaces these clearly-explained encounters with accounts of a mystical experience he had on a train in 1980, and the occasions when he saw Iain after Iain's death, one of them in the course of association with a seer in New Zealand. It is refreshing, as well as engaging, to find a writer on religion so open about his or her subjectivity, and the photographs which Turner provides of people and places significant to the narrative enable it to come further alive.

It is slightly ironic for one who traces a particular type of 'renunciation' as a common thread between these religious traditions, that his reflections are quite so self-preoccupied (the chapters can at times read like a travel diary), and often not self-critical (for example, I wondered what his former wife made of their bereavement and his reaction to it). However, those who do not have the patience to journey with Turner on his travels will find his analysis set out and developed in the conclusion, the most useful section of the book.

The inspiration for Turner's 'logic of renunciation' comes from the Aborigines, who in relating to one another bear in mind and supply what each other lacks according to each other's 'emptiness', knowing that their own needs are

in turn met by others. So one regards others as others, rather than in terms of one's self or ego; differences are valuable because they exist for others' benefit; and the most vulnerable members of society are provided for. In the conclusion, Turner applies this ethic to contemporary life and behaviour, against the competition and self-indulgence of western society with which he and so many others feel deeply uncomfortable. 'By placing a part of oneself in the other, whether it be self as such, the services one provides, or the things one possesses, one transcends division, separation, and duality, and one undermines the fundamental source of conflict and violence in the world' (p. 12, Turner's emphasis).

This, Turner suggests, is the spirit which lives. Those who like me would be interested to see how he relates this spirit to the doctrine of the (Holy) Spirit in Christianity must either consult another of his works, *Genesis Regained*, to which he refers for an explication of the theme in different faiths, or hope for more.

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Unconscious Wisdom: A Superego Function in Dreams, Conscience and Inspiration, by Merkur, Dan, New York: State University of New York Press, 2001. ISBN 0-7914-4948-3. Pbk. 163 pp.

In psychoanalytic terms, religion of any kind, either explicit or implicit, is an illusion. This does not mean that it is false, however; simply that it cannot be shown to be either false or true. Merkur cites Freud:

We call a belief an illusion when a wish-fulfilment is prominent in its motivation, and in doing so we disregard its relation, just as the illusion itself sets no store by verification.

(The Future of an Illusion, 1927)

Merkur goes on to point out that, 'Because their reality can neither be proved nor refuted, good, evil, beauty and ugliness are illusions in the psychoanalytic sense of the term' (p. 102). Some perfectly normal minds perceive religious realities strongly, some less so, others not at all; or rather, the values which are real to them are not construed as being 'religious' ones.

As a psychoanalyst, Merkur is bound to start from this position—that religions are 'intra-psychic wishful thinking'. His book is about what goes on

within the psyche, but outside the ego, in the realm of superego awareness, upon which religion depends because of its ability to direct the self's attention away from itself towards another. From this point of view, 'Unconscious Wisdom' is a psychoanalytic investigation into the possibility of religious-type experience. Experiences of the divine, we are told, are functions of the superego, which is actually capable of ego-type thinking. This is in direct contradiction of Freud's view, according to which the superego forms part of the ego:

I have suggested, however, that the superego has an inborn function to represent the loved object...through an inborn capacity to invest mental representations with the significance of objects (p. 117).

The ability of the superego to think metaphorically blows Freud's closed system of ego domination wide open, says Merkur.

The result is a book which concentrates almost exclusively on the relationship between different realms of psychic life, the intra-personal relations upon which personal ones depend. The evidence provided by three important ways in which we perceive—dreams, conscience, and inspirations—all of which are customarily explained in terms of the commerce of id and ego (or, to use Freud's terms, 'primary and secondary process thinking'), leads Merkur to present the superego as possessing its own kind of unconscious reasoning, which is essentially different from the ego's attempts to solve problems created by pressure from the id (or the other way round!), by taking refuge in symbols whose purpose is to evade the censorship imposed on all communication of unacceptable psychic material. The superego, says Merkur, has other things to do and to say. He is particularly impressed by the reality orientation of the three modes of perception mentioned above: Inspiration's ability to focus on things outside the self, as problems to be approached from an objective point of view ('it is as though the superego combined the pleasure principle of the id with the reality principle of the ego, from the perspective of its imaged objectivity'—p. 107); the ways in which dreams, demonstrate a wisdom beyond the subject's own rational assessments ('moral decision making is integral to their nature'—p. 45), and conscience, able to show this kind of objectivity in the form of empathy, which is 'creative inspiration regarding the feelings of another person'; it may extend to 'feelings imparted to works of nature, as though by a creator'. 'In all cases', says Merkur, 'empathic imagination is integral to the production of illusions' (pp. 108, 109)—particularly ones involved in the creation of value systems, upon which religion depends.

This fascinating and skilfully argued book is not about the truth or falsity of religions, but about the probity of religious experience as a unique way of

interpreting reality, rather than a disguised form of other kinds of thing: as the answer to repression, not one of its results.

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