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stitute itself and sets limits to what it can become; within those limits the new event "decides" (usually unconsciously) what it will become—decides in the sense of cutting off some possibilities by the actualization of an incompatible possibility. Because the past does not completely determine what the new event will be, each event has some freedom, however trivial that freedom is by human standards in many cases. The amount of freedom increases in more complex organisms. Mesle thinks it would be impossible "to live and act as if you were totally determined, as if you had . . . no freedom to exercise" (82).

This line of thought led Whitehead to posit God as the source of the novelty found in events. He believed that possibilities had to be part of some actual being; since there are unrealized possibilities, there has to be an actual being who can provide them with new events. Later, Whitehead added that God, in addition to providing new possibilities, also feels all that every event has become. Whitehead does not consider this a proof of the existence of God: "there is nothing here in the nature of proof. There is merely the confrontation of the theoretic system with a certain rendering of the facts" (84).

Mesle highlights the importance of relational, as opposed to unilateral, power. Unilateral power is the power to affect other individuals without being affected by them, the power to impose our will on others without them being able to affect us. Relational power is the power to be affected by others. This is the sort of power that increases with the increasing complexity of living things. It is this power, the "capacity to be affected by the incredible richness and complexity of the relational web within which we live" that "makes our lives richer and more valuable" (72). God is related to all creatures by relational power. By feeling all that every event has become, God is affected by them. And because God offers a range of possibilities to each new event as it starts, each event is affected, but not unilaterally determined, by God.

Process thought has had an important influence on discussions in theology, the relation between religion and science, interreligious dialogue, environmental issues, feminism, social justice, and other areas of contemporary concern. Those who want a basic understanding of process thought to provide a background for study of this influence can do no better than this little book. It can be used by undergraduates with little or no background in philosophy. Even academicians with little knowledge of process philosophy can obtain a useful understanding of it with this book. Those who know process thought reasonably well are unlikely to learn anything from this book, except perhaps some ideas about how to present process thought to others (not an insignificant matter).

In religious and theological discussions, Whitehead's idea of God provides a contrast to the idea of God, common in Western thought, as an all-powerful creator of the universe who cannot be affected by anything outside God. Whitehead's idea seems less strange if it is put in the context of a Whiteheadian view of the cosmos. By explaining this context, Mesle's book makes both that view of the cosmos and that idea of God accessible to his readers.

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BAGGER, MATTHEW. *The Uses of Paradox: Religion, Self-Transformation, and the Absurd*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. 152 pp. \$36.50 (cloth).

Religious thinkers both east and west teach paradoxes—claims that appear absurd because self-contradictory but which the religious community never-

theless insists that its members believe. What is intended by “knowing through unknowing,” the “light of the darkness,” or the “name that cannot be named”? Many have taken such phrases to refer to paradoxical experiences. But, in a welcome shift, Matthew Bagger sets aside phenomenological approaches in order to build a bridge between philosophical and social scientific approaches to religious thought.

Bagger argues that one can distinguish two ways that religious intellectuals venerate (and recommend and use) paradoxes. One type of religious use of paradox he labels “cognitive asceticism.” Cognitive ascetics use paradox to increase cognitive dissonance in order to turn themselves away from certain affects—to weaken their attachments to reason, the world, or certain “others.” They want to frustrate or do violence to their natural inclinations in order to induce suffering or abnegation (16). Religious contradictions are used as an assault on the intellect and, by extension, on the ego. Paradox is thereby a cognitive technique that leads the religious participant to self-denial. Bagger illustrates this use of paradox with Søren Kierkegaard, who wrote that religious “suffering is precisely the consciousness of contradiction” (25). For Kierkegaard, the more inward the individual, the more he or she wrestles with what cannot be understood objectively and the greater the inner suffering. The Christian life for Kierkegaard redoubles this cognitive asceticism: faith in the impossible truth of Christianity is a “martyrdom,” a “crucifixion” of the understanding (26). Ultimately, for Kierkegaard, “self-annihilation is the essential form for the relationship with God” (25–26).

The second religious use of paradox Bagger calls mysticism. Mystics use paradox to point to truths too wonderful to fit into language or conscious thought. In this approach, reflection on paradox does not frustrate but, on the contrary, points to suprarational forms of cognition. Paradox “opens the cognitive vista” (40) to where the distant, the obscure, or the wholly other beckons. Mysticism “promotes identification with a wider perspective” (10). For this reason, teaching paradox does not serve to humble the ego but instead to indicate a path of growth and increased abilities. Paradox is revelatory, and it can mediate and enable states of ecstatic union. Bagger illustrates the mystical use of paradox with Pseudo-Dionysus, who outlines a path of cognitive training that begins in the paradox of God’s transcendent immanence and leads to a mystical knowledge and, ultimately, union with God.

With this distinction in hand, Bagger proposes an original hypothesis. Developing Mary Douglas’s sociological theory of taxonomic anomalies, Bagger argues that a religious thinker’s attitude toward paradox—logical anomalies—reflects his or her attitude toward the boundaries of his or her social group. He argues that concern about a threat of outsiders informs the thinker’s view of the limits of what is reasonable. “To a thinker apprehensive about the integrity of the external boundary, paradox will appear irreconcilably dissonant, suitable for ascetic use. Conversely, the greater the value seen in incorporating outsiders, the more rich become the possibilities for cognition beyond the bounds of reason” (10). Bagger’s examples illustrate this conformity between a religious thinker’s social concerns and her or his use of paradox. The Syrian Pseudo-Dionysus’s primary social concern is bringing outsiders (perhaps especially solitary desert monks) into the orders of the church; he is congenial about the way that theological paradoxes cross the limits of understanding. The Danish Kierkegaard is anxious about the integrity of true Christianity in

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the social and political assumptions of modernity; he sees paradox as appalling and offensive.

Bagger proposes that religious paradoxes are generated by the cosmogonic question: religious intellectuals run into paradoxes when they try to explain why there is something rather than nothing. This question is confused, Bagger argues, because the pragmatics of explanatory questions make it impossible to explain "everything." When one is trying to explain the entirety of the causal nexus, one has simultaneously eliminated from relevance all of the context that might distinguish this explanatory question from others and thereby make the question intelligible. In other words, paradoxes arise when a religious thinker tries to speak of one reality that is the source of every reality, while not including the former in the latter.

To say that an explanation, in order to be meaningful, must point to a portion of the causal world seems awfully close to a positivist criterion. Moreover, this critique may not fit everything that Bagger wants to reject: it is not clear that the pragmatics of the cosmological question get at the Anselmian idea of something that cannot be thought not to exist, for example, or the Buddhist idea of the emptiness of emptiness. But Bagger offers his analysis of the origin of religious paradoxes as a hypothesis that is open to testing and application, and even if not all religious metaphysical claims will fall into this pattern, plenty will.

In practice, it may be difficult to identify thinkers, texts, or movements as either ascetic or as mystic, since both disparage ordinary reason. Nevertheless, as an ideal type, Bagger's basic insight seems sound: we can distinguish between those who see paradox congenially as a door that can be opened to a higher way of thinking and those who see it as a gate blocking human powers. The latter especially have not received much attention. But the book's greatest promise is that Bagger gives attention to the fact that religious ideas are not simply thought about; they are used. Religious intellectuals think in social contexts, and their work serves that context. By making this point, he shows that one way in which philosophy of religion can contribute to the social scientific study of religions is precisely by showing how intellectual practices are not simply speculation but reflect and shape their larger cultural and political environment. And this book provides a provocative proposal about how they do so. Few philosophers of religion work in conversation with social theory; one hopes that others will read this book and expand the path that Bagger reveals. KEVIN SCHILBRACK, *Wesleyan College*.

WOLTERSTORFF, NICHOLAS. *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008. 400 pp. \$39.50 (cloth).

There are two major aims pursued in this important book, one that involves narration and one that involves theory. The narrative part of the book attempts to tell a story that is at odds with the commonly accepted story that natural, inherent, human rights started in the late medieval and early modern periods as the result of both nominalism and (capitalist) individualism. Wolterstorff's alternative narration, which he claims to be a more accurate telling of the story regarding natural, inherent, human rights, is that such rights were implicit in both Hebrew and Christian scriptures (but not in the eudaimonistic theories of the ancient Greek philosophers) and were then made explicit in