McConnell, T.C. (2000) Hugh McCann’s The Works of Agency (Cornell University Press, 1998) in Ethics 110(3) (April), pp. 656-657. Made available courtesy of Univ. of Chicago Press: http://www.press.uchicago.edu/ ***Reprinted with permission. No further reproduction is authorized without written permission from Univ. of Chicago Press. This version of the document is not the version of record. Figures and/or pictures may be missing from this format of the document.***


This book consists of eleven chapters, six previously published between 1972 and 1991. Chapters 1–2 concern the ontology of action. McCann defends a fine-grained approach, according to which when John Wilkes Booth moved his finger, thereby firing a gun, thereby killing Lincoln, he performed multiple actions. But in the spirit of conciliation, chapter 2 shows that action theory must also leave room for entities of a coarser sort in order to account for the unity of agency. Chapters 3–6 contrast two views about the foundations of actions. According to the causal theory, what counts as basic action is the motion of the bodily part in question being properly caused by a motivational state of the agent. The volitional theory, by contrast, does not seek to reduce agency but, rather, treats overt actions as grounded in the interior dispositions of the agent, which are known as volition. Chapter 3 provides conceptual arguments against the causal theory, and chapter 6 maintains that the theory cannot handle the problem of causal deviance. Chapter 4 offers conceptual arguments for the voluntarist theory, and chapter 5 advances an a posteriori argument for it based on clinical evidence about paralysis. Chapters 7–9 deal with freedom and the will, arguing against compatibilism and for an account of the formation and execution of intention that can be understood in noncausal terms. Chapters 10–11 address issues of practical
rationality, such as akrasia and whether it is ever rational for agents to try to achieve goals that they believe they will not accomplish.

As is typical of McCann's work in action theory, this book is well written, thorough, and interesting.

T. M.


Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999. Pp. 244. $57.95 (cloth); $16.95 (paper).

*The Social Contract Theorists* is a volume in the Rowman and Littlefield series Critical Essays on the Classics and includes selections from fairly recent (none earlier than 1970) papers and books on Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, along with a brief editor's introduction and bibliography. There is very little to complain about with respect to Morris's editing job: the most that one can say is that some of the cross-references, left unchanged from the original texts, lead nowhere and thus should be altered or eradicated. Any other complaints result from the editor's work but from the severe constraints under which he was laboring: he had to include a variety of top-flight selections, fairly equally distributed among Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, which in tandem cover the central issues of contention within the thought of these social contract theorists, and which at least some of the time manage to engage directly with one another—and this within the space of 250 pages. Morris includes selections on Hobbes by Gregory Kavka, M. M. Goldsmith, Jean Hampton, and David Gauthier; a paper on Hobbes and Locke by Gauthier; selections on Locke by John Simmons (two) and Joshua Cohen; and pieces on Rousseau by Patrick Riley, Cohen, John Charvet, and Arthur Ripstein. While there has been such a burgeoning of scholarly work on the early modern political thinkers that one could conceivably put together a top-notch set of essays that overlaps little with the papers that Morris collected, Morris's selections are invariably individually strong and collectively give a good feel for the recent interpretive and philosophical debates on this sort of social contract thought. It is a useful reference text for political philosophers and a nice secondary work for courses in political philosophy.

M. C. M.

Muller, Jerry Z., ed. *Conservatism: An Anthology of Social and Political Thought from David Hume to the Present.*


This excellent anthology of conservative thought is not a random collection of occasional pieces. The editor has a principled method of selection, explains what it is, and follows it consistently. The method is historical, and the principle is explained in the introduction, where the editor identifies some central themes that recur in conservative thought. These are human imperfection, epistemological modesty, presumption in favor of the enduring institutions and customs