Biography - Corrington, Robert S. (1950-)


Drew University, Casperson School of Graduate Studies, Madison, NJ, professor of philosophical theology. Previously professor at Pennsylvania State University.

**WRITINGS:**

12. Riding the Windhorse: Manic Depressive Disorder and the Quest for Wholeness, Hamilton Books (Lanham, MD), 2003.

Contributor to numerous academic journals, including Chrysalis, International Philosophical Quarterly, and the American Journal of Semiotics. Also author of two plays, Black Hole Sonata (or Waiting for Steven Hawking) and One, Two, Three.

"Sidelights"

A philosophy professor and semiotician, Robert S. Corrington has developed a particular philosophic perspective called ecstatic naturalism. In addition, Corrington is a student of the depth psychology of C. G. Jung and Wilhelm Reich. In his book The Community of Interpreters: On the Hermeneutics of Nature and the Bible in the American Philosophic Tradition, Corrington examines the American philosophers Ralph Waldo Emerson, Josiah Royce, and C. S. Pierce to establish an authentic American tradition, founded in nature, of semiotics and metaphysics. As Cross Currents contributor
James Campbell explained, "Corrington has laid out in lucid prose a compelling sketch of a living relationship among community, hermeneutics, nature, and religion. For him, community lives and grows as a process of mutual inquiry and interpretation." According to Corrington, the communal approach launched by Pierce is superior to the subjectivist work of European philosophers such as Martin Heidegger. Church History writer Douglas R. Sharp stated, "Corrington contends that it is the community which both restrains the primacy of individual experience and perspective, and suggests the criteria by which cogent interpretive decisions can be made." A reviewer for the Christian Century felt that "for most tastes, there's a bit too much jargon," but also noted the book's "startling insights." Religious Studies Review contributor Phil Mullins called The Community of Interpreters "immensely rich, though philosophically dense."

Corrington further explores this philosophical perspective in a loosely connected series of books exploring different aspects of naturalism. Nancy Frankenberry, writing in the Journal of the American Academy of Religion, commented that the series "integrate[s] a metaphysics of naturalism, semiotics in the tradition of C. S. Pierce, ordinal complexes as delineated in the work of Justus Buchler, and the author's own highly nuanced use of phenomenological and hermeneutical methods." Robert Cummings Neville, in the International Philosophical Quarterly, noted that Nature and Spirit: An Essay in Ecstatic Naturalism is a "brilliantly imaginative, serious book of systematic philosophy dealing in roughly equal parts with the self, community, world and God." Corrington further develops Pierce's theory of signs, adding a theory of "selving" through a process of interpreting the world around us. Again, there is much about the use of signs in community formation, and in contrast to the European Continental perspective, an emphasis on integration within nature, in the tradition of Justus Buchler. At the same time, Corrington explores the European phenomenological idea of "horizons," seeing "worldhood" as the sum of horizons.

When referring to Ecstatic Naturalism: Signs of the World, Choice reviewer W. B. Warde, Jr. predicted that readers "will find this study valuable as a historical journey and a harbinger of further inquiry." Roger A. Badham explained in Religious Studies Review that Nature's Self: Our Journey from Origin to Spirit explores the subconscious and unconscious aspects of the split between "nature naturing" and "nature natured," noting that we "as products of nature are aware of an internal fissure within ourselves." Corrington draws especially from the work of Carl Jung, finding an innate melancholy as the self confronts nature, from which it feels ejected. At the same time, archetypal images in the unconscious allow a bonding with nature, and a hope of transcending nature's opacity. In addition to Jung, Corrington draws on Julia Kristeva, Paul Tillich, and Martin Heidegger to explore this inner quest for meaning. Frankenberry, in her Journal of the American Academy of Religion review, concluded that "Nature's Self is elegant proof that the sweep of the metaphysical mind can only move from the inside out."

According to Wesley J. Wildman in the Journal of Religion, Corrington's A Semiotic Theory of Theology and Philosophy "plumbs the symbolic world as deeply as any philosophical theologian ever has." Corrington considers human invention of symbols within the framework of nature, finding that nature is an endless factory of signs that build on other signs in a never-ending process. In addition, Corrington uses this process as the basis for a post-theistic theology drawing especially on the work of Spinoza. Wildman stated, "This must be among the most difficult books ever written in the philosophy of religion, directly proportional to the richness of the author's mind. The book's argument is worth the reader's effort."

In a departure from naturalist and semiotic theory, Corrington turns to the life and work of a highly controversial figure in Wilhelm Reich: Psychoanalyst and Radical Naturalist. Reich, a sort of renegade Freudian, is perhaps best known for positing the sexual basis of nearly all human behavior, and for his pursuit of "orgone" energy. Often dismissed as a paranoid schizophrenic, Reich actually died in an American jail on a contempt-of-court charge after the Food and Drug Administration ordered his books banned, and even burned. A Kirkus Reviews contributor found that the author's effort "to champion Reich as an unduly overlooked revolutionary thinker is valiant but ultimately unconvincing." Library Journal reviewer E. James Lieberman found that the biography helps "restore a unique challenger to a place among Freud's more controversial offspring."
FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

PERIODICALS

- Environmental Politics, summer, 1995, Lisa Lebduska, review of Ecstatic Naturalism, p. 358.

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