

which liberal capitalism constrains eclecticism and open-endedness, taming radical democracy in the name of liberal democracy.

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*A Semiotic Theory of Theology and Philosophy* by Robert S. Corrington (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) xi + 268 pp.

Robert Corrington's recent book is a stunningly original and imaginatively developed work of metaphysics. The general perspective articulated here will be familiar in broad outline to the readers of Corrington's previous six books. But that should not dim their appreciation for the present volume, which summarizes some of the basic features of those earlier thought experiments while boldly pressing forward into new territory. Persons unfamiliar with Corrington's earlier work should brace themselves for an extraordinary reading experience with this text. Only a handful of brave souls really do metaphysics anymore; and absolutely no one does it in quite the way that Corrington does it.

Brief remarks in the preface to the book (pp. ix-x) accurately map the intellectual terrain that Corrington intends to traverse, while also recording the major influences on his thought. His metaphysics, in the first place, is an odd type of philosophical naturalism, in important respects indebted to the thought of Justus Buchler. At the same time, his project resembles in many ways the speculative systems of Hegel and Schelling. Certainly Corrington is closer to the latter than to most of those philosophers typically classified as "naturalists" in the American tradition. The very concept of "nature" that he employs is one sufficiently capacious (typically an honorific term in Corrington's writing) to distinguish his metaphysics from most forms of naturalism. Nature is all that there is for Corrington; it has no opposite and nothing can be conceived as being outside of it (p. 10). For most philosophers, the natural defines a category, but Corrington locates nature on the "volatile cusp" between the categorial and the pre-categorial (p. 6), between *natura naturata* and *natura naturans*. Corrington's sustained, brilliant, but frequently paradoxical meditations on the pre-categorial, the realm of nature naturing, that vast, dark and mysterious "underconscious" of nature, represent perhaps his most distinctive philosophical contribution.

Those meditations draw heavily on psychoanalytic theory, from Freud and Jung to Kristeva, the second "stream" of thought identified in the preface. As employed by Corrington, psychoanalysis is more than a method for understanding human selves and "selving." In fact, it is a fertile source of metaphysical and cosmological insight. I am being soberly literal when I suggest that in this book Corrington proceeds to psychoanalyze the cosmos. On his account, psychoanalytic concepts and categories apply most directly to the complex processes of nature naturing as they partially manifest themselves in the world of signs. These concepts are neither exclusively nor primarily to be used for the purpose of understanding the human psyche or humanly generated sign systems.

The third major influence is American pragmatism and here Corrington surely succeeds in doing what his preface promises. This is a book that truly "honors the spirit of Peirce and Dewey" (as well as Royce, I might add). He displays a deep understanding of the pragmatic tradition, an appreciation of it, even as he submits

it to penetrating criticism. Unlike the neopragmatists, from whom he frequently distances himself (and like Robert Neville, whom he criticizes but clearly admires), Corrington does not shrink from the metaphysics of pragmatism, as he incorporates some of those metaphysical insights in his own "ecstatic naturalism." Here the semiotic theory of Charles Peirce is of special significance for Corrington, although both that semiotic and the metaphysics that informs it have to be adapted in order to suit his specific purposes.

The final stream identified by Corrington is explicitly religious. The desideratum for theology, in Corrington's view, is a "truly universalistic religious consciousness," one that will transcend the patriarchal limitations of traditional western monotheisms. Influences here are more difficult to discern. Not only is Corrington sharply critical of mainstream western religious thought, but also this aspect of his own system is perhaps the one that is least fully developed. Nevertheless, the ghost of Tillich continues to haunt Corrington's theological deliberations. He also cites Unitarian Universalism and Vedanta as key sources of insight.

This project is impressive in its general scope and conception; but there is also considerable beauty in the detailed features of the system. I might mention, as a few examples of what this reader found particularly noteworthy, the following: the analysis of how, in the basic moods of melancholy and ecstasy, the self becomes open to the encounter with nature naturing (pp. 39-40; compare the early Heidegger on anxiety and the later Heidegger on boredom as a fundamental "attunement"); the compelling account of "natural communities" and their often violent refusal/suppression of alien or novel sign vehicles (pp. 127-134); a provocative discussion of the relationship between the aesthetic and religious spheres (pp. 146-153); the fascinating semiotic meditation on Stonehenge (pp. 154-163); and the ingenious application to semiotic cosmology of the mathematical theory of infinitesimals (pp. 199, 245).

Readers will differ not only in what they find noteworthy, but also in what they regard as problematic. My longstanding preoccupation with the subtle complexities of Peirce's philosophy is probably at the source of my concern that not all of Corrington's improvements on Peirce represent real intellectual progress. I am not sure, for example, that he has properly assessed the nature and significance of Peirce's "anthropomorphism" or of his "panpsychism." I am not convinced that Peirce's concept of the "interpretant" is nearly as "encapsulated and information-driven" as Corrington worries that it is (p. 95). And I am enough of a Scotistic voluntarist to prefer some version of Peirce's theory of developmental teleology to the radically delimited account of free will that Corrington provides (pp. 205-207).

Aside from exegetical quibbles about Peirce's philosophy, there are more substantive concerns about the theological and ethical upshot of Corrington's worldview. It is unclear to this reader what is at stake in the choice between Corrington's "post-monotheism" and a more traditional theism that has been chastened both by its own self-criticisms and a healthy respect for the divine mystery. Indeed, is postmonotheism to be regarded as any kind of theism at all? At times, the dark underconscious of nature, nature naturing, seems to play the role in Corrington's philosophy that concepts of "God" or "the sacred" might play in other systems of thought. But any philosophical talk about the pre-categorial is bound to be paradoxical, probing, and tentative. Thus, it is difficult to assess the importance for theology of such talk.

That the unconscious be brought to consciousness whenever possible is clearly of great moral significance on Corrington's account; indeed, his insistence on this point represents "the moral force behind and within ecstatic naturalism" (p. 206). Yet it is difficult for me to see precisely how Corrington's ethical concerns are related either to the shrunken concept of human freedom that he supplies or to his equally vigorous insistence on the principle of "ontological parity." Nothing has more or less being than anything else. Realities may differ, but not in terms of how much reality

they possess. Deleuze, in *Difference and Repetition*, misappropriated Duns Scotus' doctrine of the univocity of being to achieve just this kind of leveling effect, a democratization of being. But I am suspicious with Deleuze, as well as with Corrington, that this sort of principle might create more problems for ethical deliberation than it resolves.

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