

ments, and the insights behind the blindspots metaphor are sifted from the misnomers and disanalogies, the complex linking of philosophical themes and the hint of a unified solution to so many diverse problems in Sorensen's investigation remains an impressive guide to further inquiry.

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*American Religious Empiricism.* William Dean. Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1986. Pp. 150. Paper, \$12.95.

*History Making History: The New Historicism in American Religious Thought.* William Dean. Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1988. Pp. 175. Paper, \$10.95.

Contemporary philosophy and theology both seem more concerned with the elaboration of methodologies than with probing into the recurrent and pervasive features of the world. A corroding skepticism, to a large extent the product of a militant and unself-conscious neo-Kantianism, makes it difficult to move beyond the cluster of self-validating methods toward an appraisal of the orders of nature. The emphasis on signifiers and on sheer historicity has made all exploration of generic traits suspect. The current revival of pragmatism might seem more promising for the future of fundamental reflection were it not for the subjectivistic bias of neopragmatists such as Rorty, Bernstein, and Putnam. Their appropriation of James, Dewey, and Peirce seems to serve interests quite alien to the originators of pragmatism and ignores the metaphysical implications of radical empiricism. The pragmatists' painstaking elaborations of experience and nature are replaced with methodological reflections on the implications of pluralism for the finite hermeneutic agent. Neopragmatism fails to carry forward the complex metaphysical insights of the classical period.

In his detailed analyses of the rise and premature decline of American empiricism, William Dean struggles beyond the solipsism of methodology for its own sake to examine the ways in which classical American thought can refocus and redefine the energies of philosophical and theological reflection. His achievement is all the more important because of the poverty of so much contemporary reflection and its inability to illuminate those features of nature that the earlier tradition once made available to us. What is of special interest is his concern with showing how American empiricism is compatible with several of the key insights of post-modernism.

Dean's approach is both broad minded and philosophically suggestive for the genuine appropriation of the classical tradition.

Classical empiricism refused to acknowledge anything beyond atomistic sense data and was incapable of articulating social inference and some sense of the "more" that surrounds and permeates any finite experience. In the pragmatic reconstruction of empiricism, these limitations gave way to a phenomenologically dense account of the traits of lived experience. Dean contrasts the classical and pragmatic accounts:

Radical empiricist philosophers distinguished themselves from eighteenth century British empiricists by adding to the five senses certain other senses, such as the sense of beauty, the sense of a "more," the senses of aversion or attraction, and the senses of quality. Further, these philosophers claimed that these valuational senses had an objective referent, that they responded to a locus of objective value in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Radical empiricism remains permeable to the natural, social, and aesthetic characteristics of finite human experience and refuses to confine awareness to the clear and distinct. By the same token, it provides a means by and through which we can understand qualitative configurations in the realms of art and religion. The pragmatic reconstruction of the concept of experience extends the scope of epistemology to include social and communal traits as well as those that are personal and idiosyncratic. This new framework, when reinforced by pragmatic and instrumental forms of inquiry, provides a more flexible and open horizon within which to disclose the generic features of nature and the complexes of the world.

Dean explores the tensions between an older historicism, which accepts many of the presuppositions of modernism, and the newer historicism that works within the horizon of post-modernism. The older historicism, as manifest in such thinkers as Schleiermacher, Hegel, and Dilthey, assumes that the finite historical agent is also open to an extra-historical power that is free from the tensions of finite freedom and destiny. The newer historicism assumes that the only actualities are within history, both cosmic and human, and that no avenue exists through which one can escape the realms of the finite. This newer historicism is part and parcel of a post-modernism that rejects the ahistorical, the transcendental ego, and foundationalism. For Dean, the newer historicism is more sensitive to the power of finite historical horizons as they struggle to reappropriate the horizons of the past.

Neopragmatism seems in some respects to correspond to the new historicism proffered by Dean. Yet it fails to escape from the tyranny of its own

skepticism and obsession with method. Neopragmatism has become alienated from its roots in naturalism and has thereby explored only one side of the post-modern horizon. More basic than the sheer plurality of horizons is the presence of natural compulsion and habit that serve to groove and shape the horizons of human history. History is a continuing assimilation of the horizontal plenitude of nature and human culture. We gain access to this growing history through finite human experience. Dean insists that the radical empiricism of James, especially as modified by Dewey's social categories, provides us with the means to understand the traits of an evolving world and a changing self. Neopragmatism appropriated James's pluralism without understanding the natural and cosmic conditions that governed the direction of the flow of experience. Pluralism without nature is solipsism in a new guise.

The new historicism is friendly both to classical pragmatism and to contemporary deconstruction. For many, these two movements make very strange bedfellows, but for Dean they converge on the common insight that history is indefinitely self-appropriating through a chain of signifiers. For Dean:

A deconstructionist historical method would analyze the reality of the past by following the chain of signs, the writings on writings, the interpretations of interpretations, that constitute the reality of the past. It would emphasize the free augmentation of historical orders and meanings as they are constructed by ever-expanding interpretations.<sup>2</sup>

Dean insists, unlike many deconstructionists, that the chain of signs reaches down into the heart of history and points to non-linguistic, and pre-human structures that are not themselves mere signifiers. The pragmatic dimension of the new historicism limits the omnivorous pantextualism of deconstruction. Neopragmatism thus comes closer to a one-sided deconstructionism than to classical pragmatism.

By combining classical pragmatism and radical empiricism with contemporary deconstruction, Dean is in a position to develop criteria for historical appropriation that will insure the growth of concrete value in the self and in society. Deconstruction, insofar as it operates outside of the ballast provided by pragmatism, leaves us without meaningful structures for social communication. Content, that is, *what* is known, is ignored. Dean states:

Ironically, while the transcendental self may have been deconstructed, this led to a new, more intense subjectivism and meth-

odologism, a preoccupation with understanding how one understands anything at all.<sup>3</sup>

The deconstruction of the self, while not inappropriate, needs to be governed by larger historical insights into the growth and evolution of a non-transcendental self as it attains values and meanings that transcend its finite location. Dean's analysis of Dewey and the implications of Darwin show in clear terms how an overemphasis on signification for its own sake makes it impossible to address the problems of social reconstruction. The anti-political, perhaps reactionary, aspects of deconstructive politics are challenged by the pragmatic demand for just social consensus. Dean makes it clear that the new historicism is in sympathy with the older liberal tradition, even while challenging its optimistic theology and anthropology.

In the continual reappropriation of past horizons, the community is concerned with enriching and enhancing the scope of concrete reasonableness in the universe. Process metaphysics has developed a conception of God that can still play a role in the new historicism. Dean argues that the older Chicago School of theology, as exemplified in such theologians as Case, Meland, Weiman, and Loomer, worked within the framework of radical empiricism and thus emphasized the correlation between God and finite human experience. At the same time, it attempted to show how theological categories reflect the deeper aspirations and needs of American culture. This theological movement was eclipsed in the 1930's and 40's by the growing power of neo-orthodoxy coming out of Europe. The so-called "crisis" theologies of Barth, Brunner, and Tillich, rejected the claims of natural theology and social science for a theology that assumed a vertical relation between God and the self. No attempt was made to integrate theological dogmatics with social theory or social need. Dean sees this premature rejection of the older Chicago School as part of a larger failure to understand the nature of the post-modern world.

Not all of the older Chicago School theologians were process thinkers but they all struggled to show how human experience is related to the growth and expression of God. Dean argues that process thought can be reconstructed to emphasize the consequent and evolving dimensions of God rather than the ahistorical and primordial dimension. His criticisms of Hartshorne stress the difficulties in defending a modal and logical analysis of God in the face of the post-modern challenge to atemporal structures. In addition, the optimistic liberalism of the Chicago School ignored the power of evil within God itself and thereby fell prey to cultural projections

that reflected only one aspect of American experience. By going back to the classical pragmatists, Dean insists that we can incorporate a deeper sense of divine evolution and self-overcoming that reflects the evil within God. The divine life is part and parcel of nature and exhibits the tensions of natural evolution, including the irruption of both novelty and variation.

The theology emerging from the new historicism is not confined to the projections of a religious imagination. God is actual outside of human life and thought and lives as a unifying power within human communities. Dean states:

James, Dewey, and Whitehead advance a cosmology in which the interpretive process is alone real, and in which that process is actualized and created only in the present subjective experience of interpretation. This is a third position. It is not a subjectivism, for subjective experience is understood to arise from past objects and to be validated or invalidated by reference to future objects. It is not an individualism, for in the most profound ways the self is social and historical in that it is internally related to and composed by its social past and externally related to and constitutive of the social future.<sup>4</sup>

This third position, referred to as "naturalistic historicism," locates the human search for God within the compulsive horizons of nature and history. God's own life is enhanced by our contributions to the growth of meaning and value within human communities. Both God and the finite human self are social and evolving toward a more value-rich universe. Dean strips process metaphysics of its ahistorical modernism to bring it more in line with post-modern thought. The older Chicago School developed many of the empiricist insights that will reappear within the framework of the new historicism. When these insights are deepened and refashioned by the classical pragmatic tradition, an adequate and forceful doctrine of God will emerge.

No conception of the divine natures will long prevail if it is not directly related to a historical community in search of redemption and transformation. The new historicism can only function in the context of a community of believers who wish to provide a proper locus for God's manifestation within finite experience. The community is part of the evolution of both God and history and responds both to the divine lure and to the deposits of the tradition. Theology serves to actualize and define a present community in terms of past communities:

A theologian as an interpreting historian is an historian, and writes about religious individuals, religious thinkers, and religious communities of the past; but as an interpreter this theologian reads the past in a way that makes it pragmatically useful for a present community.<sup>5</sup>

The traditional concepts of the authority of the church and or scripture need to be redefined in terms of the pragmatic tests of the contemporary community. The most reliable and compelling authority for the religious life, whether personal or communal, is the realm of finite human experience as it becomes permeable to the "more" that surrounds our specific projects and concerns. Dean makes it clear that an adequate theory of God will entail an equally adequate theory of ecclesiastic and secular communities. The crisis theologies that emerged between the two World Wars frequently ignored this logical and experiential connection and thereby weakened their scope and efficacy. Without a proper metaphysics of community, the doctrine of God becomes alien to the life of interpreters.

The theologies of Schleiermacher and Tillich rely on the concept of religious experience but fail, according to Dean, to move into the post-modern perspective. Schleiermacher's "absolute dependence" on God only reinforces the modernist commitment to an atemporal and non-historical reality beyond the fitful and novel orders of finite human history. Even though the religious self is a part of human history, its God is not. By the same token, Tillich's analysis of faith as "ultimate concern" drives the existential self beyond the horizons of history toward the power of Being that underlies nature and time. American radical empiricism incorporates such a stress on religious experience within a more radical and pluralized sense of the orders of history. Theological liberalism was too ready to efface history in a drive toward the absolute ground of all experience. Naturalistic historicism makes history the category by which all others are measured and structured.

The God of radical empiricism is the God of an ambiguous and fragmented history. As noted, this history is both cosmic and communal and limits the reach of the divine life itself. If evil is a part of history then it is a part of God. Referring to the theology of Bernard Loomer, Dean states:

Loomer's signal reminder to today's new historicist is that there is every empirical reason to believe that our history and its general impetus are tragically ambiguous, and that they do not necessarily

foster a good, a redemptive, a creative conversational community. In their utter ambiguity, our history and its God are as likely to engender conversations and interactions that are destructive as conversations and interactions that are creative.<sup>6</sup>

The naive optimism of a Rorty or of a traditional progressive liberal are challenged by the new historicism that insists that God is fully embedded in the tragedy of history. Like Carl Jung, Dean demands that we take seriously the shadow side of God and incorporate that vision into our more complete picture of the divine life. History makes and remakes itself as an expression of God's eternal self-transformation. Like William James, Dean also insists that God is in need of the agency of finite human selves to fulfill its purposes in history.

Dean's understanding of naturalistic historicism has much to commend it and will undoubtedly evoke creative responses. However, like many new projects, it overstates its claims to comprehensiveness and drives the image of history appropriating history too far. Dean's specific criticisms of neo-pragmatism are certainly well founded and show the superiority of the classical pragmatic tradition over its pale contemporary imitation. At the same time, his use of radical empiricism in the new theological context is bold and sound. The difficulty in his project lies in its privileging of history over nature and the consequent difficulties in building a more differentiated doctrine of God.

Nature is more than the self-interpretive process of historical horizons. There is, of course, a sense in which natural history can be seen as a sign series that leaves complex traces of its evolution. Josiah Royce presented such a case in his 1913 *The Problem of Christianity*. But there is an even stronger sense in which nature is the non-located potency that makes historical horizons possible at all. Clearly, some orders are historical while others are not. To take the traits of human communal orders and apply them to all complexes seems to violate the deeper pluralism that Dean wishes to enforce. Nature is not only the 'sum' of all actual and possible interpretations, it is the pre-formal potency that drives 'outward' toward the realms of intelligibility. Using more traditional language, we can call this aspect nature in its naturing. In a striking sense, God is as much an eject of nature as are the other historical orders. Yet this finite and historical dimension of God belongs to a more pervasive order of sheer providingness that lives as the enabling ground for any complex whether historical or not. To privilege the orders of history is to ignore the other side of the ontologi-

cal difference, that is, of nature in its naturing which is the source for nature as natured.

To develop an adequate and forceful account of God one must transcend the confines of radical empiricism, no matter how broadly drawn, and probe into the enabling conditions for finite human experience. Dean's project takes us to the edges of pragmatic method and its generous understanding of experience but it does not grapple with the providingness that makes it possible for the world and its God to prevail at all.

More pointedly, radical empiricism's sense of the "more" needs to be lifted outside of the traits of human experience. Deep in the heart of nature naturing is a primal sense of the "more" that cannot be reduced to a trait of historical experience. Both God and the world of human and pre-human orders point toward an encompassing that is not to be confined to the self-appropriation of history. This encompassing potency is neither a sign nor a body of interpretations and actively overturns all attempted appropriations. The God of the new historicism fails to point toward the encompassing measure in and through which the divine life discovers its own inner laws of growth and change. Dean's project helps us to understand the God of history but fails to illuminate the encompassing that lives as the lure for divine evolution. Of course, from his perspective, such an encompassing, or God beyond God, sounds like an echo from the now transcended modernist period. In reply, one can insist that no articulation of the divine is complete that fails to become permeable to the abyss within which the world and its God find their measure. This abyss lies beyond all historicism, whether old or new.

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#### NOTES

1. William Dean, *American Religious Empiricism*, (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1986), p. 36.
2. William Dean, *American Religious Empiricism*, p. 55.
3. William Dean, *History Making History: The New Historicism in American Religious Thought*, (Albany, New York, 1988), p. 129.
4. William Dean, *History Making History: The New Historicism in American Religious Thought*, p. 132.
5. William Dean, *American Religious Empiricism*, p. 114.
6. William Dean, *History Making History: The New Historicism in American Religious Thought*, p. 121.