I have regretfully avoided these byways, intriguing though they are, for the main highway—the "average," "typical" American funerary practices, surely fully as curious as any of the customs derived from ancient folklore or modern variants" (xi). While there is no question about the need to study such "byways"—that is, the need for investigations of death in multicultural America—Mitford does not explore how ethnic and new immigrant groups negotiate the delicate balance of maintaining particular traditions and conforming to distinctly American practices when the dead are ushered out of living society. This area of research could have provided ample support for her jaundiced, skeptical views, as well as larger arguments related to the Americanization of death practices. It might have also led her to reconsider the rather myopic view of American deathways presented in these pages.

In addition, Mitford's conventional analysis of the relations between the industry and various religious institutions is rather one-dimensional and tending toward the sensational; a richer, more intricate analysis of death, religious sensibilities, and American culture would yield a completely different perspective on the American funeral. But Mitford's book is too important, and too enjoyable, to wish for something else. It is a highly valuable, rewarding work. In spite of the authoritative position it has attained, *The American Way of Death* is not the last word on funerals, or death for that matter, in America.

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Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion, and Ethics. By Nancey Murphy. Westview Press, 1997. 228 pages. $18.95.

Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology. By J. Wentzel van Huyssteen. William B. Eerdmans, 1997. 286 pages. $35.00.

There are a lot of "posts" in these two books: post-structuralist, post-foundationalist, post-modernist, post-liberal. There are a lot of "antis" too: anti-individualist, anti-reductionist, anti-foundationalist, anti-rationalist, anti-naturalist, anti-realist, anti-relativist. These two authors are saying what a lot of people are saying, namely, that we are post-something, and either anti the things we are post or anti the antis that are also post. For my part, I used to be post-anti, but now I am anti-post and trying hard to be post-anti-post. I need all the help I can get, and so I am glad to have read Murphy and van Huyssteen.

Both books are collections of previously published essays. Both offer orientations to the contemporary intellectual scene as far as philosophy, science, and theology are concerned. Both offer diagnoses of our situation, noting the proliferation of dead-end intellectual options, unresolvable debates, and ill-framed questions. Both advocate specific conceptions of intellectual activity in this situation. Both argue that his or her new conception is the key to transcending the morass of frustrations that make people want to be post and anti so much in the

first place. That is why the two books are being reviewed jointly. The two books have obvious differences, however, beginning with the style of analysis and extending to the suggestions offered for setting a variety of intellectual activities on a better path. I will be paying slightly more attention to Murphy's book but both are genuinely interesting and important.

Murphy's aim throughout the book is to show that the western intellectual climate is changing in fundamental ways. In fact, she predicts that historians will eventually judge the change to be as significant as the one that occurred in the time and person of Descartes (2). Murphy uses the contrast between modernism and postmodernism to designate the shift only with great reluctance because the word "postmodern" has many other claimants. She is perfectly clear that she has and wants "nothing to do with the Lyotardians, Derridians, De Mannians" (1). Rather, she aims to articulate a distinctive version of postmodernism that she calls "Anglo-American" postmodernity. While disappointed that Murphy makes no effort in these essays to understand what her version of postmodernity might have to do with other versions—there is some fascinating common ground, as van Huyssteen shows—I appreciated the firmness with which she distinguished her usage from all others. She has her own agenda and claims the word "postmodern" for it even at the risk of misunderstanding, a risk she accepts with good humor.

Chapter 1 develops the distinction central to the book's thesis between modern and postmodern thought. Modern philosophical thought, Murphy contends, has been tied to the assumptions guiding three classes of debates. The first bears on epistemological foundationalism, which stipulates that propositions are justified by showing how they can be inferred from indubitable foundational propositions. The implicit building metaphor is shared by most modern philosophers, Murphy claims, with persistent disagreements over how to form the foundation (e.g., clear and distinct ideas or sense data?), how to infer properly (e.g., is induction allowed?), and how much we can know anyway (e.g., the skeptical objection). All parties to these quarrels accept the terms of the debate, terms that Murphy and numerous others think are wrong-headed. The second debate characteristic of modern thought bears on referentialism in the philosophy of language. Referentialism is a theory of linguistic meaning whereby language is meaningful by virtue of its capacity to refer. The contentions here concern the basic units of meaningful language (words or sentences?), about how those units refer, and about whether there is anything to refer to anyway (expressivism or representationalism?). All these disputes are guided by shared assumptions, some of which are sufficiently mistaken so that transcending the debate is the only way to make headway, according to Murphy. The third typically modern debate is a metaphysical one concerning relations between parts and wholes. The enormous success of atomism and reductionism in modern physics spread far and wide through western culture, says Murphy, inducing controversies about human action and ethics (individualism or collectivism?) and spawning everything from atomic sensations to linguistic atoms.

Murphy reserves the term "postmodern" for thinkers and views that transcend the terms of these three debates without simply making a nostalgic return to premodern modes of thought (8). The obvious question is whether the post-

moderns in Murphy's sense exhibit significant agreement. Murphy's unsurprising answer is that they do. On each of the three topics characteristic of modern thought there is convergence around holistic approaches. First, epistemological holism is a form of post-foundationalism for which Murphy takes W. V. O. Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (1951) to be the key publication. Quine's metaphor of the web of belief nicely contrasts with the building metaphors so apt for foundationalist views of justification. Second, linguistic holism attends to the context of language, seeing speech as a form of action and paying attention to all dimensions of such acts and not just their possible fact-asserting content. Murphy looks to L. Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) and J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (1962) as the keys works in this case. Third, scientific holism adds top-down causation to the customary bottom-up causation of atomistic reductionism, all developments in the last two or three decades, according to Murphy. This is not merely the anti-reductionism of mind-body dualists or biological vitalists but a version of physicalism that allows both for the emergence of complex realities whose characteristics and governing laws cannot be reduced to those of lower-level constituents and for mutual influence between parts and wholes.

Subsequent chapters examine themes in the philosophy of language (Part I), philosophy of religion (Part II), and science, religion, and ethics (Part III). Particularly important in some of these chapters is Murphy's working out of her subthesis that conservative forms of Christian theology can reap tremendous benefits by paying attention to the way that Anglo-American postmodernity liberates them from futile battles. The promised payoff is essentially that of the post-Liberal theological scenario: a new era of powerful and relevant theological reflection within the context of the language games of Christian communal life worlds.

There is a wealth of clear-headed thinking here, mostly of two sorts. On the one hand, Murphy seems to have a passion for tidying up philosophical messes or, better, diagnosing philosophical tangles in Wittgensteinian fashion as the result of our own mistakes and then finding ways to leave the tangle behind. On the other hand, Murphy articulates arguments for her own views with economy and vigor. She has a lucid writing style that matches her mode of thought. She is also relentless: each essay drives home the thesis of the book from a new angle. The book is correspondingly unified as a result, which is a welcome feature in any presentation of revised versions of previously published material.

Because I am striving to be post-anti-post, I do not begrudge Murphy her idiosyncratic use of "postmodernism." What she does with it is worth the trouble, and connecting her version with even a few other usages of the "postmodernism" would be a sufficiently infuriating undertaking that most people would give up before starting (though van Huyssteen tries it with some success). Idiosyncrasy is a small price to pay for sanity. I do want to lodge a complaint, however, about her idiosyncratically narrow account of the origins of the view she defends. The sources for these holist moves are basically Anglo-American, on Murphy's analysis; thus the book's title. But Murphy goes back only as far as the mid-twentieth century for the key players in her story. Folk such as myself are glad to hear our own message being so eloquently defended but think of the luminaries in Mur-

phy's genealogy as latecomers in an established pattern of conversation that was initiated much earlier by a string of especially American philosophers. Turn-of-the-century philosopher C. S. Peirce, for example, was resolutely holist in all three of Murphy's senses. He was a post-foundationalist who anticipated Quine on holist justification by half a century. He had an elaborate semiotic theory and theory of language in which linguistic meaning derives from patterns of language use, thereby interpreting reference chiefly in terms of the usefulness of those usage patterns. And he was a sophisticated philosopher of science who anticipated the main elements of I. Lakatos's methodology of research programs and rejected atomistic reductionism in favor of holistic models of nature. He was, in other words, correct on all three of Murphy's counts—and it is not a matter of reading between the lines of Peirce's writing to see this, either—yet he does not rate a mention in Murphy's book. The same goes with variations for the other so-called paleopragmatists (a term coined by R. Neville and needed to distinguish their projects from neopragmatists such as R. Rorty), including especially W. James and J. Dewey. A common element in their biologically oriented approach was the concept of habit, already developed in profound ways by D. Hume, who appears in Murphy's book only as an archetypally modern skeptic. And the same ideas are embraced in various ways in the philosophers of the early twentieth century's Chicago School, especially H. N. Wieman; in the Boston Personalists, especially E. S. Brightman; and in process metaphsyics.

Idiosyncrasy with regard to the use of "postmodernism" is one thing; such an extraordinarily idiosyncratic usage of "Anglo-American" is quite another. Of course, we all neglect antecedents in favor of the crystallizing luminaries of new ideas—and rightly so when antecedent thinkers never pulled all the pieces together. But it would be absurd to try to make such a case with regard to so influential a group of thinkers as Peirce, James, Dewey, Wieman, Brightman, Whitehead, Hartshorne, and their ilk (neglecting for the moment earlier modern and pre-modern antecedents), each of whom displayed not merely one but two and usually all three of Murphy's types of holism. For over a century epistemic foundationalism has been a non-issue for those who have learned from these British and American philosophers. Similarly, reference has been understood as an influence on linguistic meaning that is heavily mediated by habits and communities of discourse; causation has been approached in holistic fashion; and reductionistic approaches to explanation have been complemented with other modes of analysis. Those of us who stand in this diverse family of Anglo-American philosophical traditions are glad to have Murphy working among our ranks in her own distinctive way, even as we were glad to welcome before her in various (sometimes contradictory and usually limited) respects Wittgenstein, Austin, Quine, Kuhn, Lakatos, Searle, Campbell, and others to whom Murphy makes appeal.

That my struggle toward the bliss of post-anti-postness is a work in progress must be evident by now. I like those old anti-post philosophers. They saw right through modernity's various fallacies of misplaced concreteness (Whitehead's phrase) so beautifully described by Murphy, and they got on with business while resisting the urge to describe themselves as post-anything. To speak anachronistically, they were anti-postmodern because they saw the defining characteristics of

modernity as having less to do with the epistemic foundationalism that they so effortlessly overthrew and more to do with the new worlds opened up by the natural and social sciences. They thought of the strictly referential and purely expressivist theories of meaning as quaintly oversimplified and praised modern philosophy instead for its vast awakening with regard to the complexities of language and the communities that use it. And paying close attention to the richness of their own experience, they had no time for the enthusiasm of atomistic reductionism in science because they believed modern philosophy had unearthed so many other layers and types of analysis. That's why they had no need to be post anything and why their readings of their modern philosophic heritage, so different from Murphy's, led them to be what I would (again, anachronistically) call more anti-post than anything. And here am I, longing for the post-anti-post indifference to these debates that is grounded in trust that the richness of philosophy in all eras pretty much makes caricatures of any characterizations. Longing, I say, because it is hard to be post-anti-post in a world of posts and anti-posts and because here I have abandoned my resolve to stand serenely above the debate. Be that as it may, even if it just is not fair of Murphy to hijack the term "Anglo-American," and even if my remarks about the heritage of these ideas casts doubt on her thesis about a change of eras, there has rarely been a more accessible account of the issues than Murphy's.

In *Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology* van Huyssteen portrays modern modes of thought as obsessed with epistemic foundations, meta-narratives, and comprehensive explanations of reality. By contrast, postmodern modes of thought focus on the local, circumstantial, traditioned character of human rationality and thus constantly derail modern trains of thought. Van Huyssteen appreciates the postmodern interruptions for their trenchant critique of foundationalist epistemology but judges the postmodern vision of local, tradition-bound, and mutually incommensurable rationalities to be unrealistic. He wants to transcend the postmodern and the modern extremes, joining the postmodern appreciation for tradition and context with the modern concern for justification of claims in broadly public ways. This way of having one's cake while eating it is named "postfoundationalism" by van Huyssteen, and he intends it to be one sort of postmodern project. He points out, however, that postmodern thinkers are frequently not postfoundationalist, concluding that learning from the postmodern critique of epistemic foundationalism does not in itself constitute a constructive solution.

Van Huyssteen's postfoundationalist vision for a new theological era has several notable features besides postfoundationalism, which carries much the same connotation as it does for Murphy. One is what he calls "interdisciplinarity" whereby many forms of intellectual inquiry are brought to bear on theological reflection. The other is the public character of theology whereby its postfoundationalism and interdisciplinarity serve to invite many voices into the theological task as dialogue partners. While theologians remain the faithful and convinced bearers of their community's convictions in this scenario, they are also able to break out of the marginalizing insularity that plagues theologies focused only on their own communities by resolving to learn where possible from other insights. Van Huysteen is extremely critical of the insular approach to Christian theology, and I heartily agree. Many of his essays in this volume argue against it and urge a

chastened acceptance and disciplined pursuit of the rational dimensions of theology in its place.

These two books make for fascinating comparison, and I make only three points here. First, where Murphy cleans up the term "postmodern" and then idiosycratically uses it to name her recommended way forward, van Huyssteen preserves the messy ambiguity of the word "postmodern" and uses another word, "postfoundationalism," to name his constructive proposal. In view of the cacophony of postmodern voices, it is hard to choose between Murphy's clarity and van Huyssteen's descriptive adequacy.

Second, Murphy and van Huyssteen agree on postfoundationalism but Murphy beats the drum of nonreductionist holism louder than van Huyssteen does, and they actually disagree on referentialism. In the terms of Murphy's analysis, van Huysteen's concern for critical realism and reference in science and theology might seem to be an archetypally modern instinct. In the terms of van Huyssteen's analysis, Murphy's stress on "meaning is use" goes too far in the direction of postmodern localist ideology and neglects the fact that there is no theological or scientific rationality without reference. Actually, van Huyssteen devotes chapter 4 to a discussion of Murphy's *Theology in an Age of Scientific Reasoning* (1990). There he rightly enters this objection and argues instead for a fallibilist, experiential epistemology as the best way to do justice both to the reality of successful reference and to the fact of the traditioned character of human rationality. In the book under review here, however, Murphy is more careful to say that Anglo-American postmodernity stands for *transcending* the debate between referentialism and expressivism. She says very little about how successful reference is achieved by speech acts within the language games of scientific and religious communities, however, and I am left wondering how this debate is supposed to be transcended. Her former stress on a *move* from referentialism to "meaning as use" seems to live on in the later view, but I think the clarified, later view is better. Van Huyssteen spends more time spelling out how successful reference is achieved within traditioned forms of speech but does not have the philosophical tools needed to break the problem open decisively. It follows that both could profit from the century-old and wonderfully clear solution to this problem found in paleopragmatists such as Peirce.

Finally, Murphy's book is nothing if not clear and economical in its argumentation, even if (as I have said) reality gets represented a bit too cleanly in the process. While I appreciate van Huyssteen's resistance to simplifying any issue, his prose is denser and his presentation of arguments burdened by the complexity he seeks to manage. This indicates the strengths and weaknesses of the two books in literary terms, but only relatively speaking, because both books are well written and conceived. Both books also make serious contributions to our understanding of what normative religious language (theology) could possibly look like in our postmodern future. And reading them has convinced me that it is harder to stay above the fray as a cool post-anti-post when post and anti-post arguments are flying through the air all around me. Ah, maybe next time.

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