vince his critics and convert them into pluralists. Most of them view pluralism, at least as Hick formulates it, as depriving Christianity of its uniqueness and preferential status and this itself, whether or not pluralism is philosophically defensible, is reason enough to reject it.

Most Christian denominations view pluralism as dangerous. Cardinal Ratzinger and the Vatican's sharp criticism of pluralism, and the characterization of it as relativism of the worst kind, echoes the sentiments of mainline Christianity. Hick's investigations and conclusions challenge the theological and ecclesial status quo, rendering Hick a threat to Christianity and a foe of the churches. Although he does not write in order to instigate controversy, he does not seem to be bothered by his role as a pariah to some within the philosophical, theological, or ecclesial communities. Hick envisions a "second Christianity" that will radically revise Christianity and will situate it among, and not above, the major religious traditions of the world. His critics accuse him of abandoning the uniqueness of Christianity and, paraphrasing Pinnock, an evangelical theologian, simply aping the ways of contemporary culture without offering an alternative. His is, they say, the epitome of a spent liberalism. It is too early to tell whether Hick's work will endure. Surely the ideas he has championed have caused an entire generation of thinkers to take him seriously, and that itself, for a scholar who has contributed to the conversation for more than fifty years, must be satisfying.

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CORRINGTON, ROBERT S. *A Semiotic Theory of Theology and Philosophy.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000. xii+268 pp. $59.95 (cloth).

Something as familiar as symbol usage may not seem promising as a topic for close analysis. But philosophically minded people thrive on first noticing the familiar, no mean feat, and then plumbing its depths. In this volume, Robert S. Corrington plumbs the symbolic world as deeply as any philosophical theologian ever has. He interprets human symbol wielding in a thoroughly naturalistic framework. In fact, the book can be thought of as an essay in the philosophy of nature, wherein symbols and symbol wielding are disclosed as the most basic stuff of nature—an argument begun in his *Nature's Self* (Lanham, Md., 1996). In such a picture of reality, nature is an infinite semiotic flow, each sign of which expresses an interpretation that takes some other signs to mean something. There is no bedrock of basic signs here: semiosis goes all the way down.

In this ontology of signs, conscious interpretation is not a precondition of meaning; rather, consciousness arises from the infinitely tangled web of signs and interpretations. In fact, the semiotic flow gives birth to every complex emergent structure, from the invariable relationships that we call laws of nature to the variable conventions of social life, from the simplest arrangements of matter that have significance for something else to the wondrous chaos and order in balance that is human life.

The psychologically attuned reader will immediately ask how the emergence of consciousness from a semiotic flow relates to the dynamics of the unconscious that Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and others tried to trace. Corrington spends most of the first part of the book describing how the ontology of signs transforms our conception of psychoanalytic categories. His term "psychosemiosis" names this transformed view: the human unconscious is blunt evidence of the way human beings process signs and interpretations at a level more basic than conscious-

ness. In fact, conscious sign processing is but the peripheral crystallization of lucidity from within a rich but murky solution of sign transactions: "Meaning is the genus of which conscious meaning is a species" (p. 1). The reinterpretation of psychoanalysis involves detailed discussions of motives, projection, unconscious complexes, transference, countertransference, and nature's vast unconscious of which the human unconscious is but an aspect.

The theologically sensitive reader of this book will want to know how Corrington sustains the claim that his semiotic theory reframes not only metaphysics but also theology. He calls his naturalism "ecstatic" in part to distinguish it from simplistically reductive competitors (pp. 22–31). But the phrase "ecstatic naturalism" also conjures an image of semiotic flow in which meanings emerge and are preserved, thereby creating a transcendent testimony to the infinite depths of nature. In this way, Corrington conceives of this proposal as the basis for both a philosophy of nature and a posttheistic theology. The details of this reconception are fascinating, involving analysis especially of communal and religious signs and culminating in a delineation of "spirit" not only as "part of the innumerable orders of *nature natured*" but also as lying "outside of the churning underconscious of the world" (p. 164) and thus expressing the other aspect of nature, nature naturing. Benedict Spinoza's distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* is the touchstone for Corrington's ecstatic naturalism. In affirming both parts of this distinction, Corrington lays claim to the wisdom encoded in all theological traditions, namely, that the divine, however interpreted, is not exclusively passive.

The metaphysically minded philosopher and the philosophically minded theologian have strong incentives to explore a semiotic theory of nature. It helpfully shortens the traditionally hazardous journey from ontology to serious theories of value, it properly complexifies our understanding of every kind of interpretation, and it enriches our view of nature and of human beings within nature. There is a good argument to be had over whether Corrington's robustly naturalistic view of the divine is too high a price to pay for these virtues. But my chief concern about this brilliant book is that it will be neither attacked nor praised but rather simply ignored because it is so enormously difficult to read. Although the writing is often delicious, the reader staggers against the host of allusions, unrealistic assumptions about the range of the reader's existing knowledge, lack of clear exposition of others' ideas, a relentless flood of insights, and the dense web of conceptual connections maintained throughout the book. 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.

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LAZARETH, WILLIAM. *Christians in Society: Luther, the Bible, and Social Ethics.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001. xii+274 pp. $22.00 (paper).

In *Christians in Society: Luther, the Bible, and Social Ethics,* William Lazareth engages in a close analysis of the biblical sources and norms of Martin Luther's theological and social ethics. He seeks to demonstrate that Luther's ethics as well as his theology is indeed "wholly determined by Scripture" (p. 31). He describes Luther's approach to reading Scripture as christocentric and intra-Trinitarian. This approach "enables biblically guided Christians to interpret the totality of human life, and especially their new life in Christ, in organic relation to the adoration of

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