

Anglo organizes his book around styles of fighting. First he introduces the masters and shows how, for all their theory and literary style, their art remained a craft. Books could enrich but not replace hands-on instruction. He considers attempts to create a geometric science of swordsmanship, a movement that created magnificent treatises but was doomed by fencing's demand for spontaneity and deception. The sword was only the most glamorous of the weapons. The masters also taught fighting with staffs, pikes, and axes, as well as more plebeian skills such as wrestling and combat with daggers and knives.

Anglo ranges from exalted theories to the back-breaking, hamstring-cutting side of Renaissance fighting techniques, but we are left wishing to know more about the practitioners themselves. Who would have thought, for example, that the Hapsburgs would entrust

the wrestling instruction of the dukes of Austria to a master named Ott the Jew?

Still, this book is a sumptuous scholarly feast, with delicacies for art historians, bibliophiles, Shakespeare specialists, wrestling fans, Asian martial arts enthusiasts, and graphic designers. Anglo does not shrink from using terms such as *prosopopoeic* (referring to an object speaking of itself as though a person), but he complements academic rigor with wry humor: Questioning some colleagues' preoccupation with a shift in style from cutting to thrusting, he writes that "by concentrating on the point, they have missed it completely."

Now that the president of the Russian Federation, judo master Vladimir Putin, has published his own manual of arms, body skills may be returning to the world stage. This challenging but lucid study raises the curtain.

—EDWARD TENNER

## RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

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*THE BOOK OF MIRACLES:  
The Meaning of the Miracle Stories  
in Christianity, Judaism,  
Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam.*

By Kenneth L. Woodward. Simon and Schuster. 429 pp. \$28.

Did that really happen? It's the first question that comes to mind when we hear of a "miracle," a suspension of the normal way the world works, an intrusion of the extraordinary into the everyday. But it's not the question that matters to Woodward, religion editor of *Newsweek*. His subject is not the literal veracity of miracles but their meaning within the traditions of the world's five major religions. "Miracles have the character of signs and wonders," he writes. "As wonders, miracles are always astonishing, but as signs they are never wholly inexplicable."

Woodward's approach to the subject is utterly straightforward. He considers the five religions in turn—the three monotheistic faiths in the first part of the book, the two polytheistic Indian religions in the second—and begins in each case with a compendium of the miraculous deeds of their founding and central figures, such as Moses, Elijah and Elisha, Jesus, Muhammad, Krishna, and the Buddha. He follows the chapters on the foundational miracles

with chapters on the miracles of the great saints, sages, and spiritual masters in each tradition who took up the example of the first masters: "In this way, we can see how miracles themselves become signs of the continuing power and presence of God in this world (for Jews, Christians, and Muslims), of the continuing power of the diverse gods and goddesses (in Hinduism), and of the continuing power of the Dharma, or teachings, of the Buddha and, in some Buddhist traditions, of the enduring presence of the Buddha himself."

The entropy that exempts nothing mortal has had its way with miracles too, and Woodward detects a fundamental change in the contemporary tradition: "Miracles have become detached from the rigors of spiritual attainment and from the discernment taught by all religious traditions. Relocated in the theater of the questing inner self, the modern miracle has become a sign of the God within us all. The idea of a miracle has thus been turned on its head. Where classical miracle stories inspired fear and awe, inducing worship of God and admiration of the saints, modern miracles tend to inspire admiration of the divinity that is the self."

You can't help but admire what Woodward has accomplished in this book. He has fashioned

graceful, readable, and illuminating accounts of the various miracle traditions, and, through those narratives of external action, he has found the internal force of the religions. Of course, he does not elevate one religion or religious tradition above another. That would be

insensitive, and he is unfailingly sober and respectful. But a little partisan passion in Woodward's scrupulous presentation would have been a forgivable sin and lent some heat to the considerable light.

—JAMES MORRIS

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