
opment, with neither a past nor a social life, unlike those lucky Greek gods on Olympus. He labors toward emotional maturity, unaware of his own intentions until humankind helps him discover them. Miles locates the climax of his tale in the Book of Job, where God is finally so flummoxed by his dealings with Job, the human being who forces him to confront his inner demon ("a dragon goddess of destruction"), that he falls silent for the rest of the Bible. He doesn't grow old so much as simply subside.

Miles does his best to keep aloft the balloon of his conceit, but it begins to lose air before the official landing. You hear the hiss when he resorts to filler such as "God sometimes becomes a part of the landscape rather than one of the *dramatis personae* because his character has stabilized for a while." Read instead: "The Bible is in the way of my theory." In the end, there's no getting around all those disparate books that make up the Book, composed by many hands for different purposes over hundreds of years and arranged in a couple of final orders—of which only one, the Hebrew, serves Miles's reading.

"The unity of the Bible," Miles insists, "was not imposed by clever editing after the fact. It rests ultimately on the singularity of the Bible's protagonist, the One God, the *monos theos* of monotheism." Nevertheless, the absence of a final authorial hand, such as shaped the received *Iliad* or put Hamlet through his paces, may leave a theorizing critic as winded as his readers. The Lord awaits his Boswell still, but he's found a Joyce Brothers and a Cleanth Brooks in the meantime.

JOHN DEWEY AND THE HIGH TIDE OF AMERICAN LIBERALISM. By Alan Ryan. Norton. 416 pp. \$30

Philosophy once mattered in America, or at least one philosopher did. John Dewey was 92 years old when he died in 1952, and for more than 60 of those years he found an attentive and responsive audience not just among his fellow academics—he was associated with Columbia University from 1905 until his death, in the philosophy depart-

ment and as a member of the education faculty—but among the larger public. This was an extraordinary achievement for a philosopher, the more so for one such as Dewey, who was not an easy or engaging writer and whose beliefs, if fully understood, might not have been expected to win wide acceptance among Americans. Born in Burlington, Vermont, and raised a Congregationalist, he lost his faith in his early twenties. But he continued throughout his life to use the language of religion—of "faith" and "belief" in democracy, the common man, and education—to argue for a worldview that was squarely at odds with religion and decisively rejected the supernatural.

Dewey called his mature philosophy "experimentalism" (the graceless word says a lot about the foursquare philosopher). "What he meant," writes Ryan, a professor of politics at Princeton University, in this splendid new contribution to the ongoing reappraisal of Dewey's thought, "was that the truth, or more broadly the value, of any belief or statement about the world is to be measured in experience. He was insistent that a thoroughgoing naturalism was the only intellectually respectable philosophy, the only approach to life, education, ethics, and politics that offered a hope of progress."

Above all, Dewey wanted the world to be governed by "intelligent action." The words were meant to suggest an agenda of informed—by science especially—and energetic purpose. And he wanted to make the scientific attitude consistent with religious, artistic, and ethical attitudes, as part of a process of trying to understand and bring order to the world.

Not everyone was persuaded. Ryan notes that Dewey has always had two kinds of readers. One group, in which Ryan situates himself, "has seen him as trying to unite the religious conviction that the world is a meaningful unity with a secular 20th-century faith in the scientific analysis of both nature and humanity." The second group takes him for "an aggressive rationalist, someone who expects 'science' to drive out faith, and a contributor to the 20th century's

obsession with rational social management."

Dewey was out of favor with his fellow philosophers when he died, for his approach was regarded as old-fashioned. Now he is being read again by philosophers and political theorists who worry about the state of contemporary liberal democracy and speak of a new communitarianism. Ryan's respectful but not reverent book is, in fact, the third major work on the philosopher to appear in recent years. The others, which Ryan acknowledges and praises even while observing that "their" Dewey is often not "his," are Robert Westbrook's *John Dewey and American Democracy* (1991), "a distinguished intellectual biography," and Steven Rockefeller's *John Dewey* (1991), "truer to Dewey's philosophical and religious concerns."

Taking readers through 100 years of American intellectual life, Ryan locates Dewey's politics at the heart of the 20th century's attempt to articulate a "new liberalism" that allows for individual freedom even as it acknowledges the regulatory role of the state in working to improve the life of the national community. In this, Ryan's position is orthodox and at odds with Westbrook's, who portrays a more radical, socialist inclination in Dewey. Ryan's British background allows him to see Dewey as more than simply an American figure—to recognize how he was influenced by British philosophers and to place him in a larger world context, as a "modern" and a "North American."

Dewey's religious views leave Ryan, like many before him, a bit baffled. He complains that "Dewey wants the social value of religious belief without being willing to pay the epistemological price for it." Yet he acknowledges as well that Dewey was "a visionary of the here and now" who could "infuse" the present with "a kind of transcendent glow" that overcame the vagueness of his message and won widespread conviction. Ryan's book should help the man he calls "the century's most influential preacher of a creed for liberals, reformers, schoolteachers, and democrats" find an attentive new audience.

Science & Technology

FIRE IN THE MIND: Science, Faith, and the Search for Order. By George Johnson. Knopf. 357 pp. \$27.50

"There are few places on earth that so many people have claimed as holy and where so many people see the world in different ways." *New York Times* science writer George Johnson is speaking of the desert and mountains surrounding Santa Fe, New Mexico. A rich mix of peoples make their home here, from descendants of the native Anasazi, who left behind their puzzling runes scratched into the rocks, to the Hermanos Penitentes, a Catholic brotherhood whose members regularly perform a rite of self-flagellation in order to recall the sufferings of Christ. Both groups were profoundly influenced by Coronado's Spanish legions, and later by *Yanqui* expansionists sweeping down from the north.

The land remains a magnet. At Trinity Site, 150 miles to the south, scientists detonated the world's first nuclear device; at the nearby Santa Fe Institute, Big Thinkers still ponder the Big Questions, including whether the universe is governed by some underlying order.

Johnson observes that the people from these different cultures, sciences, philosophies, and religions all share common ground. He cannot help wondering whether they might, in some larger sense, share Common Ground as well. Could there be strands hidden within their varied tenets that, when woven together, might yield a tapestry explaining the origins of the universe? Johnson is adept at adding the proper touches of local color and telling detail, but his task proves elusive. Time and again he follows strands to the end only to find them circling back to where he began. Thus, he describes experiments occurring at the "edge of chaos" and remarks that "science, the art of compressing data, turns its gaze back on itself and finds, surprise, that the very ability to gather and compress data is fundamental. . . . Driven to spin our gossamer webs, we can't help but put ourselves, the spiders, at the very center."

Indeed, says Johnson, humanity is "bequeathed by nature with this marvelous drive to find order," and this desire sometimes leads us