

all his life in a God of wisdom and peace. So his work might seem to indicate that in his desire for an art which made large demands on humanity, he internalised the issues of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and arrived at a view of Christianity in which an amalgam of Catholic cultural attitudes, a love of the Bible and a personal myth of nature and art provided for him an idiosyncratic spirituality. Nichols has initiated a very interesting debate.

MARY CHARLES-MURRAY SND

**ON HUMAN NATURE** by Roger Scruton, *Princeton University Press*, Princeton and Oxford, 2017, pp. 151, \$22.95, hbk

Roger Scruton has written more than forty books, ranging from substantial surveys of modern philosophy to analyses of beauty, music, architecture and sex, from defences of Conservatism and Anglicanism to explorations of Green philosophy and animal rights, even a philosopher's guide to wine. His mastery of philosophical arguments enables him to move easily over his varied areas of interest. In this short volume he presents his distinctive vision of what it means to be human.

The foundation of this vision is the simple fact that each of us is able to say 'I'. We have an irreducibly first-personal perspective on the world, which includes a privileged ability to know our own thoughts and feelings. A purely scientific, third-personal analysis is unable to reveal the whole truth of things. Moreover, I cannot say 'I' in a vacuum, as if we are thinking minds without a context. I need another who says 'You': it is in face-to-face encounters that we become and learn to be 'I's. '[T]he word *you* does not, as a rule, *describe* the other person; it summons him or her into your presence, and this summons is paid for by a reciprocal response. You make yourself available to others in the words that call them to account to you' (p. 69).

On this view, the self, the 'I', is not some kind of spiritual addition to body, meaning that organism plus soul make a human person. Rather it is a perspective on the world that emerges in a creature with a certain set of complex capacities, similar to the way in which a picture emerges from the complex of patches of colour that make up the physical content of a painting.

Negatively, this account enables Scruton to reject the imperialist claim of some evolutionary biologists (Dawkins is the best known example) that functional value is the total explanation of our rational capacities. The 'trivial truth that dysfunctional attributes disappear' does not justify the 'substantial claim that functional attributes exist *because* of their function' (p. 16). Evolutionary explanation is compatible with the

emergence of properties that are more than purely physical, notably subjectivity.

Positively, Scruton uses the 'I-You' relationship to construct a theory of morality and society. The example of erotic love shows that even our pleasures involve us in directing our thoughts and actions *to* another, recognising him or her as another 'I' rather than a thing *on* which to act. Abusive sex shows this distinction clearly. More generally, the 'overreaching intentionality of interpersonal attitudes' means that we always address and respond to each other as selves capable of giving reasons and being accountable for actions. Indeed, this is what freedom is. Emotions such as resentment and gratitude make it clear that we think of each other in this way. Virtue then, for Scruton, becomes the capacity to take responsibility for one's actions, even in the face of temptation. It involves what he calls 'recentering' our passions 'in the I': we do not treat our anger, for example, as something that just happens to us, but as something which we can govern and for which we are accountable.

Recognition of another's identity as an 'I' leads directly to certain freedom rights. Our capacity for dialogue leads, rather, to claim rights. These should be negotiated in freedom; when they are imposed for political purposes, as Scruton has often argued, they become oppressive and even incoherent. Thus the 'spectral mathematics' of consequentialists both undermines common sense and threatens totalitarianism.

Liberals and communitarians each tell us half of the truth, for we are both deeply individual and irreducibly social: 'Freedom and accountability are co-extensive in the human agent' (p. 111). Scruton accepts with American political theorists as different as Nozick and Nussbaum that we need rights and duties, virtues, and a political system to back these and coordinate our projects. Two things, though, must be added to this picture: our embodied nature and our unchosen obligations. We need to take much more seriously our deepest emotions, revealed, for example, in the sense of defilement created by sexual violence or abuse. We need to put piety, including towards the family, back where it belongs, 'at the center of the picture' (p. 126). At a time of political confusion and impasse, thoughtful, lucid and humane conservatism of Scruton's sort is sorely needed to make dialogue possible.

Defilement, filial piety, beauty, evil, guilt and the sacred: we cannot do without such conceptions. Yet they are not easy to explain 'without transgressing the ontological assumptions of liberal contractarianism'. (p. 133). Scruton attempts to do so by extending the concept of 'overreaching intentionality'. Just as in human inter-personal encounters we reach towards the inaccessible 'I' of the other, so with the world. Religion is a reaching out towards the 'I' that is behind the whole. Thus the title of his earlier book, *The Soul of the World* (Princeton, 2014), from which the arguments here are largely distilled.

Scruton builds an impressive edifice on the foundation of the reasonable, responsible 'I'. But can it do all that it needs to? On the one hand

it seems to demand too much, so that dogs, and even children (about whom the book says little) risk being lumped with thermostats as things whose ‘intentions’ can be explained purely causally. On the other hand, negotiation plus personal ties of piety seem insufficient to explain, for example, the response of the Good Samaritan. How does a proper reverence for the family and the nation relate to our membership of the whole human race? Again, to understand God as Creator is surely to claim Him as far more than an emergent property of the world. Questions remain, but a lucid, integrated, philosophical anthropology so open to the transcendent is a gift that Christian readers will welcome.

MARGARET ATKINS CRSA

**RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND NEW MATERIALISM: MOVEMENT MATTERS**  
 edited by Joerg Rieger and Edward Waggoner, *Palgrave Macmillan, London/*  
*New York, 2016, pp. ix + 191, £60.00, hbk*

In a world of competing discourses, it is not surprising that theologians speak different languages. However, that means that theologians working in different spheres may not understand each other. So while on the face of it, we might think that ‘New Materialism’ denotes either the return of ‘Greed is good’, or scientific materialism, in fact it has nothing to do with the former, and not much with the latter. This collection of studies, however, has a great deal to say about burning issues for the church and society: how religion actually functions in modern society; religious practice and the body; community organisation, ecology and the rich/poor gap. So my aim in this review is to put these New Materialism-inspired theologies in dialogue with the more classical Scholastic tradition, as this has influenced many current schools of theology. I am *not* aiming to ‘translate’ this book into Thomism, still less to shoe-horn it into scholastic categories. Rather, I am seeking to uncover points of common concern.

But what is New Materialism? The feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti is credited with coining the term. She says, ‘‘Neo-Materialism’ emerges as a method, a conceptual frame and a political stand, which refuses the linguistic paradigm, stressing instead the concrete yet complex materiality of bodies immersed in social relations of power’ (p. 28). Her target is ‘the linguistic turn of postmodern scholarship evident in the 1990s, which she regards, with its attendant relativism, as forms of earth-denying idealism’ (*ibid.*). Scholastic theologians, trained in the principles that all knowledge comes to us through the senses and that the human being is a social being, should be pricking up their ears, as should anyone who has read Pope Francis’s *Laudato Si’*.