Reviews

The Moralist. By ALLEN WHEELIS. New York: Basic Books, 1973. 170 pages. $7.95.

For many persons, Nietzsche's Promethean declaration of the death of God has become a symbol of modern man's spiritual condition. Man come of age—rational, scientific, technological man—no longer needs to rely on an omnipotent and omniscient God. Indeed, continued belief in such a God keeps man in bondage and prevents him from realizing his highest possibilities. As man's faith in himself waxes, his belief in God wanes.

We can see the beginnings of the death of God and the correlative divinization of man at least as far back as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Throughout the Enlightenment, man's confidence in his own abilities, especially in his reason, gradually grew. Less and less room seemed to be left for God. By the end of the eighteenth century, God had virtually disappeared from both earth and the heavens, and man had taken his place. *Les philosophes* symbolically expressed this development by setting up an altar in Notre Dame at which they paid homage to the goddess Reason.

In Germany we see a similar development in the first half of the nineteenth century. Although Hegel always understood his philosophical system to bring to conceptual clarity the truth implicit in the Christian religion, in the years following his death Hegel's own position fell prey to the cunning of reason. Feuerbach inverted Hegel's dialectic and, in words anticipating Nietzsche, proclaimed the demise of God and the divinity of man. Marx, elaborating Feuerbach's insights, argued that belief in God is an outgrowth of the alienation that man suffers in a capitalistic economic system. He called for man to divest himself of the anesthetizing belief in a benevolent God and a peaceful afterlife and to strive to create heaven on earth by establishing a socialist utopia. For Marx, God is both an expression and a cause of humankind's bondage.

But something went awry. Man did not prove to be much more capable of running the world than had God. *Les philosophes* led to Robespierre, Marx led to Stalin, the optimism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led to the world wars of the twentieth century. If it has now become difficult to believe in God, it has become impossible to believe in the divinity or in the infinite perfectability of man. We have learned anew the lesson of man's radical evil.

And yet we continue to hear the refrain "God is dead." No longer is this conviction the correlate of the belief in the unlimited powers of man. Rather, the current claim that God is dead is based upon the perception of the thoroughgoing relativity of man's religious beliefs and moral precepts. On the one hand, the natural and social sciences have made us acutely aware of the ways in which our physical, psychological, social, and cultural situation conditions our beliefs and deeds. On the other hand, our constantly enlarging "electronic global nervous system" (McLuhan) created by a complex telecommunications network daily brings us into contact with alien cultures and

novel forms of experience. This expanded awareness sensitizes us to the multiple ways of viewing reality and of conducting our lives. As our consciousness and sympathy expand, life views different from our own assume greater coherence and persuasiveness. Through deeper understanding, one is able to apprehend the significance and the validity of the Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, or Muslim perspective. The goal becomes to understand and to appreciate rather than to convert.

This development has an important effect on one's own viewpoint. No longer can one's belief system be construed as absolute or as the only true way of perceiving reality. Alternative modes of interpretation and various forms of conduct come to be regarded as equally authentic. The recognition of the validity of alternative perspectives necessarily relativizes one's own weltanschauung. Consequently, something of a paradox emerges in contemporary culture. As the world is increasingly unified in an ever more finely knit web of interdependence until it forms a virtual "global village," the world's villagers are increasingly pluralized by their participation in constantly expanding forms of experience. Citizens of the global village become "protean" (Robert Lifton) or "inwardly many" (Richard R. Niebuhr). The recent declaration of the death of God signals the death of the conviction that one can be absolutely certain of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. For secular man, there are truths but no Truth, goods but no Good, and beauties but no Beauty. Though God may be dead, the gods are being reborn. Monotheism again is giving way to polytheism.

It is important to stress the difference between the earlier proclamation of the death of God and our own. As we have seen, during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, man's newly discovered confidence in his own powers led him to declare God to be an artifact of the human imagination that keeps man in bondage and prevents him from reaching the heights of which he is capable. In short, the death of God grew out of man's belief in his infinite potentialities. In our day, the reverse recognition—that of man's finitude and limitations—leads paradoxically to the same contention that God is dead. Enmeshed in a web of competing yet compelling world views, man is gripped by the relativity of all perspectives—including his own. For secular man, the death of God is the death of absolutes.

Contemporary relativism raises difficult problems for moral reflection. As Ivan Karamazov observed, if God is dead, everything is permitted. In a world devoid of absolutes, man would seem to have lost his moral compass. Surely, this problem is not novel. Plato constructed his realm of ideal forms to combat a similar epistemological and moral skepticism. But this old problem assumes new urgency today. Plato's attempted solution is no longer viable, for the forms have been historicized and in the process relativized. We are compelled to ask: How can secular man make moral judgments? Allen Wheelis's most recent book, *The Moralist,* addresses this question. "Where then, having lost God, can we find a reasonable ground for reasoning about good and evil?" (p. 23).

Wheelis recognizes the moral dilemma posed by the increasing awareness of the relativity of our beliefs and of our moral codes: "If we know nothing for sure, how can we know we are right? And if we never can know we are right, how can we act?" (p. 12). Wheelis begins his analysis of moral action in a thoroughly secular setting by criticizing one of the most common responses to the death of God—nihilism. Following the lead of Ivan Karamazov, many twentieth-century thinkers have asserted that if man cannot ascertain the

objective ground of moral truth, he has no means of judging the moral propriety of different actions. Everything is permitted, for good and evil are finally indistinguishable. Wheelis asserts that such "nihilism is a fraud" (p. 13). The inevitable result of nihilism is Dacca, Auschwitz, Biafra, and Treblinka (p. 4).

Wheelis formulates the main line of his argument by directly opposing nihilism: "The mood of this work is that some things are not permitted, that there are immanent standards, of man's making but not of man's design, that they are, therefore, to be discovered but not created, that though not absolute they change but slowly, that to live by them is what is meant by being human. Such standards transcend our knowing, are guides to lead us, not we them, are rules which we must seek to find, not presume to enact. . . . Whirl need not be king" (p. 4). Wheelis holds that his effort to move beyond nihilism is not a naive return to the Eden of moral certainty: "To go back is not possible; to go on requires that we give up the demand for certainty, become willing to act in a field of probable goods and probable evils, 'to fight a lie in the name of a half-truth' " (p. 12).

Having expressed his dissatisfaction with the nihilistic response to our loss of moral certitude, Wheelis proceeds to explore the nature of moral activity. He argues that morality includes two primary components: insight and action. Insight is the reflective aspect of morality that seeks to discern the "likely consequences of behavior in order to recognize good and evil" (p. 27). Action is the actual struggle "to secure the good and diminish evil" (p. 27). Both are necessary for moral activity. Insight without action is empty; action without insight is blind. But Wheelis does not think that the identification of these dimensions of moral activity offers a satisfactory definition of morality. He attempts to develop an acceptable view of morality by making one of the most suggestive distinctions of his discussion. He distinguishes love of others from respect for the rights of others (p. 49). The former he labels positive morality, the latter he calls negative morality:

> Positive morality dictates our purposes; negative morality leaves purposes for us to determine, but sets limits which guard the freedom of others to pursue *their* purposes, limits which our purposes, whether selfish or unselfish, are not permitted to exceed. The one asserts love and tends to be religious, the other asserts justice and tends to be secular. The one appeals to compassion, the other to fair play. Positive morality is proud, believes great things may be achieved, raises banners, sets out on crusades; negative morality is modest, believes some things may be achieved but never a radical cure, is unmoved by banners, declines crusades. One is a striving to achieve, one a taking pains to avoid. [Pp. 49–50]

Wheelis defines positive morality as goodness and negative morality as morality strictly so called. Consequently, "morality is not a motivation but a limit; not endeavor or process or purpose, but a wall. It is not meant to *make* anything happen, but to *prevent* certain kinds of things from ever happening" (pp. 52–53). From this perspective, "morality is designed to secure the greatest possible freedom for everyone compatible with the restraints necessary for group life" (p. 53).

Wheelis contends that man's activity must be informed by both goodness and morality. However, in the course of his analysis, it becomes evident that he regards morality as the more promising principle of conduct for secular man. Having become aware of the relativity of all perspectives, one must recognize the limits of one's own viewpoint and respect the validity of differ-

ent belief systems and codes of conduct. Though well-intentioned, goodness easily leads to the effort to impose one's point of view on another person. This is a violation of the other's integrity that morality seeks to prevent.

This basic understanding of the nature and the function of morality forms the axis around which Wheelis organizes the remainder of his discussion. He develops insightful analyses of complex issues such as the relationship between slavery and rebellion and between force and authority. A careful consideration of the character of human community is also presented. In each instance Wheelis attempts to clarify perennial moral and philosophical problems by relating them to his revised notion of morality.

It is not, however, until he addresses the correlative issues of the relation between self and other (we and they) and the nature of social hierarchy that the full implications of his argument emerge. He points out that morality, as he has defined it, "depends upon our taking the part of the other" (p. 77). Through the sympathetic identification of the self with the other, one gains an appreciation of the other's viewpoint. This mutual understanding generates empathy which leads to the moral resolution not to infringe upon the integrity of the other. As our awareness and empathy expand, the possibility of moral activity increases.

But Wheelis's analysis is not designed to illuminate only the situation of individuals. He understands the individual to be the lowest rung on a ladder of hierarchical social associations that ranges from the family and the state through the nation and the world. Moreover, a social group "is not a congeries of individuals wandering about in physical proximity, but an organized association of individuals, an entity with a life of its own different in quality and pattern from the life of a person" (p. 98). Such collective entities are capable of moral and immoral actions. For instance, "the moral agent in the case of individual crime is the whole man who plans and executes the murder; the moral agent in the case of war is the whole nation" (p. 101). "War is not the result of aggressive self-assertion, but of aggressive group-assertion" (p. 104).

The argument that social units are morally responsible is important for Wheelis's overall position. He holds that "the urgent predicament of mankind is not individual but social, and our greatest danger lies in actions which only the state can take" (pp. 104–5). It becomes apparent that the argument of this book constantly moves on two levels: the individual and the social. Wheelis attempts to provide a guide not only for the interrelation of persons but also for the relationship among nation states. For both the individual and the social collectivity, "morality is a wall" on which is written "whatever passion impel you, whatever goal you pursue, beyond this limit you may not go; and no loving, however great, not even the willingness to lay down your life for him whose rights you would violate, will gain for you the right to trespass" (p. 74). In a world where persons and groups with different beliefs and values are brought into closer and closer proximity, moral conduct of this order becomes a necessary survival strategy.

Wheelis concludes his reflections on an optimistic note. By creating a global village, modern technology greatly enhances our awareness and appreciation of other persons and of alien cultures. Moreover, "the strength of empathy is an inverse function of emotional distance: the deeper our relatedness to others the stronger our identifications with them" (p. 129). In other words, as our relatedness to others grows more nearly complete, our empathy with them deepens and the likelihood of moral progress is enhanced: "The path of

moral progress is one of increasing awareness, creating an ever-widening field of empathy within which we take the part of the other, which leads in turn to an ever more inclusive hierarchy of communities, pushing ever outward the fault line, so that when conflict occurs the warring fragments are themselves even larger. As we live on a sphere, such expansion of empathy may eventually bind the earth in a secure community" (p. 132).

Wheelis has written a stimulating book that confronts directly the complex and important problems that our secularity raises from moral reflection and conduct. The very readable style of the work should make it accessible to a wide audience. Rather than a tightly argued ethical treatise, Wheelis has composed a series of loosely joined, though clearly related, reflections on a series of moral issues. This method of presentation creates certain problems. At many points the discussion is advanced by assertion and suggestion and not by careful argumentation. Consequently, some of the most essential aspects of Wheelis's position remain unpersuasive. Two examples suffice to make this point. As I have noted, Wheelis begins his essay by trying to demonstrate the unacceptability of nihilism. To make his point, he takes the example of an enraged father who beats his young son for spilling some milk. Wheelis asserts that observers of this scene recognize the father's action to be wrong. The claim that seems to be advanced here is that, while our knowledge of good and evil is not perfect, all persons have a rudimentary awareness of the difference between right and wrong. This moral sense causes one to recoil from the conduct of the father. But is this position any longer viable? Is it not precisely such an innate moral awareness that contemporary relativism calls into question? Moreover, such a viewpoint seems to suggest a universality of moral sensitivity that is no longer intelligible. It seems unlikely that the revival of the notion of an innate moral sense or of the conviction that man possesses inherent knowledge of universal moral principles can answer the questions raised by relativism.

The second example of the kind of problem that Wheelis encounters emerges near the end of his discussion. We have seen that Wheelis concludes by maintaining that, as a result of increasing empathy, we can hope for moral progress that will eventually create a secure global community. In this progress Wheelis suggests that humankind will be guided by "rules of just conduct [that] are not something we make, but something within us, already made, which we discover" (p. 109). Again a pivotal point is asserted without either demonstration or explanation. By maintaining that there are rules of conduct that are discovered and not made, Wheelis tries to overcome some of the difficulties created by relativism. The argument seems to be that such discovered principles in some sense transcend the ambiguities and the contingency of "man-made" morality. At this point Wheelis seeks to return to the Eden of moral certitude from which modern man is forever exiled. For secular consciousness, all moral precepts are made and not discovered.

Like the proverbial temptress, Wheelis's book leaves the reader aroused but unsatisfied. He has raised issues that sorely need careful and detailed consideration. However, his suggestions for reestablishing a foundation for moral activity in our secular world remain problematic. The nature of the solutions Wheelis proposes forces the reader to wonder if he appreciates fully the magnitude of the problems he has identified.

MARK C. TAYLOR

Williams College

Between Science and Religion: The Reaction to Scientific Naturalism in Late Victorian England. By FRANK MILLER TURNER. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974. 273 pages. $12.50.

This is a book about six Victorian men whose philosophical thought has remained remarkably unappreciated in the twentieth century. In examining the lives and works of Henry Sidgwick, A. R. Wallace, F. W. Meyers, George Romanes, Samuel Butler, and James Ward, Frank Miller Turner has done an admirable job of identifying one historical response to the English scientific publicists of the latter half of the nineteenth century. In so doing he has bestowed belated recognition upon these six worthy opponents of Victorian agnosticism.

Although John Passmore may be correct that "none of the nineteenth-century scientific publicists is of any great importance as a philosopher," this does not mean that the philosophical claims of Thomas Huxley, John Tyndall, William Clifford, and others were unimportant in the nineteenth century or, for that matter, that they are not occasionally visible even today. Part of the strong appeal of Turner's book stems from the cogent but largely unheard arguments presented by his six Victorians against the sweeping claims of what the author has labeled scientific naturalism.

While there were others, both philosophers and scientists, who were critical of mechanism and scientific materialism in the nineteenth century, Turner has identified six individuals whose motivation to criticize the "New Nature" came directly from their loss of faith in Christianity. Having forsaken Christianity, they found themselves suspicious of new dogmas, be they scientific or otherwise. Turner emphasizes that the grounds of their suspicion were not drawn from the Christianity they had abandoned, that naturalism represented to them an alternative to Christianity rather than an attack upon it. Their critique of naturalism was a non-Christian critique, far more interesting than the rearguard response of the Church. Sidgwick, Ward, and the others found themselves in a realm between science and religion. The title, however, is a bit misleading, for if one does not equate religion with doctrinal dogma, the six remain essentially religious men, determined to meet head-on the traditional religious questions about the meaning of existence. Perhaps "Between Science and Christianity" would be a more accurate heading.

Turner's exposition of Sidgwick and Wallace on the inadequacy of naturalistic ethics, his treatment of the romantic insistence of Meyers and Romanes on "questions that the adherents of naturalism wanted to ignore," his analysis of Butler's attack against intellectualism and of Ward's theory of mind all reveal the diversified lines of attack that were employed against scientific naturalism. The author does not miss the many opportunities to point out where the thinking of his subjects overlaps with that of critics of scientific naturalism such as Ernst Mach and Henri Poincaré or where the Victorian critique anticipates that of twentiety-century physicists and existentialists.

In showing how theism supplied the teleological continuity so indispensable to the figures of his study Turner has not sufficiently explained why the "theism" of scientific naturalism, in which Man himself is God and Man supplies the basis for ethics, does not satisfy Sidgwick, Wallace, and the rest. Where ethics is concerned, the strength of the six lies in their critique of agnosticism. They point out that the ethical position recommended by the scientific naturalists cannot be derived from agnosticism; rather, it is drawn

from a new dogmatism allegedly devoid of purpose. But if the scientific naturalists were depending on a Feuerbachian conception of man, as Huxley was in "Evolution and Ethics," then scientific naturalists, too, possess a theistic basis for their ethical position. The fact is that Turner's six Victorians refused to recognize this "theism" for the thoroughly Christian reason that it was not a transcendent theism. Even for Sidgwick, man alone could not provide the purpose Sidgwick wanted to find in the universe. Purpose had to be prescribed by an external God.

The author excuses himself for omitting the work of Oliver Lodge on the grounds that his productive years came after World War I. Although Lodge did not die until 1940, his creative work in physics was over by 1914. Further, Lodge was indeed a man of the nineteenth century, never able to accept the radical developments in quantum mechanics. An examination of Lodge's critique of Christian doctrine and an exposition of his fundamental affinity to the attitudes of the six figures covered by Turner would have provided an informative addition to this study. Lodge was a physicist, and, while he was less able to appreciate the philosophical criticisms of natural science than the others, he was very much like them in other respects. His unique perspective as a physical scientist who was caught between science and Christianity would have rounded out the book.

The author perpetuates the notion that it was only in the later editions of the *Origin* that Darwin's Lamarckian ideas appear (pp. 73, 190–91), a myth that Ernst Mayr has tried, apparently unsuccessfully, to lay to rest. A final complaint stems from the lack of biographical material in the book. A work devoted to the thought of six such unusual men would do well to provide more personal information about them. The author did not overlook manuscript sources; he simply chose to draw upon them too sparingly.

FREDERICK GREGORY

Eisenhower College

Science and Creation. By STANLEY L. JAKI. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1974. 367 pages. £4.50. [New York: Neal Watson Academic Publications, 1974. 367 pages. $15.00.]

This lengthy and detailed work by Stanley L. Jaki (who is professor of the history of physics and astronomy at Seton Hall University, New Jersey) is an attempt to answer the question of why science, as a self-sustaining process, should have originated in Europe at the end of the Middle Ages rather than earlier in one of the many civilizations of antiquity.

Jaki's thesis starts from the contention that the great civilizations of antiquity (Hindu, Chinese, Aztec, Egyptian, Babylonian, and Greek) all possessed a cultural ethos which was highly unconducive to scientific inquiry. In his view, all these civilizations adhered, in some form or other, to two essentially destructive doctrines. The first was the idea of a cyclical universe, a universe which goes through an endless sequence of growths and declines; and the second was the conception of nature itself as a deity or as a living organism of a peculiar type. In successive chapters Jaki tries to demonstrate precisely how, in his own words, "a cyclical concept of cosmology coupled with an organismic concept of nature influences the chances of man's slow advance toward a

scientific grasp of the external world." His argument is that a cyclical theory of the universe leads to pessimism and induces a sense of fatalism which inhibits the search for universal principles of physical order; and that to look upon nature as an organism is psychologically debilitating in that it tends to give rise to the further ideas that nature is capricious, that there are no universally valid regularities to be discovered, and that hence systematic investigation is pointless. Science, as a cumulative and ever-expanding stock of theoretical knowledge, emerged, claims Jaki, when the intrinsically optimistic Christian conception of the universe as the purposeful creation of a rational God had become part and parcel of a civilization's intellectual fiber.

This conclusion is a momentous one, and many questions must be asked and answered satisfactorily before it can be accepted as it stands. To begin with, we should be clear as to what kind of problem Jaki is discussing. It seems to me that notions, conceptions, theories, and systems of ideas are the sort of things that cannot be explained in the same manner as events brought about by mechanical causes. It follows that in the field of the "sociology of belief" arguments can at best merely sketch an outline of the way in which men's ideas support and are reinforced by their social and cultural background. We are never entitled to advance a stronger claim to the effect that such and such a background was causally sufficient to generate certain specific ideas in the men of the time. But I am sure Jaki would agree with this, and indeed he does implicitly acknowledge that the fact that European culture in the period 1250–1650 was permeated with metaphysical presuppositions originating from Christian doctrine is on its own not sufficient to explain the birth of modern science. He writes: "Adoption of the Hindu-Arabic decimal system with its positional notation in late medieval Europe was an *indispensable* condition for reaching a higher level of measurements and calculations which greatly helped the rise of physical and astronomical science during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (emphasis added). On consideration, therefore, Jaki's thesis amounts to the less controversial claim that the Christian civilization in Europe from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century was, on balance, more conducive to sustained theoretical inquiry than any that had preceded it.

Although sympathetic to this position, I appreciate that even in its mild form Jaki's conclusion is open to a number of objections. I shall mention a couple of the most telling that spring to mind. First, in all the ancient civilizations there were highly developed technological crafts and, in some cases, notably the Greek, the beginnings of genuine scientific thought. But if it is argued that science failed to develop fully in these civilizations because of the pessimism induced by a cyclical view of the universe and/or an organismic view of nature, then the difficulty has to be faced as to why this pessimism did not have a similar stultifying effect on technological innovation (and also, incidentally, on achievements such as the evolution of sophisticated architecture and successful techniques of warfare and civil administration). And, second, is it always the case that a "defeatest psychological climate [is] created by the combined impact of cyclical and organismic ideas" (p. 62)? If the cyclical theory held is one that refers to the physical universe, then this does not seem to imply the existence of the same sort of process at the human and social levels. Sociological determinism, certainly, may produce an overpowering sense of the futility of creative effort, but this, surely, is not a necessary concomitant or entailment of every cyclical cosmological theory.

Despite these points, however, Jaki is probably correct in arguing that when

fatalism and the notion that nature is animate have become dominant world outlooks, then they have tended to militate against the appearance of scientific inquiry as a long-lasting and self-perpetuating activity. But to point out that neither of these doctrines was accepted in Europe at the end of the Middle Ages is not, I think, enough to account adequately for the birth of modern science at this time. However, to show that late medieval Europe lacked two doctrines which, whenever they had taken root in the past, had shown themselves to be unhelpful to scientific advance is undoubtedly to provide at least a partial reason for why the European climate of this period should have been so markedly more favorable to scientific growth than the climates of many previous civilizations.

Although Jaki's argument appears vulnerable on several counts (and what substantial historical thesis is not?), his work is nevertheless a significant and most interesting contribution to the history of ideas. Moreover, his clear and readable style allows his scholarship to be presented in the best of lights. This is a book to be read and thought over by scientists, historians, philosophers, and theologians alike.

THOMAS S. TORRANCE

University of Aberdeen

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