
Book Reviews

Nicholas AGAR. *Humanity's End. Why We Should Reject Radical Enhancement*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010. 219 pp.

Anyone who has read Nicholas Agar's previous book *Liberal Eugenics. In Defence of Human Enhancement*, which was published in 2004, will probably be rather surprised by the present volume. *Liberal Eugenics* was essentially a defence of (an extended version of) reproductive freedom. Firmly rooted in a liberalist ideology, Agar argued that people should be free to enhance themselves and their children if they choose, in accordance with their own personal idea of excellence, as long as no obvious harm resulted from it. So called 'bioconservative' concerns regarding the desirability of using technology to "make better people" (Harris) were rather brusquely brushed aside and the risks of employing new technologies to transform human nature downplayed. Because of the huge potential benefits for many generations to come, Agar argued, we should ignore the precautionary principle and allow the development and use of enhancement technologies.

The outlook of Agar's new book is quite different. Without even mentioning his earlier position or any of the arguments he then proposed in favour of (the permissibility of) human enhancement (except very briefly in the very last chapter of the book), he now proceeds to expressly counsel a precautionary approach and to attack at least *radical* enhancement as a bad idea, as something we ought rather to keep clear of. The reasons he gives, to the extent that they are ethical rather than science-based, are not markedly different from those of the bioconservatives he formerly denigrated: "Radical enhancement threatens to turn us into fundamentally different kinds of beings, so different that we will no longer deserve to be called human" (2), and this would be bad because such a drastic change is likely to "eliminate experiences of great value from our lives" (11).

However, instead of developing this argument throughout the course of the book – and thereby lending support to a "rational biological conservatism" (57) –, he applies himself mainly to the discussion (or rather paraphrasing) of the positions held by four prominent proponents of radical enhancement, namely Ray Kurzweil (dubbed "The Technologist"), Aubrey de Grey ("The Therapist"), Nick Bostrom ("The Philosopher"), and James Hughes ("The Sociologist"). Starting with Kurzweil, he gives a detailed account of the latter's "Law of Accelerating Returns" and the ensuing techno-optimism,

which leads Kurzweil to believe that we will eventually be able to get rid of our messy bodies and gain virtual immortality by uploading ourselves into a computer. The whole idea is ludicrous, of course, but Agar takes it quite seriously and tries hard to convince us that “it may take longer than Kurzweil thinks for us to know enough about the human brain to successfully upload it” (45) – as if this lack of knowledge was the main obstacle to mind-uploading. Agar’s principal objection, however, is that it will always be irrational for us to upload our minds onto computers, because we will never be able to completely rule out the possibility that, instead of continuing to live, we will simply die and be replaced by something that may be conscious or unconscious, but in any case is not identical with us. While this is certainly a reasonable objection, the way Agar presents it is rather odd. He takes Pascal’s ‘Wager’ (which was designed to convince us that believing in God is always the rational thing to do, because by doing so we have little to lose and a lot to win) and refashions it so that it appears irrational to upload one’s mind, because the procedure might end in death, whereas refusing to upload will keep us alive and is hence always a safe bet. The latter conclusion does not work, of course, since the whole point of mind-uploading is to escape death (which is unavoidable as long as we are stuck with our mortal, organic bodies). Agar argues, however, that by the time we are able to upload minds to computers, other life extension technologies will be available, so that uploading will no longer be an attractive option. This seems to be a curiously techno-optimistic view to take.

This brings us to the second proponent of enhancement, namely Aubrey de Grey, whose mission in life is to promote the engineering of “negligible senescence”, in other words to halt (and reverse) ageing. Again, we hear a lot about how de Grey thinks negligible senescence can be achieved before Agar finally gets around to actually proposing some arguments that are meant to support his prediction that, “when fully informed about both alternatives, most humans will prefer to retain definite life spans even if they are, on average, shorter than indefinite life spans” (111). And why is that? One reason is what Agar calls *species-relativism*, according to which “certain experiences and ways of existing properly valued by members of one species may lack value for the members of another species” (12). Just as we would not swap our lives for the much longer lives of a Galapagos tortoise (because their experiences and pleasures are so different from ours), we wouldn’t want to become a negligibly senescent human because their experiences may likewise lack value for us (112). But would they really? Surely the difference between a human and a tortoise is far greater than the difference between a human who must die after a century or so and one who *may* live much longer, and the reason why we wouldn’t want to swap lives with a tortoise has probably more to do with Mill’s distinction between the quality and the quantity of pleasures than with the fact that a tortoise’s pleasures are simply different from those of a human. Agar also believes that, although a much longer life would not necessarily lead to boredom (as Bernard Williams has argued), it would most likely make people fear death a lot more and prompt them to “develop a risk-aversion that will radically truncate their existences” (115). Humans with an indefinite life span ahead of them would probably not even dare to drive to the cinema to watch a film

because it is simply not worth the risk (given that they might be killed in an accident and thus potentially lose thousands of years, whereas we stand to lose a few decades at best) (117). Personally, I find this outcome rather unlikely, because our psychology is not based on such pseudo-rational risk assessments (pseudo-rational because, since it *never* seems worth taking the risk of getting killed in order to watch a movie, no matter how small the risk is, it would *always* be irrational to do so). At any rate, it is mere conjecture and will hardly dissuade anyone from extending their lives if that should one day be possible.

After dealing with Kurzweil and de Grey in the above manner, Agar proceeds to discuss Nick Bostrom and his claim that opponents of human enhancement suffer from “status quo bias”, i.e. an irrational preference for the present condition of humanity for no better reason than that it *is* the present condition. Agar does not accept this and thinks it more likely that the desire to remain as we are has something to do with the “endowment effect” that psychologists have discovered guides our preferences: we have a tendency to want to hold on to what we have and not to exchange it for some other equally valuable thing, but if that other thing happened to be in our possession first, then we would not want to swap it either. In the same way, we like to be human and stay human because that is what we are and have now. We want to keep what we have. This may well be true, but Agar curiously concludes that the “strength of our emotional bond with our humanity may make it rational to prefer this state of being to some objectively superior posthuman state” (139). It may make it understandable, but I fail to see how such an emotional bond can ever make it *rational* to prefer an admittedly *inferior* state of being to a *superior* one. The claim that “humans might have a rational preference for objectively inferior human experiences” (140) strikes me as contradictory. It is perfectly possible that “radical enhancement might threaten significant human values” (140), but that is an altogether different argument, which Agar once again fails to develop in sufficient detail.

The last proponent of radical human enhancement discussed by Agar is the sociologist James Hughes. Agar’s objection to Hughes’ “democratic transhumanism”, his vision of a society in which humans and posthumans live together in peace and harmony, is basically (and quite sensibly) that it is too good to be true. Agar thinks it more likely that posthuman societies will be decidedly “human-unfriendly” (173), so that it is in our own best interest to prevent their existence. However, this argument is based on the assumption that ‘we’ are not ‘them’. If we ourselves become posthuman, we have no reason to fear ‘their’ existence (which is not to say that it is generally a good idea to try to become posthuman).

The reader has to wait to the very last chapter of the book (the last twenty pages), entitled “A Species-Relativist Conclusion about Radical Enhancement”, before he or she is given something resembling a coherent account of “why we should reject radical enhancement”. Even here, however, we find more assertions and speculations than proper arguments. “Humanity”, Agar tells us, “is something worth celebrating” (179), but why exactly remains unclear. We hear that humans “who undergo radical cognitive enhancement are likely to suffer a form of self-alienation” (179), that they will also be

alienated from their children (180), probably never have “any mature interests and attachments” (186) and may lose the “bonds of kinship and fellow feeling that connect us with other humans, taking much of the meaning out of human triumphs and tragedies” (197). Yes, perhaps they will. On the other hand, perhaps they won’t. It is hard to say really, especially on the basis of a discussion as vague and inconclusive as the one presented by Agar.

While the book is well-written and easy to follow, it contains little of interest for anyone who is familiar with the ethical debate on human enhancement and the pro-enhancement positions that Agar describes in such detail. It may serve as an introduction, but I doubt that it will have much impact on the debate.

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Zygmunt BAUMAN. *Living on Borrowed time. Conversations with Citlali Rovirosa-Madrazo*. Cambridge: Polity, 2010. 202 pp.

Zygmunt Bauman is not happy to be living at the beginning of the 21st century. As he sees it, we live in liquid times, in a system that is liquid capitalism; we dwell in liquid cities performing our liquid identities and, occasionally, making liquid love with each other. All liquids are in the index of the book – more liquids are in the text of the conversations, such as “liquid science”.

Liquidity, of course, basically refers to Karl Marx’s analysis in the *Grundrisse*: the arrival of capitalism, i.e. free economic initiative, markets and the upholding of private property, is seen as a dissolvent of the traditions and all the fixed formats that preceded it. Whereas Marx welcomed the unlimited perspectives of human emancipation inherent in the process, Bauman rejects them. He has no alternative on offer in that he does not promote an authoritarian (communist or other) alternative, nor does he too overtly idealise pre-capitalist modes of organising our livelihood and prosperity. Bauman is also critical of the fact that we live in a (pluralist) society of organisations, and he scorns the fact that we no longer believe that Society or the State should impose the conditions of happiness upon us all. Again, he has no alternative on offer – the Church will not do either. In his rejection of nearly everything and in the glaring absence of any positive alternative, Bauman locates himself firmly in the French philosophical tradition, as he juggles with omnipresent metaphorical tools (“difference”, “liquid”).

The fact that Bauman does not offer anything but criticism is certainly due to the fact that the “new epistemological frontiers” he tries to reach for analysing the world around us (2) are not yet in sight and perhaps not even on the horizon. Until this new, presumably illiquid, epistemology is articulated, Bauman and his audience are stuck inside a rather opaque metaphor: “Bauman’s innovative notion of liquidity is a metaphor to describe the notable social and political transformations in the mid and late twentieth century, represented by the disintegration or ‘liquidation’ of the institutions of modernity” (7).

But the metaphor does not help us to understand our predicament. For instance, the first of the eight conversations in the book discusses the current financial crisis. The analysis of the marketing of credit cards is to the point (17ff.), but when it comes to an assessment and the proposal of a remedy, the particular practice is simply asserted to be inherent in liquid capitalism – i.e. the state of affairs “in which a society of producers (profits made mostly from the exploitation of hired labour) is successfully transformed into a society of consumers (profits made mostly from the exploitation of consumerist desires)” (17). Although economists have lost a great deal of credibility lately, we still might accept from them that if a profit is to be made, in both cases, a customer has to buy the product brought about by hired labour, in both economies. Any economist will also be able to explain that credit extension cannot indeed go on indefinitely inasmuch as the liquidity provided is not put to productive use. In this respect too, Bauman’s analysis of the financial crisis misses the point. The financial crisis was mostly cooked up by governments, run by financially illiterate or entirely cynical politicians who piled up debt in order to pay for ‘solidarity’, current pensions, benefits for the poor and the disabled, subsidies for social gatherings and so on. This has nothing whatsoever to do with consumerism and capitalism, but everything to do with bankers’ bonuses, lack of professional discipline among bankers and politicians alike, and ultimately with the absence of financial literacy in the population.

We do indeed live in liquid times, if this is taken to be an allusion to the famous motto of the *Financial Times*: “We live in financial times”. It means that, contrary to previous epochs, we have made tremendous leaps in financialization, i.e. we are able to transport liquidity through time and socio-economic space and disseminate more information-backed-up-with-money and express infinitely more about what is going on in the world than ever before. But we do not yet entirely grasp this and appreciate it to the full. And indeed, it also means that economic mischief, such as housing people with no income and no assets in the United States, can be transported with tremendous speed and momentum to other economies. Nevertheless, the fact that we live longer and more peaceful lives than ever before is no mere coincidence: longevity, health and prosperity have likewise reached an all time high. The financial crisis is not, as Bauman holds, a triumph of capitalism. Rather, it is the foreshadowing of barbarism, if not a strong reminder that our system is vulnerable and may implode at any time. Such an implosion would eject us back into illiquid times, when life was short and far from easy.

Reading Zygmunt Bauman, will not help the reader to grasp this, nor will it help him or her to learn anything useful from the ongoing financial crisis. Bauman zooms in on the fact that there is still hunger and poverty and that ecological developments are not for the better. He criticises the world and everything in it. The glass is not half-full, it is nearly empty according to Bauman. Nevertheless, he seems to be unable and unwilling to explain what has taken the place of the liquor that was once in the glass. The philosopher Bauman will be remembered for his moral drive, for his genuine concern and for his prolific writing, driven by the will to beat the demons of our time. He will not be remembered for the rigour of his analysis and his constructive contribution. And

one hopes that his meme of “liquidity” will become extinct sooner rather than later and that it will be replaced by a true understanding of liquidity.

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Henrik J. BJERRE. *Kantian Deeds*. London: Continuum, 2010. 199 pp.

Bjerre’s *Kantian Deeds*, the published edition of his 2008 doctoral dissertation, is an endeavour to develop morality in the idea of a moral law that springs from the confrontation with an extra dimension transcending our normal life. Morality is taken to mean the ability to perform moral actions or deeds. Because the discourse about morality is by nature broad, the author’s approach suggests a twofold subdivision.

First, Bjerre deals with the difference between what he labels a ‘Soft’ Kantian approach, meaning a linguistic and post-Wittgensteinian view that places morality exclusively within the limits of language, and a ‘Hard’ Kantian approach that embraces the inherent contradictions in reason itself and thereby creates space for a morality that transcends the limits of my own language.

Although the author definitely acknowledges the value of a philosophy of language approach towards morality, he most ardently exposes its primary weakness. Where Brandom and McDowell take a wrong turn, for instance, is in the way their post-Wittgensteinian project renders them unable to think beyond the limits of language, thereby acknowledging that there might be philosophical problems that are left untouched in pragmatic philosophy. “They fail to embrace the unavoidable tension within reason itself as the essence of its own inter-esse”(69). Bjerre then points to the dimension that is more than merely phenomenal, although not yet noumenal. The internal tension that this dimension produces is absent in the ‘Soft’ Kantian approach.

The moral law fills the vacant space at the heart of reason, opened up by this tension-inducing dialectical reasoning. This places the moral law, therefore, on the other side of inference and it makes itself known to us as an inherent and logical feature of reason itself as soon as we learn how to use language.

Secondly, by claiming that there is no normativity all the way up, the author makes possible an approach towards a morality that ‘interrupts’ and changes the normativity that otherwise permeates our being. The realization of the tension is ultimately the necessity for understanding the place of the categorical imperative as an ought that challenges us from outside as well as from within.

By differentiating between a ‘normal’ morality vis-à-vis an ‘extra-normal’ morality, the author creates space to develop the transcending nature of the deed as opposed to a moral action. The employment of the word ‘deed’ serves a very specific purpose. It emphasizes a qualitative difference between deeds and other types of (moral) action: namely actions as genus as opposed to deeds as species. Contrary to the act, therefore, the deed contains a certain surplus of action. Essentially, these kinds of acts are the ones that give the whole question of morality an aura of reverence and solemnity in

Kant. In his writings, Kant specifically identifies a ‘higher interest’ of reason, namely one that goes beyond the survival and enjoyment of the individual. It is by transcending our own private (linguistic) boundaries that human beings can fulfil their higher interest. One rises only by performing deeds, because without the ‘extra’ dimension, the kind of doing involved in morality would not be of such crucial significance and be handled with such pathos, nor would it be possible to distinguish it from anything else in the world.

The relevance of Bjerre’s thesis is that it emphasizes unconditional duty, the type of action that is only justified from the urgent awareness that it must be done. This duty is by necessity unconditional. It tears human beings out of their pre-moral natural condition, as well as from the comfortable stability of everyday modern discourse. There is no escape from it; it applies to all levels of human existence. This duty challenges the moral person to perform a deed. By focussing on the concept of the deed, Bjerre develops an understanding of an extra-moral act that results in a new beginning, rather than in an end. Where pre-moral acts represent the absence of interpretation and normal moral acts represent a result of an interpretation we can see that extra-moral acts represent a reinterpretation. The idea of normal morality is that of a moral conduct, which “a human being learns, while undergoing its transformation into a capable language user, and which it, once initiated, partakes in refining and developing. On the other side, Kant’s descriptions of a free, moral act performed out of pure obligation and a ‘higher necessity’ indicate a dimension of break, refusal and rebellion against that which is considered to be moral in a community”(2).

Every quest for a foundation for morality will be confronted with the need for a point of reference beyond our human paradigms. Morality that turns out to be simply a philosophy of conversation will always be just that, ‘a’ philosophy, ‘a’ conversation. Human experience illustrates a craving for a fundamental and fixed point of reference. It is all good and well to make scathing remarks about the latent Platonism inherent in classical morality, but in the end, the results of morality as only a form of conversation have proved to be insufficient. In his study of Kant’s philosophy of morality, Bjerre does not fall into this trap. He states uncompromisingly that every morality will by necessity end in metaphysics and to (try to) formulate an answer to this question is one of the most poignant challenges that lie ahead of every endeavour in metaphysics.

But a morality that has a lack as its birthplace will always, and as a rule, result in a lacking morality. In the end, this might very well be the reason why Kant did not go further than he (contrary to some of his followers) did. Ultimately, Kantian morality is concerned with the fundamental balance between the starry heavens above and the moral law within. By turning the starry heavens into a big black hole, you might end up with an interesting philosophy, but you will also be left with a morality lacking any firm ground upon which to base itself, and without this, as Bjerre so expressively demonstrates, a ‘Soft Kantian’ morality that can only end in an abundance of language games and morality as a social phenomena without a serious end product.

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Paul J. DAPONTE. *Hope in an Age of Terror*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009. 288 pp.

In *Hope in an Age of Terror*, the American theologian Paul Daponte investigates the impact and meaning of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the United States on the traditional theodicy question. In an original manner, Daponte develops his thoughts in three parts. The first, appropriately entitled 9/10, offers an overview of the theodicy debate in the 20th century, characterized by the questions raised by Auschwitz in this regard. The second part, consequently called 9/11, attempts to describe the terrorist attacks objectively, meditating on them in view of apocalyptic symbols. The third and final part, 9/12, reflects on the impact of 9/11 for theodicy, aiming at a positive approach instead of falling into the trap of negative fatalism. Starting in his general introduction with the image and symbol of dust, Daponte refuses to reduce these attacks to the place where everything ended, where negativity and death won out over hope and life: dust shows what once was and is now finished, but the Christian also challenges us to see through this dust the live-giving, animating Spirit of God. Indeed, “the dust of the ground can bring forth life, even the dust of Ground Zero” (1) and the author takes up the challenge to clarify this. Starting from a ‘theology of suffering’ that takes the suffering of the victims seriously, something the author maintains traditional theodicies tend to overlook from time to time, the aim is to arrive at a ‘theology of hope’.

Daponte criticizes every theodicy that results in abstract philosophical and theological reflection on why suffering happens, without taking the concrete reality of suffering seriously. This seems contradictory, because concrete human crises of suffering trigger theological theodicy questions. Is then “the wheelchair” not a better place to start theologizing than the “armchair”, Daponte wonders (18). This attention characterizes the whole project of the book, implying that before reflecting on the question where God is in certain circumstances, the author wants to get into the depths of the suffered reality and “uncover the actual dynamics of evil” (85). In order to do so, the introductory chapter focuses on traditional conceptions of theodicy according to Augustine and Irenaeus, the second chapter investigates the historical background of that other groundbreaking event: Auschwitz, characterized by its many victims and the horrible situations with which they were confronted, but also by the processes behind it, such as the banalization of evil and modern techniques of racism. In the third chapter, the author elaborates on the role of exclusion as a means to understand suffering, interpreting it theologically as a sin against divinely created interdependence, which excludes everything and everyone that does not share in the same identity and totality (cf. Levinas). With an in-between reflection on current theodicy in the context of Levinas’ critique, the reflections on identity continue in the fourth chapter, focusing on the ‘quest for identity’ that characterizes genocides. Furthermore, the thoughts of René Girard on envy and scapegoating, the structural character of evil and the role of demonizing, are discussed as a means to understand the suffering of the 20th century and the call for memory and narrative to take all of these aspects into account. In the last chapter of the 9/10 part,

Daponte reflects on revenge, showing that his plea for solidarity with the sufferers as necessary for a credible, practical theodicy, implies the need for the recognition of our “solidarity as sinners” as well (81).

The sixth chapter, the first of the 9/11 part, begins by describing the historical data related to the attacks themselves, taking into account both the causes of the attacks as the responses. These include the small, but heroic, self-sacrificing acts of those who tried to rescue the victims as a sign of goodness in the midst of this misery on the one hand, and the scapegoating mechanism calling for revenge and war on the other. In the following chapter, the author tries to grasp some of its reality through apocalyptic symbols that – in the Greek sense of the word – can reveal a new kind of understanding. He refers to the symbol of the tower (cf. the tower of Babel and the twin towers representing power and hubris), dust and ashes (representing ever-present death), the smoke (which can be used as a metaphor for the U.S. response, because it both “hides and conceals” [110]). If we want to use the “apocalyptic potential” of this crisis, however, we should also “consider the foundations upon which we build our empires, the power and domination systems that continue to victimize the forgotten or ignored ‘others’”, the foundation being solidarity: “the recognition of our long neglected solidarity in sin and of our long overlooked solidarity in suffering” (115). Investigating the first aspect, solidarity in sin, in chapter eight brings Daponte to reflect on the roots and substance of terrorist evil by comparing it to the same categories elaborated on in the first part: exclusion, dualistic thinking and the nature of violence as establishing “a cycle of revenge” (116). Accusing the terrorists of this exclusion, dualistic thinking and revenge has to remind us of the ways in which all of us are complicit in the same sins, be it in other ways, and thus are responsible for the “breaking of our created bonds of interconnectedness” (148). The second aspect, however, solidarity in suffering, becomes crucial to the reflection on theodicy in the 9/12 time period.

This existential experience of solidarity in suffering gives rise to a theological reflection on God’s presence in the midst of it, as chapter 9 develops. Perhaps God’s presence can be discovered in the acts of people reaching out to one another in the midst of death, in the phone calls from men and women to their family members from within the planes, Daponte wonders. These acts – entitled ‘moments of grace’ – can be considered as a refusal to disconnect, but to keep the created bonds of interconnectedness as primary, highlighting “God’s relationality, communality and fidelity” more than God’s “omnipotence, domination and control” (164). In chapter ten, the author explores what this implies for the image of God. Only the Trinitarian God, who is ‘Other’ and ‘Relation’ at the same time, can reflect these experiences and not the abstract, philosophical God of “post-Leibnizian or Enlightenment theodicy” (166). What this entails for the appropriate human response is developed by Daponte in the last chapter. He rethinks the notion of forgiveness as an activity expressing subjectivity, rather than a passive acceptance of the suffering. Moreover, from a Christian perspective, forgiveness cannot be considered a private matter, rather it also aims at restoring community, which is more demanding than the merely legal ‘pardon’ whereby punishment brings violence to a

closure. Instead, forgiveness refers to future possibility and as such entails a promise: the “re-membering” of the human community (203).

Daponte’s literary background becomes obvious in his writing: the book is written in a very appealing way, with a rich vocabulary and original metaphors and plays on words that make it a very pleasant read, though not always equally accessible for non-native speakers of English. Even though the book is not particularly expansive, the sources used are many, brought together in a very intelligible manner in which each of them is useful. While the three main parts are clear, their internal content is sometimes hard to relate to the main subject, giving the impression that the author seems to refer to irrelevant sources. Once the structure reveals itself to the reader, however, everything seems to fit together like a puzzle in which no piece can be missing. While it requires some effort on the part of the reader to engage in this process, it is worthwhile in the end if one decides to do so. Moreover, the several themes touched upon reveal the complexity of the question and in so doing go against an excessively facile tendency to bring together ideas about 9/11, terrorism, presence of God, identification of sinners and victims and their relationship. Instead, by showing the ambiguity of the present world and state of the theodicy question after 9/11, Daponte challenges us by pointing to both solidarity in suffering, and – the more difficult – solidarity in sin.

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Michael McKENNA and Paul RUSSELL (eds.). *Free Will and Reactive Attitudes. Perspectives on P.F. Strawson’s ‘Freedom and Resentment’*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2008. 327 pp.

In addition to a considerable amount of new material, this collection of essays contains some of the most important articles published in reaction to P.F. Strawson’s renowned paper “Freedom and Resentment”, first published in 1962. Strawson’s contribution to the free will problem has since acquired the status of a classical text, which anyone interested in this perennial philosophical problem should read and study. As McKenna and Russell point out in their introduction, Strawson has given the free will debate a new impulse, not so much by taking a stance for or against the belief in the compatibility of free will and determinism, but by shifting the perspective from which this problem should be addressed. Strawson introduces a social naturalist view on free will, whereby he defends that any theory for or against (the possibility of) free will misconceives the pitch of the question at stake. Strawson introduces the idea that we judge the actions and motives of other humans – and the alleged freedom with which humans act and form motives – not on the basis of a metaphysical theory about determinism/indeterminism, but driven by basic ‘reactive attitudes’ or emotions. In both the non-moral and moral domain, these reactive attitudes form a sort of natural, irreducible mechanism by

which social interaction is structured and through which the ascription of freedom or free will and responsibility to other humans (and to ourselves) is given shape. In so doing, Strawson rehabilitates, in a way, the moral psychologies of the Scottish Enlightenment, more specifically of David Hume and Adam Smith – as he himself acknowledges. Indeed, the 18th century Scots were also eager to stress the constitutive role of emotion and sentiment in social life and in moral evaluation and action. In this collection, the focus is not so much on Strawson's historical affiliations, but on contemporary discussions concerning various aspects of his social naturalistic account of moral responsibility. Different fundamental critiques of Strawson's view on reactive attitudes are put forward, such as the question whether reactive attitudes can diverge from culture to culture and transform through time; or whether being *held* responsible should not be differentiated from *being* responsible; and, most importantly, whether Strawson is able to adequately give a place to the distinctive moral capacity of humans or rather reduces this capacity to a sort of by-product of our 'contingent' reactive attitudes. These and other issues are treated throughout the contributions to this collection with care and intellectual skill by leading figures in the free will debate in Anglo-American moral philosophy. This book, therefore, is a must for all readers of Strawson, but also for those who want a reliable guide to study "Freedom and Resentment" and enhance their understanding of the significance of our reactive attitudes and the relationship between emotions and morality in general.

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Rich LING and Jonathan DONNER. *Mobile Communication*. Digital Media and Society Series. Cambridge: Polity, 2009. 191 pp.

In 2010, the four billionth mobile phone user (out of an estimated planetary population of 6.5 billion) will be registered somewhere in the world. Technical possibilities once considered science fiction, are now available on the consumer market: a device that not only makes international telephone calls possible, but can be used to exchange text files, photos, videos, allow users to see one another at the touch of a screen, consult websites, let people know where they are using the GPS function and even send them a snapshot of the place taken on the spot. Mobile phones are like the Swiss Army knives of the past, packed with functions that used to be available only separately. Traditional (photo-) journalists lament the fact that people can pass on information much faster via facebook and blog pages. Even governments (and business enterprises) have to face the fact that what was once secret is no longer secret. One press of a button, and 'confidential' information is available on a public website.

Time for Rich Ling, professor at the IT University of Copenhagen and senior researcher at Telenor Research Institute, Norway, and Jonathan Donner, researcher in technology for the Emerging Markets Group at Microsoft Research India, to explore

the state of play in a series of books examining the impact of network technology and digital media on economic, cultural and political aspects of society.

Evolution in this domain moves so quickly that we are barely capable of realising what is going on. The young generation consider it normal to be available always and everywhere, and cannot even imagine what it was like for their parents who were only available at home via a land line telephone. Public telephone boxes have become museum pieces, in spite of the fact that they once played an important social role. Certain films still give us an idea of what it was like. Mobile phones have become the cultural icon of our era, from toy phones for children to phones for the elderly with large keys and limited functionality.

The first chapter of the book under review relates how a commission was set up in 1982 to examine the gulf between developed and developing countries at the level of telecommunication, and its impact on public services, trade, health care, farming, banking... The commission published its findings in the Maitland Report, which observed that 50% of the world population lived in a country in which only one telephone was available per 100 people, most of them in businesses or government offices, in an urban environment, inaccessible to ordinary men and women. It was only ten years later – in 1994 – that the commercialisation of what was to be called a “*Global System for Mobile Communication*” (GSM) took its first tentative steps. Fifteen years later the situation had changed dramatically: we no longer see telephones hanging on the wall; people now carry them around in their pockets and handbags and are available at all times. The new telephones are smaller, cheaper, have more functions, and are accessible to all sort of people, more so, for example, than the internet or personal computers. For young people (and in some countries close to 100% of the young people) it has become a something of a fad to buy a new model every year. They are not immediately concerned with the growing mountain of e-waste (electronic garbage) this creates. They are intelligent enough to be able to select the cheapest formula and limit usage costs. The providers, on the other hand, do not appear to be in a hurry to make the selection process simpler.

For developing countries, it is cheaper to install wireless networks than telephone poles and cables. Several countries in Africa have thus been able to omit this costly transition. At the same time, however, some of the said countries have been witness to the fact that the networks they established have been used to publicise information about abuse at home. Thanks to mobile phones, farmers have been able to acquire a better price for their produce, immigrants have been able to stay in touch with the home front, technicians can call in the assistance of their colleagues, parents and children can keep in touch when the children are playing outside..., but criminals are also reaping the benefits: drug trade, prostitution... (see, for example, the interesting HBO TV-series *The Wire*). Connectivity has become the buzzword, and it remains amazing how quickly this sophisticated device has been ‘domesticated’, because it broke down barriers for so many users.

But is there another side to the coin? Universal accessibility is not only a possibility, it is also in danger of becoming an obligation. The excuse that one wasn’t home or

not at one's desk is not longer valid. You have to be available all the time. It has become a luxury to be able to give the mobile a rest from time to time. Fortunately, it still collects messages for us in the "message box" even when it is switched off.

Chapter 2 explores the history of the mobile phone. Nice ideas are one thing, but without the technology to transform them into reality they remain nothing more than nice ideas. Political will is also necessary. Wireless technology dates back as far as 1860, but the establishment of a global network connecting billions of points of contact costs money and presupposes the will to spend it. Those who remember the first mobile phones will also remember how heavy and clumsy they were. At the same time, agreements had to be established on standards and protocols (e.g. WAP = Wireless Application Protocol), whereby national pride sometimes took priority over technological desirability. And suddenly it was discovered that it was not only possible to transmit and receive sound, but also texts and other files. In 1997, young people discovered that messaging, up to then at least, was free. Billions of lines of text are now transmitted every year. After SMS (Short Message System), MMS (Multi-Media Messaging) appeared, followed by GPRS (General Packet Radio Service)..., and the possibility of exchanging information between your PC and your mobile via Bluetooth. These new developments, of course, demanded greater performance, smaller microprocessors and batteries that could cope with it all. But business constructions were also necessary, of which so-called '*prepaid subscriptions*' have enjoyed the greatest success, especially among young people with a limited budget or people with limited usage (in developing countries and sometimes as much as 90%).

Chapter three offers a sketch of the mobile phone in daily use on the basis of five different types of user: a technician in Bangalore, a housewife in Kigali, a sugar farmer in India, a Filipino housekeeper in Singapore and a migrant worker in China. For the majority of users, the telephone function is still the most important. It increases their sense of freedom: wherever they are they can reach whoever they want whenever they want. They receive more information, helping them to make more informed choices. The sugar farmer, for example, can check market prices and decide whether or not to sell to the wholesaler. Monopolies disappear. Improved agreements ensure that work is better coordinated. The Filipino housekeeper and the Chinese migrant worker are better able to keep in touch with the home front and feel less isolated. In addition, paying by mobile phone offers certain advantages in developing countries. In this sense, mobile telephony reinforces the social network and transforms relationships between people.

Chapter four turns its attention to these changes: What are the challenges? What choices have to be made? Once again we are presented with 5 types of user: a hospital assistant in Norway, a teenager in Japan, and businessman in Milan, a retired couple in Chile, and a student with a part-time job in California. Mobile telephony is a way of coordinating a variety of situations, of quickly intervening in urgent matters or simply letting others know about a change in our 'status'. The ease with which we can immediately find the right person is an advantage. The combination of GSM and GPS allows us to localise people in situations of need, even in the mountains or the jungle. Young

people can put their parents' minds at rest when they arrive at their new destination and seniors can reassure their children about the state of their health. In the meantime, governments have to use their authority to forbid the use of mobiles while driving. For adults (?) the functionality of the device is likely to be its most important feature, for young people it represents an expression of their status. Are you part of the avant-garde with the latest model or are you one of those people who still use one or other antiquated device? The kind of mobile you use can make the difference between being part of the in-crowd or being mocked and excluded. Immediate accessibility has also dissolved the boundary between our working hours and our private lives.

Chapter five explores public debate on the use of mobile communication. Every one of us has experienced those stray GSM signals (alone or with others) at inappropriate moments: during a meeting, a speech, at the theatre, the cinema, a funeral... The authors share an anecdote in which an actor interrupts his performance and berates the audience: "You were told to turn them off by the stage manager, you were told it was against the law, and you heard two phones go off already before this. You should be ashamed of yourself. Now I'm going to exit and we're going to start this scene again [...] and I assure you if we hear one more mobile phone go off we'll be in our right mind to quit this afternoon's performance" (108). A new moral norm: "*You must switch off your mobile to avoid disturbing others*" would appear to be desirable, or at least a little 'savoir vivre'. Everyone finds it annoying to have to listen to a private conversation in a train carriage, but we have no problem calling from the same train to inform those at home that we will probably be late. The use of mobile phones evokes values such as 'discretion', 'privacy', 'politeness'... A government minister who can't leave his Blackberry in his pocket during a national religious service is front page news. The question also arises whether we should place devices in prisons, cinemas, theatres, classrooms... that disrupt GSM signals. And what about the conservation of GSM signals and messages for police use? Is it possible to select appropriate information that might be relevant for the security services from the never-ending stream of tweets, messages, blogs?

Mobile communication is also an expression of power relationships: who calls whom? who is allowed to call whom? A boss can call an employee, but is it alright for an employee to call his or her boss? Is the mobile phone a democratic reality, in relation to which we are all equal? In addition, the mobile phone has also become an instrument of social protest. Riots are started on the basis of a couple of messages and the appearance of photos and videos on social network sites. But information on the presence of police cameras on the roads can also be shared, as can film of order enforcement turning violent. At the same time, dangerous drivers can be spotted in the traffic. The step towards civilian journalism is quickly made. Newsworthy reports are not only picked up by journalists from social network sites, blogs and tweets have come to eliminate journalists as the traditional mediators between source and target.

The exercise of power via one's mobile can even be illegal: students using their mobiles to crib during exams, the camera function being employed to film bullying or intimidation at school, the acquisition of trade secrets, scams and fraud, the organisation

of underhand deals. It is completely criminal, of course, to use one's mobile to promote drug trade, prostitution, to say nothing of using it to set off a bomb. All of this simply points out that the relative simplicity of the device has the capacity to stimulate the creativity of its users (for good or for bad) to discover and exploit new possibilities.

One interesting topic explored by the authors is the coincidence of the development of mobile communication and globalisation. People migrate, but remain in contact with the home front, not only for family reasons, but also to arrange business transactions.

Chapter six concludes the study by bringing together a number of important lines of development and endeavouring to look a little further into the future. Will people attach their identity in the future to a unique number that will function as a sort of address? This would at least exclude the possibility of discriminating against people on the basis of their name. Although the authors do not mention it, the implantation of a chip similar to those we now implant in horses and dogs might be the next step for human beings. Such a unique identification of every human person opens up an immense world of technical possibilities.

The authors' conclusion can be related to a great many technological innovations: a technology develops and evolves, but the consequences thereof are not always intentional or even desired. Indeed, it is not always clear how designers and developers can acquire a perspective on such evolutions. It is all very well to wave the principle of caution in the air, but how can you predict the unpredictable? Should we prevent technological development until potential abuses have been eliminated? The suggestion that technology is neutral and only acquires moral significance when it is used is completely outmoded. Every technical/technological development brings about change in the way individuals behave and thus has a social impact. And it is sometimes a two-edged sword: a positive side (the liberation of human potential), but also a negative side (power, exploitation, fraud...). The authors are to be praised for attempting to get to the bottom of this phenomenon on the basis of a device that 3 out of 4 people in the planet possess.

The book concludes with endnotes, a lengthy bibliography and an index of names and subjects. It offers several points most readers will be able to identify with because it deals with a device most people own and use. Those who do not have a mobile phone tend to be looked down on with pity. On a critical note, however, the authors only state their intention with clarity at the end of their study: the examination of mobile communication via the mobile telephone. In other words, mobile communication is a much wider phenomenon than the mobile phone. GPS and notebooks are also forms of mobile communication, although the functions thereof are gradually being integrated. Nevertheless, the authors could have devoted at least some attention to these other forms of mobile communication and their implications. Barring this restriction, their work has evolved into an interesting study that can also be extended to include other devices and technologies that influence and indeed dominate our everyday lives.

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Richard W. MILLER (ed.). *God, Creation and Climate Change. A Catholic Response to the Environmental Crisis*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010. 150 pp.

This book contains the revised texts of the lectures given in Kansas City, Missouri, on September 26th 2009, within the framework of the Seventh Annual ‘Church in the 21st Century’ Series. It was edited by Richard W. Miller, Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology and director of the M.A. in Theology programme at Creighton University. It consists of six chapters, corresponding to six lectures, and an additional chapter that gathers the discussions held during the final panel session. In addition to the introductory text by the editor himself, there are contributions by the following authors: Dianne Bergant, Distinguished Professor of Christian Culture at Providence College, Rhode Island; Daniel K. Finn, Professor of Moral Theology; William and Virginia Clemens, Professors of Economics and the Liberal Arts at St. John’s University in Collegeville, Minnesota; David J. O’Brien, Professor of Faith and Culture at the University of Dayton; John J. O’Keefe, Professor of Theology at Creighton University; and Jame Schaefer, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics at Marquette University.

The present volume is a written work created by eminent academics seeking to shed light from their respective disciplinary perspectives – theology, history, biblical studies and ethics – on one of the most highly topical, controversial and pressing issues of our time: the issue of environmental degradation and climate change.

The authors have a well-defined viewpoint, which clearly backs the existence of an *anthropogenic* cause to explain the phenomenon. They present their proposals from a pragmatic perspective, seeking to direct praxis and collective action – at least in terms of the North American Catholic community – based on the conviction that the severity of the issue calls for a thorough reassessment of the relationship between humankind and nature. Not only will it be necessary to raise awareness in order to cause a kind of conversion of will to occur, but we will also need imaginative abilities that will enable us to find new ways of living individually and jointly in a more sustainable way.

The theoretical and conceptual framework from which this matter is to be tackled is, of course, made up of the paradigm that represents the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. In fact, reference is specifically made in several passages of this volume to the latest contributions by the teachings of Pope Benedict XVI. Specifically, the Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* and the Message for the 43rd World Day of Peace, issued on January 1st 2010 under the title: “If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation”.

Although I will provide some brief details on the various chapters in the following paragraphs, I am obliged to explain in advance that the authors accept, as indicated above, a quasi-axiom that makes the entire message of this book meaningful. By way of summary, we could say that the basis of the message, which is assumed without further questioning, can be stated in the following terms: (i) a severe degradation of the natural environment can be observed and the incontrovertible existence of a climate change situation can be verified; (ii) the impact of humankind on the natural environment –

particularly the economic dimension of human action – is the main cause of the crisis and the imbalances that we have verified in this respect; (iii) economic development has been possible to the detriment of respect for ecology and for the exclusive benefit of a privileged few; (iv) the consequences that may, foreseeably, arise from all of this may be disastrous on multiple levels and aspects of life, shaping, in short, a terrible apocalyptic scenario in the medium term: droughts, floods, tsunamis, melting of the ice caps, pollution, extinction of species, exhausting of non-renewable resources, famine, uncontrollable migratory movements, new and even bloodier wars...; (v) the energy model based on carbon and other fossil fuels that are plentiful and cheap is unsustainable; (vi) it is not too late for humankind to modify the course of events; (vii) this would entail, among other things, a change in energy strategies, assertively backing non-polluting renewable energies and pledging more financial resources to research and development, as well as a reassessment of the growth model worldwide, which is interconnected and interdependent but also deeply unjust; (viii) the stakes are so high and the economic implications so powerful, but our moral will is so weak and political leadership so brittle, that we are at risk of becoming stagnant and gambling our children's future away, playing a sort of macabre Russian roulette, capable of destroying the extremely thin layer covering the outer part of the planet, which is none other than "the miracle of the biosphere".

This sets the background for the way in which the contributions contained in this book should be interpreted.

The first essay, written by Richard W. Miller and entitled "Global Climate Disruption and Social Justice: The State of the Problem" sets the boundaries of the playing field by referencing the theses included in the paragraph above. It should be emphasised that something begins to surface in this chapter, which reverberates in the spirit of those – including myself – who want to tackle the issue of climate change, not only from the perspective of the curious amateur, but also from a rigorous intellectual viewpoint that allows a person to properly take stock of the situation. At this point, it seems rather difficult to know what is really the true status of the issue, the true "state of the art". As the author himself acknowledges, there are scientists who maintain opposing theses and points of view to those that he himself assumes. How can those opposing views be judged? The author cuts to the quick: they have sold out – he says – to large corporations whose economic interests might be threatened if opinion became generalised on government intervention in favour of process sustainability, implementing a true economic policy against climate change. It may be that what the author states is true, but there is no reliable evidence to prove it. In any case, even sharing various aspects of the author's discourse, I cannot get beyond the feeling that the arguments provided are nothing more than a sort of *societal conspiracy theory* in support of a sort of *unique, progressive and politically correct, thinking*.

The second chapter – "The Bible's Wisdom Tradition and Creation Theology" – written by Dianne Bergant, tackles what many believe to be the root of the issue: the commandment to "dominate and submit the earth", with the ensuing repercussions

of anthropocentrism and self-awareness that humankind is the highpoint of creation. Bergant offers a suggestive interpretation of the *Book of Job* and the *Book of Wisdom* by trying to set the record straight. The tone of the contribution, is interesting. From a material point of view, it is worth noting that the author – perhaps due to being rushed and having overused the “copy and paste” tool – has repeated an entire paragraph at two different points (41 and 45).

In the third chapter – “Creation, Incarnation and Resurrection” – John O’Keefe makes a strong statement on the goodness of the material world in contrast to other viewpoints that are more inclined to favour of a spiritualist approach. It is clear that if resurrection is spiritualised, it is as if the body and the material, non-human life world are not held in high esteem. This view has been common throughout history, and neo-Platonism is a prime example in this regard. However, it is not and has not been the only way to tackle this issue in our tradition. Differing points of view have been held, such as that of Irenaeus of Lyon. The author suggests that we bring back the latter’s ideas as a channel to correct the negative assessment that the Platonic Tradition expresses with regard to the body and non-human creation.

In the next chapter – “Environmental Degradation, Social Sin, and the Common Good” – Jame Schaefer speaks of the existence of a sort of “planetary sin”, which should not only include personal sin, but also *reified* sinning structures constituting social sin. The author’s stance is influenced by Liberation Theology, although she goes even further, including endangered species and eco-systems side by side with human beings among the poor and the vulnerable. The Common Good thus takes on a planetary dimension.

In chapter five entitled “Theology and Sustainable Economics”, Daniel Finn tackles the economic aspect of the issue. He demonstrates how the market, and its mechanisms – supply, demand and prices – which at times provides an efficient response to some of the problems of economic life, such as production, can sometimes reveal itself to be a completely inadequate mechanism when it comes to achieving other economic objectives that are equally important, including, for example, the distribution of products, the quality of economic activity and process sustainability. As Finn points out, Christian Theology can provide principles for discerning criteria for action and guidelines in order to implement policies and practices that may be better suited to justice and sustainability.

David O’Brien, quoting Lenin, wonders *what can we do?* in his final essay entitled “Another Call to Action: Catholics and the Challenge of Climate Change”. The author recalls previous actions by Catholics in social movements, as well as the strength shown in other current causes, and backs the need to mobilise the Catholic community in the face of the challenges posed by environmental degradation and climate change.

The book ends by reporting on the panel’s final discussion, which was arranged in the following manner: The participants submitted written questions to the moderator, Richard W. Miller, who sifted through them and posed them to the panellists. The panellists answered and, on occasion, several of them participated in the discussion. This

chapter gives the book added value, although it also shows that the range of questions and concerns of those who attended the conference went above and beyond the issue of climate change. One is sometimes given the impression that the approach makes reference to many more issues of concern, which are on the US Catholic Church's agenda, and that climate change is but one of them, constituting an excuse to think about the great challenges that the Church faces in the 21st century.

In summary, the book is worth reading in that the way it tackles the issue of environmental degradation and climate change is based on a viewpoint that differs from ordinary views. In short, it makes good reading. However, we are left without a clear winner in the end: the fervent apostles of this new type of religion based on climate change with anthropogenic roots are accompanied by supporters, by no means any less fervent, of the diametrically opposite view. If the former brand the latter as "having sold out" to the interests of large companies, the latter claim a something similar about the former in turn: they receive big fat benefits for research projects that could feed many who would otherwise be unemployed if the myth faded.

Both sides exhibit powerful levels of faith. In spite of my every effort and good will, however, the present reviewer was unable to overcome a sort of agnostic scepticism. All in all, I believe, *just in case*, that ethical responsibility in current times calls for the sparing use of resources, energy saving, finding a fairer, more humane and respectful way of dealing with the gift of creation. In short, we must rethink the way we deal with the world and emphasise how important it is to look after and administer it as a gift and heritage that will be passed onto our children.

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Nel Noddings, *The Maternal Factor: Two Paths to Morality*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010. 289 pp.

Nel Noddings (1929) is an American feminist and philosopher specializing in the philosophy of education and in care ethics. In her latest book *The Maternal Factor*, she explores the origin of morality, which she traces back to maternal instinct. As such, she opposes a more formalistic rule-based view of morality.

In the first chapters, Noddings describes three modes of caring: instinctive caring, natural caring and ethical caring. Morality is said to have evolved out of the evolutionary positive trait of being able to 'read' a child's need. This is instinctive caring, a characteristic shared with many non-human animals that has evolved into natural caring, which is the practical empathic mode of responding to the needs of others. The third mode, ethical caring, relates to formal morality in that it sustains and expands the community of natural caring. It allows us to care for others who are outside our natural circle of caring. Natural caring (which is in itself evolved from instinctive caring) forms the starting point of ethical caring.

According to Noddings, the caring relationship is the incubator of values and virtues. Hence she believes that care ethics can guide people in the same way as more formal ethical systems such as utilitarianism, deontology or virtue ethics, three theories to which she compares her system critically in the course of this book. She also criticizes the emphasis that many ethical systems place on the concept of autonomy. She believes that a system that starts from the assumption that we are completely free beings is erroneous. People are not completely free; we become individuals only in relation to other people. Noddings still allows some room for autonomy, but this is a limited autonomy conceived as choices and responsibilities, anchored in a relational ontology.

Noddings describes the differences between her approach and Christian ethics. Caring, in the latter, is a commandment of God. She believes, however, that it is something that has resulted from evolution. She admits that her approach may lead to the criticism of essentialism. By explicitly stating that women are, on an evolutionary basis, more inherently capable of caring, and men more prone to aggression, she takes a controversial stance. Noddings claims nevertheless that this is only so if we see these ‘innate’ characteristics as being so created by a divine God. Given that these are the result of evolution, she sees an opening for change. She gives the example that women are often praised in their professional lives if they have male characteristics such as toughness. However, given that ethics has a basis in maternal caring, it should be the other way around: it should become more acceptable for men to become more like women. This would also benefit world peace. She also counters another criticism often heard with regard to care ethics. Care ethics is said to promote ‘parochialism’, a preference to help primarily those around us, and not facilitate the possibility of change on a global scale. She counters this by stating that it is difficult to bring about change as an individual anyhow. Care ethics allows us to acknowledge the strength of local communities. She believes the solution lies in committed collective action. Communities can connect with other communities throughout the world to empower these communities in the need to tackle their problems.

The Maternal Factor is an important book, as it questions fundamental assumptions from present-day ethics. The topics Noddings deals with are well deliberated and the concept of natural caring does indeed have the potential to answer many questions about the foundations of morality. It is also controversial: some would probably not agree with her ideas on religion or women. For example, her assumption that religion should best be abandoned because it is *de facto* paternalistic and the cause of oppression of women may not be acceptable to many. Also some may not accept her evolutionary outlook on gender differences. She suggests, however, that this outlook does allow for change. It was not entirely clear to me how this change could be brought about, but the book remains a must-read.

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Stefan SKRIMSHIRE, *Future Ethics. Climate Change and Apocalyptic Imagination*, London: Continuum, 2010. 290 pp.

The full title of this book may be deceptive. One might be inclined to assume that its contributors offer an ethical analysis of the future. Thus, it might contain subtle reasoning about the epistemics of climate change(s) and analyse the moral aspects of scaring people by launching catastrophic and apocalyptic discourses into social space, into the social ecosystem.

It is rather the opposite we are confronted with: all the contributors take the alleged catastrophic climate change for granted. The ethics discussed is not the ethics of propaganda but the ethics of the population and the entire human race in view of a (certain) catastrophe. As the population's behaviour consists, according to the authors, mainly in inaction, such an ethics is bad because it has the potential to make the apocalyptic imaginary come true. Of course, when one is discussing behaviour at such an abstract level, rather than on the level of the particular instances of choice individuals are confronted with, it is not ethics we are dealing with but rather anthropology. In the present instance it is religious anthropology, for the most part, mixed up with Freud, secular alarmism and criticism of modernity. The focus is on the apocalyptic-as-such; the fact that previous apocalyptic prophecies failed to materialise (whatever happened to acid rain?) is not confronted.

How is one to judge such a contribution? Well, the authors wonder and speculate about the fact that humans barely respond to predictions of ultimate catastrophe. They should wonder about the very existence of their book. Is it the most sensible thing to do, in view of impending apocalypse, to issue a book on "How should we think the future? This is the vital climate change question." Perhaps, perhaps not. However, the very occurrence of the book quite literally contributes to the ecological problem simply by having been produced, transported, stored and eventually burned. This goes especially for the hard cover version: surely, a paperback version would have lasted long enough in view of the fact that the 'End' is near. The book absorbs resources but it does not offer anything in return – anything, that is, that would diminish the chances or mitigate the impact of catastrophes occurring. The editor himself remarks that "climate change' [...] is used to justify any number of ideological and technocratic agendas" (6). Indeed! In this particular instance, we have a tribe of academics whose agenda consists in opening up a market for their disciplines. This they hope to attain by reproducing one of the memes that is currently most vivid in the mind of a large part of the population: Climate Change. The authors aim to reach activists, politicians, and educators by referring to climate change whereas the output of their work and the very discipline itself, would meet with sheer indifference otherwise.

Returning to the mistaken assumption that the book purports to be about the ethics of speech acts, I find the authors guilty of spreading alarmism. The spreading of alarmism, by itself, might be considered unethical. It infects the body social with irrational sentiments and depresses the more susceptible minds among us. Alarmism does

not contribute to a solution of the alleged problem at all. On the contrary, in a moderate dose it induces tunnel vision and in a substantial dose it overwhelms and blocks out all rational considerations.

Either you believe in Climate Change or you don't – to economize on the production and distribution of apocalyptic literature is a sensible thing to do either way.

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