

Jefferson, Hobbes, and Locke, who seek to undermine supernatural religion and to re-orient our concern towards earthly goods (147-148). In the conclusion, it seems that Owen has an affinity for Tocqueville's view that supernatural religion is useful, yet Owen does not address the concern that, if Locke and Hobbes are right, then we cannot justify our supernatural beliefs, no matter how useful they may be.<sup>3</sup> While the absence of one shared view is not a problem for a book primarily interested in investigating Early Modern views of religion, the more ambitious project motivating this book seems to call for one.

In his more ambitious argument, which he articulates in the Preface but does not develop in this book, Owen contends that the Early Modern liberals offered a stronger response to the challenge that religion poses to liberal society than do most contemporary liberals (particularly Rawlsians, who address only "'reasonable pluralism,' not pluralism as such" (xi)). Because this religious challenge is currently a pressing obstacle facing liberal societies, contemporary liberals would do well to re-examine and re-incorporate the Early Modern liberal approach to religious transformation and toleration. This book is a contribution to the larger project, carefully reconstructing the Early Modern view, which can then be refined and defended for the sake of supporting normative claims about the way we ought to structure our liberal societies today.

In light of (a) the ambitious argument, (b) the unreconciled deep disagreements between the philosophers examined, and (c) the sparse attempts to assemble any coherent view, I think that the reader is left justifiably puzzled over precisely what view of religious transformation Owen thinks is so valuable. Moreover, the method of close textual analysis that Owen employs in this book limits the role that the book can play in advancing the ambitious project. While reconstructing the Early Modern view(s) of religious transformation is certainly an important step in the argument, and while the book does that quite well, the normative project of refining and defending this view remains unaddressed. This may be considered a virtue of the book and not a weakness: the arguments are intriguing and compelling, which may encourage readers to engage in the project of refining and defending some of these arguments for contemporary application.

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<sup>3</sup> Owen comments that Tocqueville may be taken to support the claim that "almost any religion, even a false one, is preferable to no religion" (140).

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### ***Cosmic Pessimism***

EUGENE THACKER, Artwork by Keith Tilford

Pharmakon Series. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Univocal Press, 2015. 55 pp. \$19.95 (paper)  
doi:10.1017/S001221731600007X

Eugene Thacker, professor of Media Studies at the New School for Social Research and enemy of Glenn Beck, has been writing about the philosophical consequences of horror, pessimism, and nihilism for several years. *Cosmic Pessimism* is his most recent publication in this area, following on the heels of his three-volume work, *Horror of Philosophy*, which includes *In the Dust of This Planet* (2011), *Starry Speculative Corpse* (2015), and *Tentacles Longer Than Night* (2015), each published by Zero Books.

Familiarity with these works would be helpful, but is not essential, for the reader of *Cosmic Pessimism*. At only 55 pages in length, this short booklet serves as a brief summary of Thacker's work on philosophy and pessimism, although not in any systematic way. Somewhere between a best-of album, a series of deleted-scenes, and a new work entirely, the summary offered in *Cosmic Pessimism* is presented in a series of aphorisms, much in the Nietzschean style.

Consequent of its genre, there are no chapters in *Cosmic Pessimism*, but there are frequently occurring visual interventions by New York artist Keith Tilford. These visual accompaniments helpfully punctuate the movement of the text, each one taking the form of a complex ink blot and mutating throughout the work. The booklet revolves around the maxim: "There is no philosophy of pessimism, only the reverse" (1). Quite straightforwardly, pessimism, being the "nightside of thought" and the doom of extreme disenchantment, is the central figure of *Cosmic Pessimism* (3). Brief engagements with themes such as doom ("that all things inevitably come to an end") and gloom ("the stuff of dim, hazy, overcast skies") dot the bleak landscape of the book, leaving readers with little to hang on to should they desire a consistent underlying argument (20). However, that the argument is difficult to fix upon singularly should not be taken as a criticism. Instead, it seems to be part of Thacker's strategy to defeat easy summaries, clear arguments, and careful critiques. Thacker proceeds lyrically, and not argumentatively, although his individual arguments are compellingly drawn from experiences common to any postmodern individual. As well, figures such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche appear throughout the booklet, alongside Buddhist and Greek terms, and small quotations from lesser studied figures like Lev Shestov and Frogall Dibdin.

In summary—if one can successfully provide a summary of a book that resists summary because of its brevity, and furthermore a summary of a book that is a sort of summary of the author's work to date—it bears keeping in mind the goals of any book review. Having situated the work in relation to others by the same author, and having given interested readers a look into the book itself, there is really not much more to do. This feeling of pointlessness in the face of an artificial conclusion resonates deeply with Thacker's reflections on the nature of books, appropriately found in what could be called his anti-book. Near the end of *Cosmic Pessimism*, he writes (after giving several obscure examples) that there are "works designed for incompleteness—their very existence renders them dubious" (65). This is one of those works, and it is an enlightening look at the darkness of thought.

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### ***Frege on Thinking and Its Epistemic Significance***

GARAVASO PIERANNA and NICLA VASSALLO

Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014; 128 pp.; \$ 75.00 (hardback)

doi:10.1017/S001221731600010X

Frege is well known for chastising any attempt to approach questions regarding the nature of logical laws, numbers, and meaning from a psychological standpoint. He looked with despair at the philosophy of logic and mathematics practiced by many of his contemporaries as thoroughly contaminated by psychology. He never ceased to