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BIRD, Alexander. *Nature's Metaphysics: Laws and Properties*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. xiv + 231. Cloth, $66.00—Alexander Bird's latest book is an explanation and defense of a metaphysical theory about properties called *Dispositional Essentialism* (DE) and the account of laws of nature that follow from this theory. The DE view of properties and laws is rather complex and it is therefore helpful that Bird contrasts his view with the regularity theory of laws (David Lewis) and the nomic necessitation view (David Armstrong). While the other two theories hold that laws of nature are distinct from properties of things, DE holds that "laws spring from within the properties themselves" (p. 2). Consequently, DE is not only a different view about what laws of nature are, it is also, and more fundamentally, a different view about the nature of properties. On the strong view of DE that Bird favors, *Dispositional Monism*, all properties that are natural (that is, scientifically significant properties that form an ontologically distinct set of entities which differentiate them from other predicates) and "fundamental" (properties with "non-redundant causal powers," p. 13), have dispositional essences. This means that natural fundamental properties have a disposition understood as a conditional relationship between the property's manifestation property and stimulus property. It is these relations between properties that are identified with laws of nature. Though there is general agreement that there is some connection between laws of nature and natural propertiesm, Lewis's and Armstrong's views hold this connection to be contingent whereas Bird's contention is that it is metaphysically necessary.

The book naturally divides into two parts. The first part consists of an account of DE. After the first introductory chapter Bird lays out his conception of properties in chapter 2, how these properties account for the laws of nature in chapter 3 and explain why it is to be preferred to the rival views in chapter 4.

The second part of the book is dedicated to the defense of DE against various objections. Chapters 5 and 6 deal with objections that follow from the relational conception of properties that is advocated by DE. In particular, whether it makes sense to hold that these properties are real while being related to merely possible or nonactual things, and whether an essentially relational view of properties will not lead to an infinite regress or vicious circularity in that dispositions must be understood in terms of other dispositions, etc. In chapter 7 the interesting objection that some properties (such as spatial and temporal properties) seem to not be dispositional but structural in nature is considered. In chapter 8 Bird considers the objection that laws of nature appear not to be necessary. Finally, in chapter 9 Bird sketches an answer to the question of whether scientific activity is or could be adequate to the metaphysical account of laws put forward in the book.

I leave the debate about whether DE is to be preferred over the "categorical" view to Lewis, Armstrong, and their followers. One thing worth highlighting from the second part of the book is that it is framed

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to a large part on allegedly "counter intuitive" aspects of DE (chapter 7 and 8 in particular). Bird is committed to answering these appeals to intuitions (rather than simply dismissing them as "prejudices") because he holds that "intuitions" in metaphysics "counts for something" (p. 10). In fact, some of his key arguments in the first part of the book rely on "intuitions". In particular, his argument for the distinction between natural and nonnatural properties as well as his argument for the view that all laws of nature are metaphysically necessary relies on an appeal to intuition (though in the latter case he admits that further reasons are needed). The worry is, then, that his appeal to "intuitions" in the first part of the book becomes undermined in his critique of them in the second part. That is not to say that there might be stronger arguments for both the distinction between natural and nonnatural properties and for the view that all laws of nature are metaphysically necessary.

Overall, *Nature's Metaphysics* has the commendable and unusual virtue of both working out the position it defends and thoroughly engaging with the views it opposes. This makes the book not only a valuable account of DE but also a suitable work for anyone interested in the debate about the connection between the metaphysics of properties and laws of nature.—Stefan Storrie, *Trinity College Dublin.*

BRAGUE, Rémi. *The Legend of the Middle Ages: Philosophical Explorations of Medieval Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.* Trans. by Lydia G. Cochrane. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. xi + 287pp. Cloth, $35.00—The premise that animates this enquiry is that the Middle Ages are a period of history that has something to tell us about ourselves. In an autobiographical note, Brague tells the reader how his classical studies led him out of his early work on Plato and Aristotle to a serious study of the Middle Ages and a professorship in Arabic medieval philosophy. Any French man or woman who studies medieval philosophy is perforce an autodidact, given the absence of medieval studies in the French curriculum even at the university level. Many American readers will remember that Etienne Gilson founded his influential Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies not in France but in Toronto.

Brague opens with a set of distinctions rarely encountered in contemporary literature, that is between theology in Christianity and *Kalam* in Islam, between philosophy in Christianity and *falsafa* in Islam, elaborating on the terms and the difference in understanding they make.

Addressing the genesis of European culture, Brague acknowledges, "Europe borrowed its nourishment, first from the Greco-Roman world that preceded it, then from the world of Arabic culture that developed in parallel with it, and finally from the Byzantine world. It is from the

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