

themselves and adapt to new structural realities or find themselves on the ash heap of history. *Emerging Moral Vocabularies* is an admirable attempt to articulate a theoretical perspective that can put this understanding to work.

The first three chapters provide the background and advance Lowe's own "moral vocabularies" perspective. He contrasts his "middle range" theory with Dawkins's theory of cultural memetics and Lakoff's metaphor theory and argues from weaknesses in the latter that sociological theories should be preferred. Though Lowe's diagnosis of the problems in memetics and metaphor theory was right on, I had hoped that he would work harder to integrate these influential views into his own model. This would have considerably broadened the book's appeal. In general, however, Lowe bases his theoretical scheme almost exclusively on Joseph Gusfield's and Murray Milner's theories of status politics and status hierarchies, Hunter's research on the culture wars, and work on frame alignment processes from the social movement literature.

The next four chapters tackle the book's empirical cases. Lowe examines one highly successful moral vocabulary (tobacco control) and one less successful moral vocabulary (animal rights) with an eye toward understanding why some moral vocabularies are more widely adopted than others. Though a bit meandering at times, these chapters make important points that deserve broader attention. Among these is the much-needed acknowledgement that—contra Lakoff—framing is not simply cognitive magic. Frames need framers, and Lowe's social movement-oriented analysis appropriately acknowledges the blood, sweat, and legal fees that go into legitimizing a new way of thinking. He also provides instructive comparisons between animal rights "fundamentalists" and Weber's sociology of religion. Lowe demonstrates that analyzing committed activists through the lens of religious virtuosi can be a fruitful exercise. These chapters also contain extensive detail about each movement's history, fascinating to anyone who wants a fuller understanding of any of the movements.

The author makes another particularly noteworthy point in the second-to-last chapter: competing moral vocabularies exist in a

Emerging Moral Vocabularies: The Creation and Establishment of New Forms of Moral and Ethical Meanings, by **Brian M. Lowe**. Oxford, UK: Lexington Books, 2006. 262 pp. \$75.00 cloth. ISBN: 0739109804.

STEPHEN VAISEY
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
vaisey@unc.edu

Why did the author's mother—a middle-class woman without network ties to animal rights activists or other politically conscious persons—decide against buying an inexpensive fur coat? With this illustration in mind, Brian Lowe sets out on a quest to find out how new moral understandings come into being and are successfully diffused among broader non-activist populations.

The sociological study of morality has come a long way since the days of Durkheim. Most researchers now understand that societies do not have coherent moralities that their members straightforwardly internalize. Cultures are more like Malthusian ecologies than like spider webs of shared significance. Moral entrepreneurs are continually trying to get their "brand" out there, while entrenched understandings must reproduce

space of finite, inexhaustible status. Thus, advancing a new moral vocabulary inevitably implies working to delegitimize another. Acknowledging this zero-sum dynamic is helpful for understanding why some cultural differences necessarily lead to conflict. This idea has broad implications for thinking about cultural conflict. The book ends with a short conclusion.

Emerging Moral Vocabularies is a good book that could have been better. Its primary fault is a lack of engagement with sociological literatures that speak precisely to the problem that Lowe wants to address. Abbott's work on professional ecologies (and John Evans's extension of it to the bioethics debate) is formally very similar to Lowe's model. Boltanski and Thévenot's work on "repertoires of justification" and the neo-institutionalists' emphasis on legitimacy processes (among others) seem like vital points of reference for thinking about ideological ecologies. Engaging these thinkers would have added breadth to the book's target audience, depth to its argument, and (presumably) generated new insights into the movements in question.

Similarly, the author hints at the work of Lamont and Swidler on cultural repertoires in some tantalizing ways, but never really puts these connections to good use. For instance, one idea that Lowe considers briefly, but that I would like to have seen more fully explored, is that the "moral toolkit" is a more internalized, more emotionally salient subset of the "cultural toolkit." After all, despite his choice of words, Lowe makes clear that moral vocabularies are more than just words we use; in some cases, they have the power to shape entire lives.

In the end, however, these weaknesses might have more to do with the fragmented structure of the field than with any failing on the author's part. For scholars who are interested in bridging the field's structural holes, this book has much value. Cultural sociologists who want to understand better the struggles that produce shared meaning and social movement scholars who want to think about the broader cultural impact of the movements they study should take a look.