

***The Theology of the Westminster Standards: Historical Context and Theological Insights.* By J.V. Fesko. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014. 414 pp. \$12.99, Paperback. ISBN-13: 978-1433533112**

The Westminster Standards, a collection of Reformed confessional documents that includes the Westminster Confession of Faith (WFC) and the Larger (WLC) and Shorter Catechism (WSC), are regarded by many Reformed and Presbyterian churches as a magisterial presentation of Reformed doctrine. Indeed, many Baptist churches who follow the Second London Confession (1689)—a Baptist revision of the WFC—are also indebted to these works. However, due to the significant passage of time between our day and publication of the Westminster Standards (1643-1649), there is a great deal the modern reader can miss or misunderstand regarding the teachings of these works. The modern reader will likely miss the intricate theological controversies and historical currents that are shaping the nuanced language of these documents. Furthermore, reading these documents separated from their historical context has led to many instances of misreading them in light of later theological developments. Thus a need for a clear exposition of these documents that situates them in their historical context is needed. It is in response to this need that J. V. Fesko's has written *The Theology of the Westminster Standards*.

Having received his Ph.D. in theology from the University of Aberdeen, and serving as a professor of systematic and historical theology at Westminster Seminary in California, Fesko is well-qualified for providing an historical and theological introduction to the Westminster Standards. Fesko is also an ordained minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. These two callings, as a scholar and as a minister, come through in the present work where Fesko provides excellent scholarship but also makes it accessible and useful to the pastor and interested lay person. In addition to these credentials, Fesko also writes with a noticeable passion and affection for these documents. He shares in the Preface that the Westminster Standards served a significant role in his own theological formation and that it had been a desire of his to write a commentary on these works from his seminary days (1). Thus, in contrast to what could be a rather dry treatment of this subject,

Fesko's personal interest and fascination with these works makes for a book that is not only informative but enjoyable too.

Fesko's treatment fills an important space among the works that expound the theology of the Westminster Standards in focusing heavily on the primary literature surrounding the creation of the Westminster Standards. Fesko is able to take the reader back to the time period of these works and illuminate many of the historical events, trends and controversies that form the background for these works. The result is an exposition that is surprisingly fresh.

Fesko shows the divines were working to articulate the faith amidst several real dangers posed to a Reformation that was still being contended and to a Europe and a nation (England) that were in real battle over the very theology that was being debated in the assembly. The divines were often hammering out this confession with the sound of canon fire outside since England was in a civil war that was partly to decide the shape of Christianity for the nation. As Fesko states, "In early modernity, theology was no ivory tower endeavor—theology often wrote checks that were cashed in blood" (48). Fesko draws the reader into the suspense, drama, and high stakes that were involved in developing these documents. Fesko does an admirable job, not only explaining the theology of these documents, but also recreating something of their urgency.

The book is divided into 13 well-organized chapters. Chapter 1 presents the rationale for the book and the chapter 2 lays out the major historical and theological issues that give the background for the Westminster Assembly. After these two chapters, Fesko takes up one doctrine per chapter, following the order of the WCF. Though he does not treat every doctrine of the WCF (to do so would make the work exceedingly long), he does address the major doctrines. The book also includes a very useful annotated bibliography in which Fesko describes many of the primary works and their role in the formation of the Westminster Standards. This bibliography will be invaluable to any student wishing to continue their studies in this area.

Chapter 4, on "God and the Decree"—one of the more controversial chapters of the WCF—is a good illustration of how Fesko's use of the primary literature helps clarify misunderstandings and allows the theology of the Confession to be read afresh as "some of the most highly nuanced discussions about divine sovereignty and human

responsibility in early modern Reformed theology” (123). Fesko recounts the prominent criticisms of the Confession’s treatment of the decree by J. B. Torrance, Jan Rohls, and others, who charge this chapter of the WCP as evidence that it presents a Reformed theology marked by “speculative determinism” and “connected to logic rather than to God’s saving action in Christ” (97). Fesko shows these criticisms to be misguided and more applicable to later developments in Reformed theology and of the Enlightenment, by showing how careful the divines were in their articulation of the decree to preserve both God’s absolute sovereignty and the contingency of secondary causes.

In laying out the Confession’s theology on the decree, Fesko calls the reader to consider the document in its pre-Enlightenment context, in which “the affirmation of multiple agents acting with different motives and ends upon the same event was not at all troubling” (104). Fesko presents the thoughts of William Twisse, one of the moderators of the Assembly, as representative of the view of concurrence employed in the Confession. For Twisse God’s decree and man’s free acts work concurrently as seen by the numerous examples in Scriptures such as Cyrus letting the Jews return to Jerusalem and Christ’s bones not being broken on the cross. In these examples God’s decree determines infallibly what will occur, but these events also come to pass as the result of the free decisions and actions of the human agents involved (104). Thus, Fesko shows that Westminster did not enshrine a cold determinism but actually upheld the twin truths of God’s absolute sovereignty and human freedom.

Fesko is also able to demonstrate the Confession’s theological articulation which is “very specific in terms of what it rejects or teaches, but at other points it is brilliantly ambiguous or vague, thus allowing various theologians to assent to the document even though it might not advocate each theologian’s precise view” (28). This is seen with regard to the decree in that the WCF is “very specific” in rejecting the views of predestination based on either foreknowledge or middle knowledge (112), but is vague on other aspects of the decree, so that both infralapsarian and supralapsarian theologians could affirm the document (117-118).

Fesko also shows that the divines were far more well-read and studied in theology than what is often assumed. It is a popular opinion to view the divines as just spouting Calvinism. However, Fesko shows

that, instead of blind allegiance to John Calvin, many of the divines “saw their views as having roots not only in the Reformation but also in the Patristic and medieval periods” (123). Indeed, the Westminster Confession’s independence from Calvin is seen in several key areas. For example, Fesko states, “the Confession—unlike Calvin . . . argues that God permitted the fall; permission is a category that Calvin largely rejected” (110). Additionally, the WCF departs from Calvin regarding double predestination, instead the divines speak of God predestining the elect to salvation while simply passing over the reprobate (119). In speaking of these departures, Fesko makes the point that the divines were “Reformed theologians, not Calvinists” (123).

By now it is evident that this is a very insightful, carefully researched, and illuminating book on the theology of the Westminster Standards, nonetheless, there are a few areas where the present author wishes the book provided a bit more. One is an introduction to the divines themselves. Fesko mentions multiple theologians and divines by name as he presents the primary literature, but he rarely gives any biography for these theologians. If the reader is not familiar with the theologians who were part of the Westminster Assembly before picking up this book, he will likely become confused. Perhaps an appendix that listed the divines and a short biography of the major ones could be added in a subsequent edition.

Second, for the Baptist reader, it is unlikely that the discussion on baptism will seem adequate in explaining the WCF’s view of infant baptism. Though Fesko does a satisfactory job of showing how Westminster rejects the Catholic view of baptismal regeneration, and holds that baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace that “is first and foremost the promise of God and second the promise of the one baptized” (324), the reasoning for the assembly’s rejection of the believer baptism view is largely obscure. This, however, may be due to the unfortunate fact that the “extant records are a bit sparse” (322) regarding the debates about baptism on the floor.

In summary, Fesko’s treatment of the Westminster Standards is an exceptional resource on the development and theology of these important works in the history of the church. The book is well-researched and well-written so that the theology and history of these documents comes to life and helps these documents speak again to a new generation. This text is highly recommended for candidates for ministry in a

Reformed church and for any pastor, student, scholar, or lay person who would like to know more about these works and about this important time in the history of the Reformation.

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***Women of the Word: How to Study the Bible with Both Our Hearts and Our Minds.* By Jen Wilkin. Wheaton: Crossway, 2014, 158 pp. \$12.99, Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-4335-4176-6.**

The Foreword to *Women of the Word* by Lead Pastor Matt Chandler of Village Church makes it apparent that the author of *Women of the Word*, Jen Wilkin, avidly studies and teaches the Bible at Village Church in Dallas, Texas, and that she desires women to apprehend and grasp the true meaning of the Scriptures through systematic study. Therefore, she has written a how-to-book—a method for digging into the depths of scriptural meaning—to enable and empower more women with God’s Word beyond the reach of her local church family.

Her approach to studying came from understanding her own misconceptions about the Bible and what it revealed. Rather than being a self-help book and guide for proper living, she discovered that the Bible was the revelation of God Himself. Therefore, she realized that the self-centered approach to Bible study, and what one could derive from it for oneself, was not the goal. The other area of misconception stemmed from a heart-centered or emotionally-driven response to reading the Bible. This approach did not properly engage the mind, but rather was motivated by how one felt about a biblical passage for deriving scriptural meaning for one’s daily life.

Based on these common misconceptions, a solid case is made for the need for Bible literacy. Wilkin names many of the unhelpful habits of Bible study that are currently in practice. Most of these bad habits advocate taking a smorgasbord approach by picking and choosing passages to study based on a felt need. This picking and choosing negates any sense of context, historicity of the passage or coherence to the

surrounding text. Instead of these insufficient processes of study, Wilkin advocates the study of a given book of the Bible by taking it in its original context so that one can grow in the knowledge of God, discern truth, and understand a true biblical worldview.

The rest of the book focuses on resolving biblical illiteracy with a series of chapters based on alliterative titles that define the method: "Purpose, Perspective, Patience, Process, and Prayer – the Five P's." Wilkin views "each of these as vantage points helping us to begin to grow in Bible literacy, training us in the exercise of mind-before-heart, God-before-self" (47). Each of these chapters is written in an engaging style with many scriptural, as well as personal, illustrations that demonstrate the heart of the message to the reader. The author breaks down rather technical terms into simplistic illustrations, borrowing from methods the reader may have accrued in other forms of schooling such as high school or college.

She rightly argues for the concept that the Bible is literature. As literature, the reader then explores the different genres of each book, enabling them to grapple with proper interpretation. Wilkin refers to this process as perspective. Like Kay Arthur, Wilkin asks her readers to ponder the "who, what, where, when, why, and how" questions that reveal reasons behind the literary and archaeological framework of any text to be studied. In fact, the majority of her method echoes a popular inductive study method that has been used with great success for decades. It appears to this reviewer that she might be trying to simplify the method and provide more compelling personal illustrations in order to make Bible study more appealing. Sometimes the succinctness of the actual study method is usurped by the plethora of personal, family-type illustrations that tend to overshadow the message Wilkin wishes to convey.

The book encompasses a passion for the study of God's Word, but only relates this type of study to the teaching of women. It seems that if one develops and believes in a superior method of Bible study, that one would desire to share it with the whole body of Christ, rather than making it gender-specific. However, since Wilkin has decided to be gender specific, this book would benefit most women who are new believers or new students of Bible study, all of whom would probably fall into the category of newlyweds or young mothers within the 25-40 year-old age range. In the chapter directed to teachers, she goes into copious

detail about how women should teach women and that their unique perspective enhances how the Bible can be learned more effectively than through a male teacher. Yet, it seems that if her method of following the “Five P’s” exemplifies a sound, biblical approach to unlocking understanding of the Bible, it should make no difference whether this method is taught by either male or female to either male or female students.

Overall, this book seems to echo what others have already taught and taught well. In fact, Wilkin cites most of the popular authors of Bible study programs in her short bibliography. The main difference in her approach relates to how she plans her studies and the homework that is assigned. She states, “This is where I differ from other approaches. I don’t intend the homework to teach, *per se*. I intend the homework primarily to aid in comprehension and to begin the process of personal interpretation and application. Strictly speaking, teaching is commentary. My goal for the homework is that it would prepare the hearts and minds of my students for the teaching time” (138). If that is the only difference between what has already been written by others, this book just appears as a simplistic, gender-specific reiteration.

However, *Women of the Word* truly contains many useful suggestions and ideas for Scripture study, and presents them in an engaging way that will engross the reader, possibly one that has not previously delved into a book on biblical interpretation. Jen Wilkin definitely illustrates her passion for serious Bible study, and serves as an inspiration not only to students of God’s Word, but to Bible teachers as well.

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***Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction.* By Nicholas M. Healy. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014. 160 pp. \$23.00, Paperback. ISBN-13: 978-0802825995.**

Stanley Hauerwas is both well-known and widely respected as a theologian and ethicist. The scope and volume of Hauerwas's literary product makes the promise of a critical introduction to his work a hopeful prospect. Nicholas Healy's recent book is an attempt at scholarly critique, but it falls short of its potential. It gives a cursory introduction to Hauerwas with some significant critiques, but it does little to invite the reader into a deeper study of Hauerwas or to explore the nuances of his theology. The limitations of the project are apparent from the beginning. Healy notes, "I do not discuss all areas of his work, even those that are rightly judged to be important and especially insightful, such as his contributions in the field of medical ethics and his valuable essays on the disabled." (2) The length of the book serves as a warning that this is not a thoroughly argued analysis. Despite its weaknesses, however, Healy's book deserves attention.

Healy's book contains five chapters. The first is an introduction to the approach of the book, and brief instructions on how to read Hauerwas. Chapter Two begins to outline in more detail the central points of Hauerwas's approach. This chapter is mainly introductory and offers little by way of critique. The third chapter begins to situate Hauerwas in the field of modern theology. Healy demonstrates the distinctions between Hauerwas's theological approach and traditional approaches, which largely consist in the locus of the theologies. For Hauerwas, the center of theological study is not the person and nature of God, but the church. In this approach, Healy likens Hauerwas's approach to Friedrich Schleiermacher. This comparison with Schleiermacher is woven through the chapter, as Healy outlines some of the basic areas of interest for Hauerwas, including Scripture, authority, and the Gospel of Matthew. In Chapter Four, Healy develops his critique, which largely consists of unraveling the nature of the church. Healy argues that Hauerwas's theology fails if the church lacks a coherent identity as a contrast community. Empirically, such communities do not exist, as Healy demonstrates. Additionally, the nature of the church as a contrast community entails a dialectic with the surrounding culture that leads to a loss of the distinction between the two. Hauerwas's theory, according

to Healy, is a practical impossibility. The final chapter brings together the description and critique, as Healy attempts to demonstrate that Hauerwas's emphasis on practice undermines his theology. In this chapter Healy critiques Hauerwas in much the same categories he used in Chapter Three, which provides a measure of consistency.

Healy's task is not an easy one. Hauerwas has published a number of volumes, most of which are collections of essays. Throughout his work, Hauerwas does not present a neat system to critique—he is an occasional theologian. This is a worthwhile point to consider, but it does not excuse Healy's failure to create a more coherent framework by which to introduce the reader to Hauerwas's work; it is the role of the critic to systematize as best he can, even when the subject resists neat categories. While partially filling this lacuna, Healy does not engage Hauerwas's work in sufficient detail. As a first introduction to the work of Hauerwas, the reader can escape without a firm grasp of what Hauerwas wrote and when. This leaves the novice in the uncomfortable position of having to accept Healy's critiques without a clear picture of Hauerwas's views. If the reader is skeptical, or reads Hauerwas more favorably than does Healy, his light engagement with the texts is more likely to be met with resistance. Healy delivers on his promise to be very critical, but he does so in a lopsided manner. He claims to admire Hauerwas's work greatly, but this admiration is not reflected in the short volume. This book would have benefited by another approach, which could have highlighted both the critiques and the strengths of Hauerwas's theology. The chief deficiency of this volume is that its length and scope are inadequate for the task. Healy's criticisms are well-founded but underdeveloped. An introduction to such an important theologian warrants a much more developed critique, which is more than a book of this length can hope to offer.

The main contribution of this volume is that Healy's critiques of Hauerwas are accurate. Although the presentation leaves something to be desired, Healy reads Hauerwas well and points to legitimate areas of weakness. In particular, Healy highlights Hauerwas's methodological inconsistency, the insufficiency of his ecclesiology, and the failure to ground theology in the person of God. Healy's criticisms are valid and helpful for the reader that is new to Hauerwas. Healy's second significant contribution is his comparison between Hauerwas and Schleiermacher. Since Hauerwas is a post-liberal theologian and Schleiermacher is the

archetype of the liberal approach, Healy is bold to link Schleiermacher and Hauerwas. Still, such a comparison is helpful as it demonstrates some of the ways that both theologians attempt to be distinct from traditional theologies. Healy describes the relationship as analogous to the Marx-Hegel connection, where the later thinker borrows some thought structure but upends it. For instance, Schleiermacher emphasizes inner experience while Hauerwas emphasizes doing theology in the community of faith. Healy's assessment is helpful but a more complete critique would have included comparisons to more theologians.

Overall, Healy's book is a worthwhile read. Despite its weaknesses, a critical introduction to one of the most significant theologians of the early 21st century is a welcome addition to the literature of the field. Future introductions to Hauerwas's theology will need to interact with Healy, which makes this book a useful part of a scholar's library.

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***The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology.* Jeremy R. Treat. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014. 305pp., \$26.99. Paperback. ISBN-13: 978-0310516743**

In his first published work, author Jeremy R. Treat takes the reader on a broad survey of information while looking deeply into some of the specifics regarding the doctrine of the Kingdom of God. Treat is the Pastor for Equipping and Theology at Reality LA in Hollywood, California and he holds a PhD in Theology from Wheaton College. *The Crucified King*, being Treat's PhD dissertation in popular format, is a thorough and thought provoking look into the biblical and theological relationship between the Kingdom of God and the atoning crucifixion of Christ.

The Kingdom of God and the nature of the atonement have become extremely popular, and many times opposing, topics in academic

circles over the last several years. Treat displays the prevalence of both throughout the biblical account and Christian history. He ultimately opposes the "either/or" positioning of these two concepts. Treat's proposal brings him into contact with scholars on both sides of the issues pitting *Christus Victor* (emphasizing the cross of Christ as God's victory and reign) and penal substitution (emphasizing the redemption and justification of God's people) against one another.

Treat argues for the integration of the doctrines of the coming of the Kingdom of God and the penal substitutionary atonement of Christ. In the introduction Treat summarizes the entirety of his work by giving the layout and brief explanations of each chapter. Within the introduction he gives a list of terms or concepts he feels with which the reader should become familiar before delving into the work. His work investigates the reasons behind what he believes to be a false dichotomy between a robust view of the kingship of Christ and a strong understanding and appreciation of Christ as the "Suffering Servant". Through the structure of his work, and in the work itself, Treat also addresses the relationship between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology, arguing for an integrative relationship.

Treat begins his work explaining the biblical foundation for the coming of the Kingdom of God, not as separate from the cross of Christ but as actually having been accomplished through it. He argues, "Therefore, when Jesus said, "Thus it is written, that the Christ [Messiah] should suffer" (Luke 24:46), he was not merely proof-texting Isaiah 52:13-53:12...He was interpreting his life, death, and resurrection as the fulfillment of a pattern in the story of Israel, a pattern characterized by humiliation and exaltation, shame and glory, suffering and victory" (54). By tracing the themes of victory and suffering through the Old Testament, Treat surveys the unfolding of God's redemptive story, beginning from the Fall through the history of the people of Israel.

This track through the Old Testament account culminates for Treat in the book of Isaiah. While some present the humiliation and exaltation of Christ as two mutually exclusive stations within His ministry, Treat argues the former as actually the organ through which the latter is accomplished, "[Within] the unfolding story of Israel...Isaiah not only clarifies the seed's suffering as atoning and the victory as royal, but that the royal victory will come through atoning suffering" (66). In fact, Treat attributes the disconnecting of the Suffering Servant and the

Reigning King to 19th century German historical criticism, which dissected Isaiah into multiple portions with several different sources, ultimately separating the Messianic King of chapters 1-39 with the Suffering Servant of chapters 40-55. His argument culminates by portraying the Old Testament as preparing the way for Jesus as the Messiah King.

For Treat, the dual nature of Christ's reign as the Crucified King is clearly seen in the book of Mark. He contends that it could seem that Mark first portrays Jesus as the victorious and powerful, miracle-working King and then in the second half displays Him as seemingly defeated in His crucifixion and death. However, through solid exegesis, Treat reveals the message to be the "kingdom by 'way' of cross" (88). Important to note within this discussion is Treat's insistence that we not neglect the resurrection of Christ but rather place it within this framework of understanding, "[The] cross is the establishment of the kingdom and the resurrection is its inauguration" (140).

In order to include the discipline of Systematic Theology and to delve deeper into grasping the concepts inherent in the discussion set forth in his work, Treat takes the reader through a study on the particular concepts of Christology, atonement, and kingdom and how these three doctrines intersect with one another. Treat's nearly exhaustive interaction with the realm of theology ranges from the great Medieval Theologians, such as Augustine, who corroborate his findings, to the Magisterial Reformers, such as Martin Luther, who are also given as support for his thesis, to modern day theologians, such as N.T. Wright, in whom he finds much to applaud and yet differs with on a few key points (247). The end result is that Treat demonstrates a thoroughness of research through his interaction with a broad range of theologians from both sides of the discussion.

The entire discussion within the Systematic Theology section of the book concludes with the issue of the false dichotomy between the doctrines of Christus Victor and penal substitutionary atonement. Treat argues that some within the more Reformed tradition have emphasized penal substitution to the neglect of Christ as King, whereas the opposite is true for theologians such as N.T. Wright. However, Treat argues for what could be called a "Middle-Way" that maintains integrity with the biblical testimony. This "Middle-Way" can be seen as Christus Victor by way of penal substitution or, in Treat's words, "The cross is neither the

failure of Jesus' messianic ministry nor simply the prelude to his royal glory, but the apex of his kingdom mission--the throne from which he rules and establishes his kingdom" (173).

Treat's stated purpose is found in the answer to a question found on the first page of the introduction, "What is the biblical and theological relationship between the coming of the kingdom of God and the atoning death of Christ on the cross?" (25) In approximately 250 pages Treat gives a thorough and compelling answer through his interaction with the disciplines of Biblical and Systematic Theology. He offers insightful and in-depth exegesis, evidencing a more than ample grasp of the relevant biblical material as well as a broad and, simultaneously, penetrating study of both historical and current theology and displaying a well-researched thesis. Treat demonstrates keen academic insight while simultaneously displaying a Pauline heart for the gospel, "God accomplished his mission of restoring his creation through Jesus as he was enthroned as king on the cross. The kingdom of God comes in power, but the power of the gospel is Christ crucified" (253).

For those studying the Kingdom of God, the Atonement of Christ, or Christocentric preaching, Treat's work stands as a welcome addition to these fields and one with which all students of these particular topics should interact. This work would be a welcome addition to any study regarding the gospel of Christ or the nature of the Kingdom of God. While the reader need not have proficiency in Greek or Hebrew, the amount of information given and the scope of interaction with current and historical theology is definitely not geared toward the casual reader's interest. *The Crucified King* is a refreshing and welcome addition to biblical and theological studies and is therefore highly recommended.

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Reason, Religion, and Natural Law. Edited by Jonathan A. Jacobs. Oxford: Oxford Press, 2014. 284 pp. \$78.00, Hardcover. ISBN-13: 978-0199767175.

Reason, Religion, and Natural Law is a compilation of essays focusing on the “relations between natural law theorizing and the theological considerations” from Plato to Spinoza (3). The editor of the book, Jonathan A. Jacobs, writes, “[T]his volume is meant to contribute to understanding crucial developments in the history of natural law theorizing rather than the place and authority of religious considerations in political life” (8). Hence, *Reason, Religion, and Natural Law* examines the moral aspect of natural law versus the political.

The articles in the book stem from the presentations at a two-day seminar funded by the Earhart Foundation. The essays are grouped into four sections: “Ancient Origins,” “Medieval Jewish Philosophy,” “Medieval Christian Philosophy,” and “Spinoza and the Transition to Modern Thought.” Each section has works that correlate specific philosophers and thinkers to natural law—investigating the philosopher’s relation (if any) to natural law.

In chapter 1, “The Rule of Reason in Plato’s *Laws*,” Fred D. Miller seeks to elucidate Plato’s correlation of “the rule of reason” with ethical decisions. According to Miller, natural law is deducing what is moral according to human nature. Thus, Plato, not Aristotle, first adumbrated natural law theory. Given that the rule of reason regarding human virtue is central to Plato’s thought, Miller seems to be right. Or perhaps it is best to claim that Plato’s writings are pregnant with natural law overtones, yet the concepts are fully birthed with Aristotle.

In chapter 2, titled “Stoic Eudaimonism and the Natural Law Tradition,” Jacob Klein discusses the similarities between the Stoic eudaimonic tradition and the Greek thought on natural law. He argues “that the Stoics defend a eudaemonist ethics that requires conformity to the rational order of nature as a condition of realizing the best form of life for human beings” (59). Hence, according to Klein, the Stoic tradition has some interesting correlations with medieval natural law.

Chapters 3 and 4, though interesting, seem irrelevant to corpus of the philosophical discussion on natural law; however, the authors work to convince the reader otherwise. Chapters 3 and 4 show the concurrence of natural law in the Jewish philosophical tradition.

“Natural Law in Judaism,” written by Tamar Rudavsky, is a work that argues “the Jewish understanding of natural law fits into this extended narrative” (84). By appealing to the works of Moses Maimonides, Rudavsky labors to marry Jewish thought with the medieval tradition of natural law. In “The Reasons of the Commandments: Rational Tradition without Natural Law,” Jonathan A. Jacobs counters Rudavsky’s article. He claims the Jewish understanding of commandments is not synchronous with a proper and complete understanding of the medieval view of natural law.

Chapters 5-7 seem to be the heart of the book. In chapter 5, Eileen C. Sweeney writes on the innate aspect of natural law. A chief discussion among philosophers is the convergence of natural law understood innately and the individual’s ability to determine and follow the moral course. At what point does sin erode the individual’s ability to understand and perform the right moral action? According to Sweeney, Aquinas is neither a Rousseau nor a Calvin (or Aristotle or Cicero). Aquinas focuses more on the ability to perform the right action, rather than just knowing the right action. One may not choose the right action, but one has access to knowing the right action. This, claims Sweeney, is one of the problems with his natural law theory.

Chapter 6, written by Anthony J. Lisska, is a work that compares the use of right reason (i.e., *rectio ratio*) by Thomas Aquinas and William of Ockham. Some contemporary Ockham scholars have argued that Ockham cannot be labeled an unfettered voluntarist, and indeed should be seen as close to Aquinas’ rationalist natural law ideas. To investigate such a claim, Lisska methodically elucidates both Aquinas and Ockham’s writings on the use of right reason. In the end, Lisska thinks that some contemporary scholars have been too quick in removing Ockham from a voluntarist stance.

In chapter 7 the Duns Scotus scholar, Richard Cross, attempts “to give an account of Scotus’s metaethics, focusing on what Scotus himself regards as the most important feature of the system, namely, the different attitudes God takes to various moral norms, and the ways in which God is motivated to take these attitudes” (177). To draw out Scotus’s view on constructivism and divine motivation, Cross contrasts it with Aquinas’ view of moral justice.

Chapters 8 and 9, the last two chapters, wade into the bog of Spinozan compatibility with natural law ethics. According to Jon Miller,

the author of chapter 8, “Spinoza and Natural Law”, there is an “ongoing dispute among Spinoza scholars regarding how his [Spinoza’s] ethics relate to natural law ethics” (201). Miller argues that there is both harmony and disharmony between the two. His final assessment is somewhat controversial in Spinozan scholarship, but quaint: the compatibility of Spinozan ethics and natural law ethics is solely dependent upon how one interprets natural law ethics.

Prima facie, Douglas B Rasmussen and Douglas J Den Uyl in chapter 9, “Agent Centeredness and Natural Law”, make the same claim as Miller. The chapter seeks to find if there is any symmetry between Thomistic natural law and Spinozan agent centeredness. Ultimately, the authors claim that Aquinas’ ethic is best understood as God-centered rather than agent-centered. Conversely, they argue, Spinoza has a robust view of agent centeredness. Hence, according to Rasmussen and Den Uyl, there is little symmetry to be found between the two.

It is quite obvious from the chapter descriptions that one would be much better served to have a working, detailed knowledge of natural law ethics and the representative philosophers discussed while reading this volume. This is not a failing of the authors or the book. Indeed, the intent of this project was to advance the scholarly achievement of natural law work. I believe the authors have achieved their goals. It may even be fair to claim a few have taken natural law to new realms of discourse that have yet to be fully developed—even in the given works. One of the significant strengths of the book is that it brings natural law into a contemporary dialogue, while at least alluding to the ancient conception.

Furthermore, one should not approach the volume with ossified views of Thomistic natural law or the works of the classical and modern philosophers. At times it may appear as if the authors have distorted or contoured the traditional understanding of natural law to fit a mold it was never intended to fit. The problem lies in the various definitions attributed to natural law. Eileen C. Sweeney writes, “The divisions over how to interpret Thomas Aquinas’s account of natural law cut deep, and range broadly up to and including whether it is grounded in nature and whether it is law...” (133). Thus, the authors (and the readers by extension) are simply caught in the quagmire of philosophical interpretation. Perhaps (and this may be the present author’s opinion alone) one would find more joy in the work, if he or she were to immerse

him or herself solely in the authors' arguments and parley, while only giving a congenial nod to the conventional insight of natural law.

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