

Book Reviews

From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again: A Journey in Final Causality, Species, and Evolution by Étienne Gilson, translated by John Lyon, with a foreword by Christoph Cardinal Schönborn (*San Francisco: Ignatius Press*, 2009), xxii + 241 pp.

GILSON (1884–1978)¹ was a giant in the intellectual world for a great part of the twentieth century. He was both an historian of philosophy and a philosopher; indeed, he made the history of philosophy a sort of laboratory for coming to philosophical conclusions.² He championed Christian philosophy, and particularly the metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas. Regularly splitting his academic year, he taught both in Paris and in Toronto. In Paris he reached the summit of public intellectual life, becoming both a professor at the College de France and a member of the French Academy. In Toronto he founded, in cooperation with the Basilian Fathers, what became the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies. The range of his interests was most remarkable, but it was particularly towards the end of his long career that he saw the need to write about Darwinism and final causality.

How good is this book? Gilson's great friend and fellow Christian philosopher, Jacques Maritain, bears witness. The last letters exchanged between Maritain and Gilson were on the subject of this book. Writing on Sept. 3, 1971, Maritain says:

I want to tell you how much I love this book, which is a model of philosophical critique, admirably lucid and based on the texts themselves (you have read everything!), and a marvellous stimulant for the mind.³

¹ For a biography, see Laurence K. Shook, *Etienne Gilson* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984). See also my "Étienne Gilson," in *Penseurs et Apôtres du XXme Siècle*, ed. Jean Genest (Montreal: Fides, 2001), 170–82.

² One sees this most explicitly in his William James Lectures delivered at Harvard in 1936–37, entitled *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (New York: Scribner's, 1937).

³ Cf. Étienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, *Correspondance*, 1923–1971, ed. G ry Prouvost (Paris: Vrin, 1991), 247 (letter of Maritain, Sept. 3, 1971):

The book is a reflection on the inevitability of the notion of finality or teleology in our observation of nature. The notion is not presented as a scientific one (in the sense of “modern science”). The point is, rather, as Gilson says:

It is not certain that every truth concerning nature is scientifically demonstrable. Scientific demonstrations as well as reason may not have anything valid to say about what experience indemonstrably suggests. Thus understood, the existence of natural teleology appears to be one of these philosophical constants whose inexhaustible vitality in history can only be recorded. (1–2)

To do theology is not his aim, though it is pointed out at the outset that the association of natural teleology with natural theology is an abiding one through history. The book is strictly a philosophical inquiry as to the testimony of experience.

As with all Gilson’s works, the reader is immediately introduced to a whole world of discussion. After an “Aristotelian prologue” that presents to us the goal or end as cause in the domain of life, Gilson gives us a chapter setting out “the mechanist objection”; he sees this as related to the shift from a contemplative science of nature to a quest for utility (Bacon and Descartes). We are introduced, for example, to Claude Bernard (d. 1878) who, on the one hand, reduces “vital properties” to “the physico-chemical properties of organized matter,” but who nevertheless is aware that he is not explaining its organization (36).

Much of the book has to do with the efforts of biologists to deny or somehow diminish the testimony of experience in this regard. It has thus an obvious interest in the present time when so much public argument has taken place about Darwinism and Intelligent Design. (The atheists have even taken to putting up billboards trumpeting their contentions.)

I wish simply to stress the richness of the intellectual society to which Gilson introduces us. It is a wonderful aid as to how to live with science and philosophy on the contemporary cultural battlefield. Whether he presents to us the mind of Claude Bernard or of Jean Rostand (d. 1977), or of so many other scientific minds who also philosophize, the experience is enriching.

je veux vous dire aujourd’hui combien j’aime ce livre, qui est un modèle de critique philosophique admirablement lucide et fondée sur les textes eux-mêmes (vous avez tout lu!) et un merveilleux stimulant pour l’esprit.

I say “last letters”; they are the last contained in the collection published by Prouvost.

What would Gilson have thought of Michael Behe? He would, I am sure, have delighted in Behe's scientific interest in evolution and finality. Let us recall that Behe is not anti-evolution. He considers the evolution of all life from a single cell consistent with the evidence. What Behe rejects is the adequacy of the Darwinian use of random mutation as a complete explanation of that evolution. It can explain the development of particular situations, but is not suitable as the overall explanation of present biological variety. In his first book⁴ he pointed to irreducibly complex biological systems as being results incompatible with the essentially gradualist Darwinian explanation. Where the Darwinian proposes randomness, he proposes design by intelligence. In his more recent *Edge of Evolution* book⁵ he has used studies of the malaria organism and its mutations to suggest what random mutation can and cannot account for.

The new foreword by Cardinal Schönborn, besides highlighting for the reader some of the most important points made by Gilson, does a very good job of presenting mechanism and scientism as ruling the modern world view, and particularly of presenting Darwinism as finally bringing biology into the domain of the "law and particle" world view.

In general, it seems to me that the translation is excellent (as witness the scruples the translator occasionally has, so that he includes the French word in brackets here and there: to me a good sign). He has also done some editing, such that he occasionally adds footnotes where Gilson had neglected to do so; also the translator has had to cope with the differences in translations of Aristotle into English or into French.

One place that bothered me is at page 101: "sees final causes as efficient causes"; in the French it is at page 142: "il voit les causes finales comme les causes efficientes." The meaning of Gilson is that both sorts of cause are seen; I suggest: "he sees final causes as well as efficient causes."

In concluding, I wish to call attention, for readers of this review, to another recent publication of Gilson's work in this domain, work subsequent to the Darwin book. In 2008 the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies published a small book (xi + 145 pp.) edited by Fr. Armand Maurer (with a foreword by Fr. James K. Farge), entitled *Three Quests in Philosophy*. It contains the last lectures Gilson personally delivered in Toronto, in January of 1972. These are entitled "In Quest of Species," three lectures in Gilson's own English. Besides this, there are three lectures under the title "In Quest of Matter." These are the lectures Gilson

⁴ Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

⁵ Michael J. Behe, *The Edge of Evolution: The Search for the Limits of Darwinism* (New York: Free Press, 2007).

prepared to be presented in Toronto in 1973; however, his health did not permit him to make the trip from France. He sent the text to Fr. Maurer, expressing the desire that they might eventually be published. (A third item leads off the book, a single lecture delivered in French in Montreal in 1963, and translated here as “The Education of a Philosopher.”) Clearly, the lectures on species and on matter follow very much in the line of his Darwin/Aristotle book and are a most welcome addition.⁶ N V

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From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again: A Journey in Final Causality, Species, and Evolution by Étienne Gilson, trans. John Lyon, foreword by Christoph Cardinal Schönborn (*San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009*), xxii + 241 pp.

ORIGINALLY published in France by the firm J.Vrin in 1971 under the title *D'Aristote à Darwin et retour* and then brought out by the University of Notre Dame Press in 1984 with the fuller title *From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again: A Journey in Final Causality, Species, and Evolution*, the book failed to find much echo, even among Thomists, and quickly went out of print. But among aficionados of the work of Étienne Gilson (1884–1978)—perhaps the most significant and influential Thomist philosopher of the twentieth century—this remarkably vital book was received enthusiastically. (And speaking of vitality, Gilson wrote this, his last book, in his eighties, with no diminution whatever of his characteristic *élan* and dry humor.) Fortunately, Ignatius Press has rescued Lyon's lucid translation from the publisher's limbo where it has been languishing for too long. The bookmaking craft of the editors at Ignatius is stellar: this edition has been newly typeset (and thus differently paginated), and is now outfitted with a fine foreword from the pen of the Dominican archbishop of Vienna, Christoph Cardinal Schönborn.

Perhaps recent controversies swirling around evolution (such as fresh Darwinian justifications for materialist naturalism by the recent crop of New Atheists, the debate provoked by the Intelligent Design movement, Pope John Paul II's letter on evolution to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in October 1996, biology textbook controversies, etc.) will open

⁶ I do not mean to slight the lecture on philosophical education; this is a theme that Gilson visited several times, involving his life-long interest in the distinctiveness of the philosophical order.

up a new audience for this deeply insightful book. And assuming it gains the audience it deserves, it might even move the debate over evolution from the sterile and jejune categories in which it has lately been fixated.

As the (English) subtitle indicates, this book is primarily concerned with teleology, above all its central place in Aristotle's philosophy of biology and its gradual dismissal from the halls of science under the combined impact of Francis Bacon and Charles Darwin. But the story does not end there, because, as Gilson shows in vivid detail, teleology has a way of cropping up like the Ghost of Christmas Past in the very attempts of scientists to exorcize it from their cupboard. "Final causes have disappeared from science, but have they disappeared from the minds of scientists?" asks the author (150).

The fundamental reason why the invocation of final causes has lost its explanatory power in the sciences stems from the way teleology seems, at least at first glance, to reverse the temporal direction of cause (first) and effect (second). The concept of causation hardly makes sense unless causes are seen to precede effects, the way a thunderstorm releases rain which *then* causes wet sidewalks. But how can the neck of a giraffe or the wing of a seagull evolve gradually over time from minute and supposedly random variations if the neck and wing do not achieve full functionality until their final stages? Is there something in the final result that is "causing" the prior incremental changes to be "led" to the final form? One way out of this dilemma—the obvious one until Darwin—would be to posit a mind *guiding* the selection process, the way Michelangelo "had in mind" (as we say) an image of Mary cradling her dead Son before this renowned sculptor began carving his Pietà. In other words, as long as there is a *prior* mind in play, final causality can be seen to follow time's ineluctable arrow.

But precisely because *mind* must be invoked to keep final causality confined within time's arrow, by which all causes ineluctably precede their effects, science eventually came to reject teleology as a "conversation stopper." For example, advocates of Intelligent Design insist a bacterium is too complex in its formation to have been formed by chance, and therefore some sort of "abiotic infusion" must account for, say, the attachment of a flagellum to the bacterium. But such a conclusion would block any further research into bacterial complexity, since the assertion of the presence of a prior mind exceeds the competence of scientific methodology to establish.

Or perhaps, as Aristotle held, nature bears this directionality within its own processes "potentially," but non-mentally, in a directed but entirely internal process he called "entelechy." That won't work either for contemporary science, for the problem still refuses to go away, as Gilson explains

here: "As soon as one thinks about it, the notion of the end becomes obscure. One asks oneself how it could be that something which does not yet exist could direct and determine that which already is, though it be only to conduct its operations or direct its growth" (10–11).

For just that reason Francis Bacon (1561–1626) in his *Advancement of Learning* called the search for final causes—in a telling image—a lamprey (*remora*), referring to a fish that clings, barnacle-like, to the side of a ship impeding its progress. For this influential Elizabethan/Jacobean philosopher, to say that clouds exist *in order* to diffuse the sun might be proper to metaphysics but not to physics. That seems plausible enough in meteorology, but Bacon applied that same principle to biology too: thus, science could no longer claim, for example, that eyelids are "meant" to protect the eye or leaves exist to protect the fruit.

Bacon's dismissal of finality in the biological world obviously goes too far; for instead of explaining biological complexity, he has merely explained it away. Not even Darwin would countenance such extremism. On the contrary, while natural selection certainly removes *mental* causation from its account of biological complexity, it does not—because it cannot—remove teleology outright from the organic world. After all, anyone now reading this sentence knows that eyes are meant for seeing. In other words, Darwin's theory gets its very plausibility precisely because it intends to explain, not explain away, biological *functionality*. Without functionality (meaning the presence of organs within an organism that serve a purpose), there would be nothing for natural selection to select.

Ironically, Aristotle is here much closer to Darwin than Bacon ever was, despite claims from historians of philosophy that Bacon's expulsion of teleology from science foreshadowed Darwin's. Lacking a doctrine of creation out of nothing, the Stagirite never thought of his Unmoved Mover and Pure Act as an efficient cause of species. For that reason natural teleology cannot operate, either for Aristotle or for Darwin, in the manner of man's fashioning of artifacts, as Gilson explains here:

In the case of man, whether it is a question of the order of production or that of action, the problem allows of a solution. Because he is endowed with consciousness, man can conceive the not-yet-existent end in view of which, in order that it might be attained, certain antecedent conditions must be fulfilled. . . . Such is not the case with natural teleology. If nature operates in view of ends, neither the philosopher of nature nor the scientist can say in what mind these ends are first conceived. All takes place for them as if no ends of this kind intervened in the production of natural beings and of their structures. (11)

Even when that point is conceded, however, the division between man's indisputably *designed* artifacts ("designed" here meaning explicitly created from a prior mental image already located in the mind of the artificer) and nature's allegedly "*blind* watchmaking" is nowhere near as severe as modern Darwinians like Richard Dawkins claim. Indeed here is the precise point where Aristotle begins to "double back" on the proceedings, as the author brilliantly explains. In this passage, Gilson, while seeming merely to be summarizing a point made in Aristotle's *De partibus animalium*, also deftly displays the power and contemporary relevance of the Peripatetic's insights (as well as, by the way, exemplifying the extraordinary vitality and power of his own prose):

Aristotle conceives the artist as a particular case of nature. This is why, in his natural philosophy, art imitates nature, rather than nature imitating art. The contrary is imagined because—every man being more or less an artist, an artisan, and a technician—we know, more or less confusedly, yet with certitude, the manner in which art operates. But insofar as we are natural beings, we are the products of innumerable biological activities of which we know practically nothing, or very little. The manner in which nature operates escapes us. *Her finality is spontaneous, not learned.* . . . In nature the end, the *telos*, works as every artist would wish to be able to work; in fact, as the greatest among them do work, or even as the others work in moments of grace when, suddenly masters of their media, they work with the rapidity and infallible sureness of nature. Such is Mozart, composing a quartet in his head while writing down its predecessor. Such is Delacroix, painting in twenty minutes the headpiece and mantle of Jacob on the wall of Saint-Sulpice. A technician, an artist, who worked with the sureness of a spider weaving its web or a bird making its nest would be a more perfect artist than any of those that anyone has ever seen. Such is not the case. The most powerful and the most productive artists only summon from afar the ever-ready forces of nature which fashion the tree and, through the tree, the fruit. That is why Aristotle says that there is more design (*to hou heneka*), more good (*to eu*), and more beauty (*to kalon*), in the works of nature than in those of art. (12–13; emphasis added)

This passage, it should go without saying, in no way seeks to resuscitate Aristotle's long-superseded biology, with its occasional old wives' tales—though there are nowhere near as many of them as some modern scoffers claim (a blunder, by the way, Darwin never made, who readily conceded the Stagirite's greatness, even in biology). On the contrary, for Gilson Bacon's "lamprey objection" legitimately holds true for modern biology: modern science has eminently good reasons to ignore finality in its methodology. But that will never change the fact that man's artifacts

are modeled on nature's forms (as airplanes are on birds), and that is a fact philosophy must recognize even if such insights are barred from biology:

The analogy with art, then, assists us to recognize the presence in nature of a cause analogous to that which is intelligence in the operations of man, *but we do not know what this cause is*. The notion of a teleology without consciousness and immanent in nature remains mysterious to us. Aristotle does not think that this should be a reason to deny its existence. Mysterious or not, the fact is there. It is not incomprehensible because of its complexity, which we can only hope science will one day clarify, but because of its very nature, which does not allow it to be expressed in a formula. . . . The difference [in the analogy] is that in the case of art the principle is exterior to the work instead of being interior to it, as it is in the work of nature. (13–14; emphasis added)

Which leads Gilson to his central thesis that he will argue throughout the rest of the book: "Natural science neither destroys final causality nor establishes it" (20). For that reason, he can approach Darwin's achievement with utmost serenity. Darwin-bashers and evolution-deniers will find no comfort in these pages. "Darwin was the very incarnation of the scientific spirit," Gilson avers, "as avid in the observation of facts as he was scrupulous in their interpretation" (73). And toward the end of the book he says: "Darwin is infinitely attractive; none can gainsay this. He is incontestably a scientist by blood, and quite deserving of respect" (184).

In fact, if there is a villain to the book, it would have to be William Paley, the late eighteenth-century Anglican divine who bequeathed to the world his particular version of the argument from design: just as the watch was clearly designed, and since the eye is far more complex than some ordinary timepiece, we too, *a fortiori*, must have been designed. Gilson will have none of this approach; and in his strictures against Paley's too-easy argument from design one can detect what would surely be his criticism of its latter-day iterations in the Intelligent Design movement. Indeed, so strong is he here that one can almost hear him ventriloquizing the voice of David Hume when in the eighteenth century he pointed out the "engineering flaws" in creation:

The mixture of theology and philosophy of nature has exercised a disturbing influence on the history of teleology. Supposing that, as we think, the living world gives witness to the presence of final causality in all the beings which constitute it, and at the same time the theologian, speaking in the name of first philosophy or metaphysics, affirms the existence of a God who is the creator and ordainer of nature: it still remains most often impossible to infer the intentions of the Creator

from the inspection of creatures alone. . . . It is necessary furthermore to grant to the biologist that, side by side with marvelous results, nature abounds with disconcerting failures and flawed workmanship: sickness, the destructive ferocity of beings who live only by the death of others, the colossal mess in the reproduction of plants and animals in which seeds perish in their billions without this prodigality corresponding to any intelligible necessity. If one thinks on the other hand of what ought to be the infinite wisdom of an all-powerful God and compares the detail of his work to his attributes, it is hard to defend him against the feeling that a simple human engineer would easily find many ways to ameliorate the details of his work. (143)

Nor, of course, would Gilson have had much trouble skewering such contemporary Darwinian bulldogs like Dawkins. "The antireligious always has a bit of the religious in it," he mordantly notes (88). He compares these fanatics to those reductionists who explain someone's railroad journey to Marseilles by concentrating solely on the mechanics of the locomotive: "he observes, to the exclusion of all teleology, something which could not exist without that teleology . . . [and] treats organisms like travelers who would have arrived infallibly at the end of their voyage without having had the intention of going there" (147).

I cannot conclude this review without mentioning Gilson's skill at one-liners. The lengthier passages from his inimitable prose which I have quoted clearly show him arguing his larger thesis while still at the top of his form. But he also peppers his text with witty and devastating ripostes, one-line zingers which invariably hit their mark by exposing the lazy assumptions that infect so much of modern philosophy of biology. Here is one such gem: "We say that primitives take a watch for an animal, but only the genius of Descartes has been able to take animals for watches" (145; a *bon mot* that of course applies equally to Paley). Or this one, responding to those lachrymose dithyrambs from people like Steven Jay Gould who claim that life (and especially man) is the random outcome of impersonal forces, leaving us stranded in a universe bereft of meaning: "Teleology is perhaps a contestable explanation; chance is the pure absence of explanation" (154). For, as he says elsewhere, "Chance is a by-product of order, not the other way around" (224, endnote 8); and: "Where there is no order, there can be no muddle" (227, endnote 20).

Faithful Thomist that he was, Gilson was always careful about the proper boundaries and the specific competences and methodologies of each science, as readers of his book *The Philosopher and Theology* already know. It is this careful delineation of separate competences that allows him to bring all of his learning to bear on this knotty problem. If any one

passage sums up the central claim of the book, perhaps this one does it the best:

If the scientist refuses to include final causality in his interpretation of nature, all is in order; his interpretation of nature will be incomplete, not false. On the contrary, if he denies that there is final causality in nature, he is being arbitrary. To hold final causality to be beyond science is one thing; to put it beyond nature is something completely different. . . . Explanations which rely on final causality have often been ridiculed, but mechanist explanations have often been ridiculed also, and this does not disqualify the legitimacy of either point of view. (31)

Or as he says in the last paragraph of the book, “the important thing is to know whether or not [final causality] expresses a fact given in nature; for if we object to final causality as an explanation, it remains as a fact to be explained” (159). N.V.

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God is Not a Story: Realism Revisited by Francesca Aran Murphy
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), viii + 356 pp.

AT THE outset of her introductory chapter, Francesca Aran Murphy observes, “Narrative theology intends to do something indispensable—to make theology less conceptual and more imaginative, that is, less theoretical and abstract, and more biblical” (1). Acknowledging the value of this goal, she asks whether narrative theology succeeds in moving its practitioners out of the merely conceptual realm and to real contact with the living, biblical God. She identifies two kinds of narrative theology, Barthian and Thomist. For both, the biblical story has its own rules, its own grammar, and revealed realities intelligible only within these grammatical rules. We have contact with the living God only from within this biblical story and its grammar. Thus metaphysical inquiry, arising from outside this biblical story and with its own distinctive grammar, cannot contribute (at least on its own terms) to our contact with the living God who reveals himself within the biblical story, above all in Christ Jesus. Nor can historiography or physical science, with their own sets of methodological rules, apprehend the referents of Christian discourse. The remainder of the book offers a critique of this approach.

In her second chapter, Murphy argues that the “conversational image of the Church” (30) falls away in narrative theology with its understanding of

the Church as one “language” or narrative. Instead of focusing on the Trinitarian Author, theologians become obsessed with the narrative itself, with the result that the *narrative’s* portrait of God (as a guide for human praxis) displaces the way in which the narrative (as an “image”) mediates *God* existentially. Correspondingly, our concepts become more important than historical events. Drawing upon the expertise in aesthetics that one finds in her earlier works as well, Murphy here compares narrative theology with the cinema (essentialist conceptualism) as opposed to the theater (existentialist realism). Although sympathetic to narrative theology’s effort to defend Scripture from historical-critical disintegration, Murphy argues that the best way to do this is to appreciate Scripture as communication and conversation (thus recovering history). Since conversation requires an existing dialogue partner, Scripture’s truth cannot be confined to our “performance” of the narrative, but rather must be grounded outside our minds. In the same vein, Christ is not an “identity” known by his action but an “existent” who acts (63), and who thus must be known not only in a performative/regulative narrative but in historical (existential, metaphysical, imagistic) particularity. The Church is not simply shared adhesion to a narrative but rather is a dialogue rooted in personal intention and existential judgment, whose source is “the personal exuberance of the Author” (81).

Chapter 3 asks whether the five ways are Aristotelian inductive proofs, starting from finite beings, or are deductions from “the logic of the story as a whole,” the logic or grammar of revelation (92). The latter view proposes that Aquinas’s five ways are investigations into what it means to speak of the Christian God and thus will be intelligible only in light of Christian faith. Murphy goes on to observe that some scholars view the five ways through the prism of the question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” This view of the five ways, however, displaces their concreteness, their concern for particular finite things. As Murphy remarks, “The advantage . . . of empirical facts is that chains of them have specifiable characteristics, such as that they move, or that one is a cause of another or that they appear to achieve purposes” (98). From these characteristics arise “how” questions rather than “why” questions. Returning to her comparison of cinema and theater, Murphy observes that “a ‘theatrical’ presentation of the argument would infer its way through designs and moves to an Artist or First Mover, and *only then* have the temerity to enquire of Him or Her, ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’ ” (107). In other words, for Murphy theologians misunderstand Aquinas’s five ways when they treat them as deductions from the story of faith and/or move directly to the distinction between *esse* and nothingness (*creatio ex nihilo*). Rather, she advocates looking with Aquinas

at the concrete free effects of a free agent. Turning to Karl Barth's interpretation of Anselm's *Proslogion*, Murphy distinguishes between Barth's "ontology of revelation" and narrative theology's focus on hermeneutics: "With Barth, God demonstrates himself, and this results in faithful analogical language. With Frei, the analogical language of Scripture is itself the demonstration" (119). Without recognizing it, narrative theology thus falls into anthropocentric univocity, turning "Barth's self-revealing, scriptural God into a scripted God of human thought" (121).

Chapter 4 inquires into the problem of evil, showing how Aquinas's metaphysical demonstrations of God's transcendence transform evil from a logical problem to a practical one, having to do with God's providence in actual history. The alternative, as Murphy shows in philosophers from Leibniz to Nietzsche (as well as in the movie *Star Wars* and in Jack Miles's *God: A Biography*), is to stay at the level of ideas, and to pair "good" and "evil" melodramatically as contrasting principles. At this stage Murphy again compares Barth with narrative theology: for Barth we only know evil in Christ; for narrative theology (at least as represented by Robert Jenson) this means that evil belongs to the "identity" of God. In light of Aquinas's understanding of analogy, however, Murphy argues that attending metaphysically to concrete historical things, as Aquinas does, makes the difference in avoiding a melodramatic account of evil.

Chapter 5 begins with an analysis of Herbert McCabe on the Eucharist. Murphy argues that McCabe's defense of transubstantiation relies too heavily upon linguistic categories and problematically displaces Christ's "substance" with Christ's "esse." She finds a similar emphasis on "esse" in McCabe's demonstration of God's existence. Returning to her earlier concerns about the bypassing of concrete things, she warns that the risk is an essentialist ontology that leads narrative theology into conceptualism. By contrast, she argues that "[w]ithin the drama of the relation of human nature and divine grace, marking out *who is coming* engages us on the most personal level" (203). In a detailed discussion of each of Aquinas's five ways, guided by Etienne Gilson and Hans Urs von Balthasar, she pays particular attention to the difficulty that narrative theology has with the fourth way, which relies upon the metaphysics of participation and leads "not to a top perfection but to the Perfecter" (213). As she shows, von Balthasar reformulates Aquinas's five ways so as to start from "the metaphysical structure of that particularly particular existent which is the human person" (221). Von Balthasar's conclusions, she argues, insightfully exhibit God's freedom and ours.

In chapter 6, Murphy raises another problem for narrative theology: Trinitarian monotheism. As she says, "The defect in descriptive Trinitar-

ianism is that it has a psychological conception of what it is like for the Triune God to be *one*" (239). Examining theologians from Irenaeus, Augustine, and Aquinas to Barth, Karl Rahner, von Balthasar, McCabe, and Jenson, she suggests that von Balthasar achieves a breakthrough by locating "the created analogate to the divine, intra-Trinitarian relations in the *real distinction* of essence and existence" (252). By contrast, narrative theology identifies the Bible's purpose as "the description of *God* rather than of worldly factual events" (255) and replaces a metaphysical understanding of distinct "relations" with descriptive accounts of temporal relationships. Murphy describes this shift as a "cinematic conception of the Trinity" (278) that falls into modalism. She nonetheless applauds narrative theology's emphasis on how "the historical missions energetically and iconically express the Trinitarian processions" (284). In her view, the West developed more strongly the abstract side of Aristotle's notion of being, whereas the East developed more strongly Aristotle's "energetic conception" of being, rooted in being's substantial operations (285). Von Balthasar draws out the latter with his emphasis on God as active love, whose unity depends on the actions of the distinct lovers.

In light of the emphasis of narrative theology on a plotline (beginning, middle, and end), Murphy's concluding chapter takes up the theology of history, from Augustine and Joachim of Fiore to Georg W. F. Hegel and contemporary theologians. At stake is the relationship of eternity and time, as Murphy shows through particular attention to Jenson's view that "real *eternity* is *futurity*" (302). She notes that this view bears the imprint especially of Hegel, for whom God is love because God's truth is enacted in story. By contrast, Murphy emphasizes God's "free personality" in "the eternal self-giving of love" (306–7). Truth is enacted not as story but as dialogic drama. In this drama, only eternal Spirit can act as "the creator of persons and thus as the truth of love" (310). Narrative theology mistakenly replaces the sacramental sense of nature as leading upward to God (through metaphysical analogy) with rhetorical storytelling that can be understood only by believers. What is lost is "the genuinely dramatic quality of the encounter between God and human beings" (313): God reveals himself in and through actual created goods, above all in and through free persons. This realization fuels von Balthasar's "rethinking Christian metaphysics as *theo-drama*" (315).

Analogy functions here to reveal the expressive, iconic dimension of created reality. This iconic aspect is possible because "God *expresses* himself in creation as he is in eternity" (319), so that the missions dramatically reveal the processions. In history, God is revealed as total gift of love. Following von Balthasar, Murphy interprets this in the theatrical

terms, as tragedy and comedy: “The *time* in which the tragedy of Christ’s passion occurs is eternal—the Lamb is slain from the foundation of the world. And yet, flowing from the passion into the broad *space* of history, is the comedy of the Church, in which grace flows from the Eucharistic sacraments of that passion” (324). In God’s energy of self-giving love, one finds both the “tragic” and the “comic” analogously understood. With an eye to theologies of “predestination,” Murphy concludes that not epistemic certainty but hope in the energy of God’s love—dialogically and dramatically at work in the participation in eternity that is historical time—stands at the heart of the Christian vision.

Readers who seek in *God is Not a Story* a full evaluation of the theologians whom she criticizes will not be satisfied. For example, Murphy criticizes David Burrell’s manner of weaving together insights from Bernard Lonergan, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Thomas Aquinas (an approach that, as she recognizes, also characterizes the work of George Lindbeck), but she rarely cites any of Burrell’s works other than his 1979 *Aquinas: God and Action*. Likewise, this is not the book for those who seek to understand, as a historical matter, how philosophical theology was sustained and nourished among English-speaking believers during the past half century.

Even so, there is no doubting that this is a major and profound work. Murphy has hit upon two key elements in contemporary theology, one pointing to the past, the other to the future. First, she shows that the metaphysical weakness of much narrative theology leads to an anthropocentric focus. Narrative theology’s displacement of historical reference by grammatical rules and practices/performances aimed to counter the dissolving of Scripture’s (particularly the Torah’s) historical reference by biblical scholarship, but the attendant problems make this solution untenable. By contrast, when Scripture is read in light of Gilson’s metaphysical realism combined with personalist and dialogic emphases, the historicity of revelation and our encounter with revealed realities retain their full dimensions. Murphy’s critique of narrative theology’s metaphysics strikes me as accurate and constructive, although John Milbank’s influential emphasis on neo-Platonic metaphysics means that the narrative theology about which she writes no longer has the purchase that it once had.

Second, the full scope of *God is Not a Story* makes clear that in a key sense the book is actually not about narrative theology, but rather is an extended argument for the need for a better theological appropriation of the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar among English-speaking theologians. When united to her wide theological and philosophical reading, Murphy’s training in literary aesthetics and in Gilson’s Thomism—through Louise Cowan and Frederick Wilhelmsen, respectively—makes

her a more astute reader of von Balthasar than most are able to be. She is alert to metaphysical and aesthetic cues that connect von Balthasar's thought with classical and patristic-medieval sources, where others might see instead the eccentricity of Hegel's philosophy or Sergius Bulgakov's theology. On Murphy's reading, von Balthasar offers a personalist, historically attuned, and ecumenically situated development of the metaphysical insights of Aristotle and the biblical/doctrinal insights of Aquinas. Murphy's exploration of our encounter through reason and faith with the self-revealing God of love constitutes in this regard a superb companion volume to her earlier *Christ the Form of Beauty*.

Is Murphy's broadly Thomistic reading of von Balthasar's doctrinal theology accurate? Should theologians today work within the framework of von Balthasar, integrating the insights of the patristic-medieval tradition, or is the best approach to work within a Thomistic framework, integrating the insights of the *nouvelle théologie*? Overshadowing the analysis of narrative theology, these are the fundamental questions that arise from Murphy's valuable and challenging study. **N V**

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