

Book Reviews

God, Evil and the Limits of Theology by Karen Kilby (*London: T&T Clark, 2020*), 176 pp.

KAREN KILBY'S *GOD, EVIL AND THE LIMITS OF THEOLOGY* is a collection of essays reminiscent in multiple respects of Herbert McCabe's *God Matters*. Kilby cites McCabe on only a handful of occasions, but, more so than the references, the form and the content of Kilby's volume bring McCabe to mind. Like McCabe's book, *God, Evil and the Limits of Theology* consists of mostly short and readable but highly provocative essays, notwithstanding that Kilby's essays are more academic in form and hang together thematically better than McCabe's text. Regarding content, it is clear that Kilby is aligning herself in certain respects with the tradition of grammatical Thomism that McCabe helped initiate, though it might be better to consider Kilby's work an exercise in "grammatical apophaticism," since Thomas figures prominently in only three of the eleven essays. Even the "grammatical" attribution should be applied with caution, though Kilby does use the term herself, because Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose influence puts the "grammatical" in grammatical Thomism, is not at all explicitly drawn upon for theological purposes. Nevertheless, as will become clear through our discussion of the essays in particular, the arguments and themes of the collection build upon and assist in providing a valuable expansion of the line of thinking carried on by grammatical Thomists.

The first four essays treat various concerns in Trinitarian theology, and the first, entitled "Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity," does some important preliminary critical work before Kilby makes her own constructive contribution to Trinitarian theology. For Kilby, social Trinitarianism (Jurgen Moltmann, Colin Gunton, and Patricia Wilson-Kastner are some proponents with whom she engages) is characterized by the idea that the Trinity, conceived as the interpenetration or perichoresis of three persons ("person" applied with fairly minimal negation), should be understood more as a rich source of

insight for apprehending the proper nature of human sociality than as a fundamentally mysterious doctrine. As the title of the chapter suggests, Kilby's primary critique of social theories of the Trinity is that they entail projection of human experience and reality into the Godhead, and she takes this critique a step further in arguing that it is of the very nature of social theories of the Trinity that they do just that. Her defense consists of a key claim that recurs throughout the rest of the Trinitarian essays—that human beings cannot know what it means for God to be three persons but one God. Consequently, social Trinitarians' bold descriptions of insights pertaining to how the three persons are united in perichoresis could be only a product of projection. Kilby concludes this essay by gesturing toward her constructive alternative to social theories of the Trinity: the doctrine of the Trinity does not give insight into God; rather, it determines the grammar for the structure of Christianity.

Kilby follows up her first chapter with a study of Thomas Aquinas's Trinitarian theology, and as might be suggested by the conclusion of her first essay, she offers a thoroughly apophatic interpretation of Thomas, very much in the vein of David Burrell's *Aquinas: God and Action*. That is, Kilby claims that Thomas is not giving us insight into God but only manifesting the limits of our God-talk. Kilby is critical of various contemporary retrievals of Thomas that attempt to show some sort of "making sense" in Thomas's Trinitarian theology, and she focuses her argument regarding what might be called its "nonsense" on Thomas's uses of the terms "procession" and "relation." Kilby claims these terms appear to lose all intelligible connection to human experience when applied to the Trinity, especially noting the tension between, on the one hand, the subsisting relations being identical to the divine essence and, on the other, their being really distinct from each other. It is precisely the apparent incoherencies that arise within Thomas's Trinitarian theology that corroborate for Kilby that Thomas's theology offers a Trinitarian grammar but not insight into God. In aiming to address concerns about whether such a reading of Thomas debars contemplation of God, Kilby argues that it is better to conceive of Christian contemplation as contemplation *in* rather than *of* the Trinity. This claim might be read as suggesting that God is the formal object of contemplation but not the material object (Kilby never uses this language), but I interpret Kilby as offering an account of Christian contemplation akin to that of John of the Cross, for whom the Christian attains only ever a vague and general knowledge of God as material object in contemplation.

The basic thrust of the second essay is pursued further in the next two essays, the first of which (chapter 3) attempts to fill out what an apophatic

Trinitarianism might look like. Kilby argues that it is necessary to anchor the doctrine of the Trinity to its origins as a hermeneutical key for Scripture (a method employed, in Kilby's reading, by the Cappadocians and St. Thomas), rather than treating it as a set of axioms from which one can speculatively inquire into God's nature. An argument that occurs in both Kilby's second and third essays in support of her apophatic Trinitarianism is that there is a risk of rendering Christianity elitist in construing theology as offering insight into God, as if those with the highest IQs and most time might be able to know God best. If, in contrast, the Trinity is a structuring principle of the Christian life, if the Christian engages in contemplation *in* God rather than *of* God, then praxis becomes the definitive ground of one's relation to God, never to be supplanted by scholarly activity. Praxis receives treatment in her fourth essay, on the doctrine of the Trinity and politics. Setting herself at odds again with social Trinitarianism (this time the interlocutor is Miroslav Volf), Kilby articulates how an apophatic theology can have political relevance. Just as the Christian contemplates *in* the Trinity, so she does all her activity worthy of the Christian name *in* the Trinity: the Christian's just political activity is inspired by the Spirit and informed by Christ for the purpose of ordering the world toward the Father. Kilby disputes the idea that the Trinity might be a piece of information that can be applied to societies for political ends; again, the Trinity is the structuring principle of all of Christianity, not an isolatable part of it. And she raises the question of whether an apophatic theology could ground resistance to totalizing systems and political ideologies. Her fifth essay is a brief apophatic critique of John Zizioulas's theology in *Being as Communion*, raising the question of whether his pervasive use of the concept of communion might entail a kind of conceptual idolatry.

The sixth and seventh essays treat evil and sin, and in keeping with the thrust of Kilby's Trinitarian theology, they place a marked emphasis on mystery. Kilby's concern in chapter 6 is the multitude of problems associated with modern theodicies—considering theism abstractly without attending to particular faith traditions, failing to deal adequately with particular evils, and possibly encouraging complacency toward evil—but, beyond these, she seeks to raise the objection that there is a tendency among theodicies to treat divine and creaturely action as competitive. Inasmuch as freedom is often invoked in theodicies as the principle that capacitates human beings for evil, they presuppose that God must be at a remove from creaturely causality in order for evil actions to be committed. Kilby argues that the classical treatment of divine and human action as non-competitive, which is a necessary consequence of the incommensurability of God and creatures,

actually heightens the problem of evil. She critiques approaches to the problem of evil that either dismiss the question because it is overly abstract and not adequately concerned with rectifying evils (Terrence Tilley) or take it to be resolved through God's suffering in Christ (Kenneth Surin, among others). Instead, Kilby understands evil and suffering to be insuperable mysteries, so that the problem which theodicy intends to address remains even if the exercise of theodicy should be rejected. Similarly, Kilby's conclusion to the seventh essay is that the question of why God permits sin, given God's primary causality, is unanswerable. One can assent to the notions that God will bring good out of evil and that God's permission of sin is in some sense fitting (Julian of Norwich) without having any comprehension of how either is true. Chapter 10 takes up the related theme of suffering and again engages Julian of Norwich, here in contrast to Hans Urs von Balthasar. Where Balthasar seems to understand suffering as constitutive of love to the extent that it is even found analogously within the Godhead, Julian construes suffering as foreign to God's nature, only to be endured by human beings in love until it is ultimately overcome in the eschaton. While Julian does assert confidently that "all will be well," this is not due to a synthetic theological vision of how this is the case, as it seems to be for Balthasar. Julian's assent is made with the sense that suffering is a mystery to be endured until God is all in all.

Chapters 8 and 9, while interesting and not unrelated to the themes of the collection as a whole, have the least coherent connection to the rest of the essays. Chapter 8 observes that the sin–grace binary often associated with Protestant theologies and the nature–grace binary prominent in Catholic theologies both issue in paradoxes that cannot be speculatively overcome. Her main interlocutor in this essay is Kathryn Tanner, whom she takes to have failed to resolve the Catholic nature–grace paradox in her *Christ the Key* by unwittingly transposing it back into the Protestant sin–grace paradox. Chapter 9 attends to the theme prevalent in modern Jewish thinking that Christianity bears within it the constant risk of falling into paganism. Where much contemporary Catholic theology is concerned with avoiding the influence of modern liberalism, Kilby claims the risk of falling into paganism receives virtually no attention even though theologians' aversion to modernity's disenchantment may actually increase that risk. She focuses her critique on Balthasar, who, in contrast to Karl Rahner and the accusations of liberalism to which he is subjected, endorses a re-mythologization of Christianity that Kilby thinks bears striking resemblances to paganism.

The final essay is typically idiosyncratic but thematically entirely fitting.

As should be clear from this review, mystery is the central theme of Kilby's collection, and in her final essay she draws an analogy between the respective places of mystery in mathematics and theology. Noting three instances of mathematicians coming to what Bernard Lonergan would call "negative insights"—that one cannot know all prime numbers (Euclid), that there are different cardinalities of infinity (Georg Cantor), that no set of enumerable axioms is sufficient to ground all arithmetical truths (Kurt Gödel)—Kilby observes that these mathematicians are not discovering any positive content pertaining to mathematical objects, but only gaining a better understanding of the limits to their positive insights. Theology's task, then, in Kilby's view, is not to gain any ground with respect to understanding the mysteries of the faith, but only to apprehend more incisively that there are mysteries and where one runs into them. Kilby's apology for mystery is neither a celebration of irrationalism nor a throwing up of her theological hands; she affirms that theological study of the mysteries of the faith can bring great clarity regarding how to fare faithfully in relation to those mysteries, but it achieves nothing by way of making them less mysterious.

Kilby's essays are thoroughly thought-provoking, and her lucid arguments are often compelling. Kilby proceeds as a model academic on multiple fronts—her writing is clear, she is attentive to objections, and she interprets those she critiques generously. While I am reluctant to endorse as strong an apophaticism as she puts forth, she does something much more here than merely offer a theology that takes the idea that "we cannot know what God is, but only what God is not" to the extreme. Her case is supported both by an anti-elitism that is, in my view, fundamental to Christianity and a convincing defense of how theology can be considered a legitimate discipline even if it does not make "advances" on the mysteries of the faith. While a collection of essays cannot be expected to address all relevant systematic concerns, if there is a lacuna in Kilby's text, it pertains to analogy. Discussion of analogical predication of "procession" and "relation" is absent from the essays on Trinitarian theology, and analogy receives any direct treatment only briefly in the final chapter. There, Kilby reads Thomas's account of analogical predication in a manner that is difficult to distinguish from equivocation, an interpretation perhaps necessary to support the idea that we gain no positive insight about God when we apply the terms "procession" and "relation" to the Trinitarian persons. Rudi te Velde's account of analogy in *Aquinas on God*, which is still strikingly apophatic, is relevant here on two counts. First, te Velde argues that evaluation cannot be made regarding what predications of God are even worth negating without those predications maintaining some positive connection to our understanding of the creaturely predication.

Second, te Velde, I think rightly, finds Thomas's account of analogy to be inextricably related to his metaphysics of creation, especially to participation (a position that, notably, Burrell came to espouse after his earlier strict grammatical perspective). One should not expect comprehensive systematic analysis from a collection of essays, but this collection puts forth fascinating systematic claims that leave one hoping Kilby will follow it up with a monograph on the nature of theology and its limits.

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Jesus Becoming Jesus, Volume 2, A Theological Interpretation of the Gospel of John: Prologue and the Book of Signs by Thomas G. Weinandy, O.F.M. Cap. (*Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2021*), xviii + 484 pp.

THIS IS AN UNUSUAL BIBLICAL COMMENTARY. By his own account, Fr. Weinandy had set out to write a fully orbéd systematic theology. While in the process of giving a “respectful nod to Scripture” as a prelude to his systematic study, he found himself caught up and engrossed in the biblical text—and never managed to extricate himself. Changing course, he decided to write “a theological or doctrinal interpretation of the New Testament.” Volume 1 of this effort covers the Synoptic Gospels (2018). In this second volume, Weinandy turns his attention to the Fourth Gospel, his aim being “to discern the theological and doctrinal content of John’s Gospel” (x).

Perhaps the most unusual quality of this study is the complete absence of any secondary literature. Though the author has read commentaries on the Gospels, both ancient and modern, he chose not to consult any other scholars (or ecclesiastical writers) in composing this doctrinal commentary. Given his focused aim—a theological and doctrinal study of the Gospels—he wanted to avoid getting caught up in contemporary scholarly exegetical debates. And so there are no footnotes to secondary sources (a thing probably welcome to many readers).

Weinandy alerts the reader at the start concerning his particular approach to this study of the Gospels. Fascinated throughout his career as a systematic theologian with the notion of “act” (and especially with God as “pure act”), he approaches the Gospel narratives primarily from the perspective of Jesus’s *actions*. Specifically, he intends to explore how Jesus “enacts”

his name, “YHWH-Saves,” through the saving mysteries revealed in the narrative of the Gospels. Thus the title of his multi-volume work, “Jesus Becoming Jesus,” serves as the overarching theological theme of the entire effort. This is how he explains his methodology of “act” and “enactment” in his first volume: “Jesus more and more becomes Jesus in act through his saving acts; he becomes more and more the Savior. He definitively becomes Jesus-in-act with the actions of his saving death and resurrection, which will find completion when Jesus comes in glory at the end of time” (xix). With such attention given to Jesus’s actions, Weinandy admits that Jesus’s teaching does not receive the same attention. It is not that he ignores Jesus’s words, but they function primarily as pointers to Jesus’s acts.

And yet in another sense, the endpoint of this commentary is to show the Trinity-in-act. “The Father is fatherhood fully in act; the Son is sonship fully in act; and the Holy Spirit is love fully in act. This threefold perichoretic act is the one God fully in act” (xiv). As Jesus progressively enacts his name and identity, so too are the Father and the Spirit revealed according to the “acts” that reflect their hypostatic identities. A consistent feature of this commentary is the sustained attention given to how the Father and the Spirit are involved in the saving actions of Jesus, the Word made flesh. Congruent with this view of the Trinity’s perichoretic act, Weinandy often adopts what might be called a “perichoretic syntax,” whereby he presents a single reality from the distinct perspectives of the divine persons, restating the same truth in mutually enhancing ways. This grammatical-syntactical style of the commentary is admirably suited to its theme.

If we are looking for parallels to this theological-doctrinal approach in the Christian tradition, the commentaries on the Gospel of John by Cyril of Alexandria and Thomas Aquinas come to mind. Like Weinandy, they each work through the Gospel text passage by passage, explaining the meaning of each section, but they are characterized by an overarching *doctrinal* concern: to present the entirety of the Christian faith through the words of John’s Gospel and to refute false presentations of that Gospel. Though crafted in a modern mold and addressing more contemporary issues, Weinandy’s theological-doctrinal study of the Fourth Gospel follows in the track set by Cyril and Thomas.

Insights abound as Fr. Weinandy moves from passage to passage through the first twelve chapters of John’s Gospel. A few examples will serve as representative of the rich feast that this commentary serves up. The handling of the wedding feast at Cana is luminous. Weinandy works with the naming of days (third and seventh) to offer a deep insight into this sign: “On this present seventh day of the first miracle sign at Cana, God set aside his rest and once more takes up his new work of re-creation, and he does so, as in

the beginning, through his eternal Word now become incarnate" (97–98). Then he interprets the miracle of the water and the wine, not only in terms of the symbolic passage from the old covenant to the new but also as "the seamless progression of the water becoming wine," showing the integral link between baptism and the Eucharist.

When treating Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, Weinandy proposes a dual icon of the Church in the linked but contrasting characters of Mary the mother of Jesus and the Samaritan woman. From the miracle at Cana, Mary is revealed as "the ecclesial woman—the perfect icon or image of the church. She is the New Israel and the nascent church. She personifies what the church is and will be." In contrast to this, "the Samaritan woman is a contraposed image and icon of the church. She is the sinful woman, the image of all the Gentiles, who needs to enter into the church so as to be made holy, and in so doing she is the image of the church that is ever in need of repentance and growth in holiness" (175). Weinandy concludes from this that "what Mary is the Samaritan woman will become" (176). Searching for the representative identity of these two women in the early chapters of John, Weinandy opens up a fruitful meditation on the complex nature of the Church.

A third example appears in the story of the raising of Lazarus in John chapter 11. Weinandy considers this final sign (in the Book of Signs) to be of special importance. After working through the story in considerable detail, the author draws our attention to the kind of action Jesus performed by raising Lazarus from the dead. Weinandy sees in this "a theandric action—a divine action done humanly" (377). This points to one of Weinandy's central theological tenets, that everything Jesus does is accomplished *humanly*; that is, these are the actions of God's Son now living and acting as a man. Where the patristic tradition tended to distinguish Jesus's actions according to what he did "as man" or "as God," Weinandy is insistent that all of Jesus's actions—whether they point specially to his divinity or his humanity—are done *humanly*, revealing the full extent of what it means for the eternal divine Son to actually exist as a man. Further, Weinandy considers this final miracle sign as a capstone to all the signs and sayings that come before. "Thus the raising of Lazarus from the dead is not simply the last of Jesus' miraculous signs—it is also the culminating, paramount sign that authenticates the entire Book of Signs" (442). This final sign then points in a special way to Jesus's culminating act—his Passion, death, and resurrection—that will be taken up in volume three of this work.

As he proceeds through the first part of John, Weinandy gives special attention to two contested issues: the historicity of this Gospel and John's

portrayal of the Jews. On three occasions (xiii, 213, 432), Weinandy steps aside from the Gospel narrative to offer his account of how best to reconcile Jesus's words and actions in John with what we find in the Synoptic Gospels. He concludes that John's Gospel is historically reliable, but that we may not always be hearing "the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, his exact historical words." Rather, what we often hear is the Evangelist's own formulation of Jesus's words, shaped to give "Jesus' deeper intended *ipsissima sententia*" (xiii). Weinandy argues that, though these may not be Jesus's actual words, they represent an even deeper expression of what Jesus genuinely taught.

The vexed question of John's critical presentation of "the Jews" also comes under inspection at several points in the commentary. Weinandy does not seek to soften the sharply critical reading of the Jewish leaders as portrayed by John, but he maintains that this is not nascent anti-Semitism at work. Instead, Weinandy interprets this portrayal of the Jewish leaders as the Evangelist's attempt to win over his own brethren who, by the time John is writing, have not received Jesus in faith as their Messiah: "The very perceiving of Jesus in the proper light would, John hopes, dispel the present darkness in which his Jewish brethren now find themselves" (313). He concludes that "John is not engaged in antisemitism but is instead expressing his ardent love and deep concern for his fellow Jewish brethren" (357).

Despite the evident value of considering the Gospel of John from the perspective of Jesus's acts, my concern with Fr. Weinandy's focus on "act" and "enactment" is how he contrasts Jesus's acts with his words, giving a strong priority to the acts of Jesus at the expense of his words. This contrast is most sharply stated when he sums up John chapters 7–8: "Since in these two chapters Jesus is portrayed as teaching, he performs no action, no miracle signs, and therefore is not enacting his name Jesus—YHWH-Saves. He is not becoming Jesus" (312). What then is the relation between Jesus's acts and words? "Jesus becomes Jesus through his saving actions, and his words designate the saving significance of those actions" (445). The words simply describe what the acts accomplish. Weinandy appears to modify this sharp distinction when speaking about the words and acts of Jesus in John chapter 6. There he finds "a complete teaching" on the Eucharistic liturgy and acknowledges that "Jesus also nourishes through his teaching, his spoken word," which he describes as "the life-giving word of God" (234). But then, when handling Jesus's statement that "the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63), he undercuts the plain meaning by maintaining that "it is Jesus' actions, and not his words, that give eternal life" (254). The words do not possess or communicate eternal life in themselves, but point to the saving actions which are the true source of life and salvation.

Is this an adequate rendering of the relation between Jesus's words and acts? No one would want to claim that Jesus's words *apart from* his saving actions save by themselves. But does not God's word "enact" what is spoken (Isa 55:10–11)? When Jesus speaks a word and someone is healed, this would seem to "enact" who Jesus is. His words are not mere words—as if words are only pointers or things that designate—but are "active" words that properly "act" to accomplish the will of God. To assign Jesus's words in the Gospels only to the task of "designating" what Jesus really accomplishes only through his proper "acts" fails to account for God's word (and so Jesus's word) as having the power to act and enact—and so to express and to fulfill who Jesus is. Such a reading better accords with the plain meaning of Jesus's account of his own words, that they are "spirit and life" to those who hear with faith.

Jesus Becoming Jesus has the commendable quality of never being boring and always being thought-provoking. It is the mature work of a theologian seeking to penetrate deeply into the meaning of the Gospel and into the identity and character of the Triune God as manifested in the saving acts of the Word made flesh. Even when offering extended doctrinal readings, this theological-doctrinal approach to the Fourth Gospel always stays close to the biblical text. It remains a genuine *biblical* commentary crafted by a reliable guide to the profound mysteries of John's Gospel.

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The Rights of Women: Reclaiming a Lost Vision by Erika Bachiochi
(*Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2021*), 422 pp.

ERIKA BACHIOCHI'S *THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN* is animated by a clear vision: a vision of men and women as possessors of the same nature and engaged in the same shared enterprise. Men and women possess the same nature because they are rational animals and hence fulfilled by living a life that exhibits the fullness of their rational human nature, and they are engaged in the same enterprise because both naturally pursue the same good: the common good of their families and societies. Bachiochi argues that this Aristotelian and communitarian understanding of the relationship between the sexes was the original vision of feminism: it was the vision of the early feminist Mary

Wollenstonecraft, and likewise the vision that inspired and animated our nation's founding mothers. As feminism's most famous advocates began to adopt the language of the Enlightenment and its incoherent emphasis on "rights," however, Wollenstonecraft's robust and sensible understanding of the right relationship between the sexes was gradually left behind. Modern feminism, Bachiochi argues, needs to reclaim Wollenstonecraft's vision, and has indeed already begun to do so in the communitarian and dignitarian work of Mary Ann Glendon.

As is evident from the preceding, there are three distinct claims advanced in Bachiochi's book. First—and this I take to be the overarching thesis of the book—there is a claim about how feminism ought to understand the relationship between the sexes (i.e., in terms of Aristotelian flourishing and natural law). Second, there is the claim that feminism originally *did* understand the relationship between the sexes in this way. Finally (this is the third thesis), there is the claim that modern feminists have lost this vision, and that the solution to our current woes is to reclaim it. It is important to notice that truth of the first thesis does not depend on the truth of the second or the third, or vice versa. Because the first thesis is to my mind the most interesting and important of the three, it will be the focus of my remarks here. But it is worth making a few brief remarks about the other two theses, if only because so much of the book's content is devoted them.

Did early feminists have a clear vision of the right relationship between the sexes, a vision informed by Aristotle and natural law? Did later feminists discard that clear vision? Is Enlightenment philosophy to blame? This is a common narrative, particularly in pro-life circles, and I think there is certainly an element of truth to it. I think Bachiochi rightly recognizes an Aristotelian strain in Wollenstonecraft, and rightly applauds the early feminist advocacy of virtue. What I am not quite ready to accept, though, is the "clear" part of the clear vision. Early feminists subscribed to many admirable views. They also seem to have held some less admirable ones. However laudable her advocacy of virtue and chastity may have been, for instance, Wollenstonecraft seems to have had a very dim view of men (45). Similarly, I found the "voluntary motherhood" movement, which Bachiochi applauds, repellent. If disharmony between the sexes arose from men having too much control over women's sexual lives, harmony will hardly be restored by reversing the equation and instead giving women *complete control* over sex (109). My own instinct (which this book only reaffirmed) is to think that feminism as a movement has always been a bit confused, has always had some good goals and some that were less so. I think this, in

part, because I am not sure that a coherent “feminism” is possible. I shall say more about this below.

Bachiochi’s real claim, of course, is that there is a right way to understand men and women, and consequently a right way to be a feminist. But my genuine appreciation for and affirmation of her view of what the right relationship between the sexes is is also—where the thesis of her book is concerned—a source of confusion for me. Bachiochi believes, as I do, in a dignitarian and communitarian vision of men, women, and the family, in bringing about a state of affairs where men are not pitted against women or women against men, a state of affairs where all work toward the flourishing of all. She believes that the solution to modern ills lies in cultivating the virtues and social structures that make the pursuit of the common good possible. With all of this, I wholeheartedly agree (though I am less certain than she is about what the right social structures *are*). I am just not at all convinced that a dignitarian and communitarian vision is also a *feminist* one.

To truly embrace a communitarian and dignitarian vision is, to be sure, to work toward the flourishing of all. But it is also, at the end of the day, to put the well-being of the whole above the desires and interests of any individual part. Should a mother accept her dream job if she knows it will put a strain on her marriage or impede the well-being of her children? I think a communitarian will have to say “no.” If she cannot both complete her education and give her children the care they need, should a woman complete her education nonetheless? Again, I think a communitarian will have to say “no.” It is hard to imagine a feminist of any stripe offering the same answer. Pro-life feminists insist that, with the right social structures, those choices will not have to be made, and pro-choice feminists insist on the fail-safe of abortion. But no social structure can ever ensure that hard choices will not have to be made, and when those hard choices arise, the right choice will very often be hardest on the woman. Until feminism can accept that, I will always have a hard time with feminism. And when feminism does accept that, then I am not sure it will still make sense to call it feminism.

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Does Judaism Condone Violence? Holiness and Ethics in the Jewish Tradition by Alan L. Mittleman (*Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018*), v + 227 pp.

ALAN MITTLEMAN HAS WRITTEN a profoundly thought-provoking book. A main question of the book is whether a higher (revealed) law may in some cases require harm to be done to the neighbor—harm that otherwise would be unjust. Mittleman offers some fascinating examples of cases in which Jews have appealed to God's Law in order to justify oppression of Gentiles. He cites a contemporary halakhic text, *Torat ha-Melekh* ('The King's Torah'), as particularly egregious. While *Torat ha-Melekh* was widely condemned by rabbis and the general public in Israel, it had an audience among the ultra-Orthodox. According to the *Torat ha-Melekh*, Gentiles' souls are not intrinsically holy in the way that Jews' souls are. This means that killing Gentile children in wartime may be acceptable due to the threat that otherwise these children may grow up to kill Jews. The *Torat ha-Melekh* observes that many Gentiles do not practice and obey the seven Noachide commandments. Since this is so, the Gentiles who do not obey the Noachide commandments live "in an inhuman state, where the brutish nature of their souls has free rein and their lives have lost value" (186).

Another example given by Mittleman is the status of the Holy Land and the Holy People. Insofar as the holiness of the land and people is thought to be intrinsic—an inseparable property—problems can arise. According to a midrash in *Bereshit Rabbah*, the land is so intrinsically holy that only the dead who are buried in the land—or whose dead bodies somehow travel to the land—will rise from the dead and enjoy everlasting resurrected life. Likewise, the land's air is presented as uniquely making its inhabitants wise, and the divine presence or *shekinah* comes only in the land. For the medieval Jewish philosopher Yehuda Halevi, in his *Kuzari: The Book of Refutation and Proof on Behalf of the Most Despised Religion* (ca. 1140), the land of Israel is the most temperate climate and the most conducive to producing the ideal human beings. In addition, Halevi thinks that only certain descendants of Adam are "true Adamites" (66). A true Adamite is a son of God, just as Adam was. Specifically, only Seth and some of his descendants are fully human in accord with the Adamic model. It is only in the family of Jacob that "God's influence [finally] becomes the property of an entire people" (67). The true Adamites are Adam's (and Jacob's) seed; other humans are comparatively speaking mere husks. Although people can convert to Judaism, therefore, converts cannot be equal to those born of the Jewish nation. This does not mean that all who descend from Jacob are holy, since

it is possible for a Jew to distort his or her purity of soul. Nevertheless, for Halevi the Jewish people are a holy seed that is intrinsically superior to all other humans, so that it is possible to say that “Israel is an angelomorphic, even theomorphic race” (69).

Moses Maimonides responded to Halevi, rejecting his viewpoint completely—on the grounds that holiness is not an intrinsic or biological (let alone racial) property. Yet, Halevi’s viewpoint influenced Jewish Kabbalah in a major way. For the Kabbalist text the *Zohar*, the people of Israel derive from the emanations of the divine, whereas all other nations derive from the impure powers. The *Zohar* holds, “The other nations count for nothing in God’s sight. They are the products of Eve’s illicit union with the serpent,” rather than coming forth from the theomorphic being who was Adam (70). Similarly, Moses de Leon—thought to be an author of the *Zohar*—argues that Gentiles ontologically possess impure souls that will carry them to spiritual damnation and will ensure that they have no participation in the resurrection of the dead. Another Kabbalist, Joseph of Hamadan, makes the same point that Gentiles are naturally prone to impurity and indeed seek out impurity, whereas Jews have a principle of purity that enables them to overcome impurity. As Mittleman sums up this perspective: “Jewish and gentile souls are occult entities with definable characteristics. The nations have a bestial soul (*nefesh behemit*); only the Jews are capable of having a human one (*nefesh adam*)” (71).

Mittleman observes that Hasidic Judaism, grounded upon the *Tanya* of Shneur Zalman of Lyadi (d. 1812), follows a similar line by arguing that both Jews and Gentiles have animal souls, but the Gentiles’ souls come from the lower, impure “husks,” whereas the Jews’ souls come from the fourth “husk,” which “has within it elements of good” (72). The fourth husk mediates between the divine realm above and the evil world below; the lower three husks simply belong to the evil world. For this reason, the Jewish soul can redeem material activities by making them spiritual in accord with Torah, while the Gentile soul has no such redemptive power, but rather is firmly “trapped in the lower, unholy world of the impure klipot” (72). Even when Jews eat, drink, or have sexual intercourse in order to satisfy base animal needs, these actions can dispose a Jew to praise God properly through his Torah. The life of Gentiles, by contrast, is inherently degraded in the sense that it cannot truly rise above the animal level. Continually exposing themselves to impure foods and actions, Gentiles have no hope for a spiritual life.

More recently, a toned-down version of this approach has been offered by the Holocaust survivor Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, a critic of the *Torat ha-Melekh* who nevertheless falls into a similar trap. In a publication aimed at Israeli

soldiers, Aviner argues that the graves of righteous Jews *do not* convey ritual impurity, while the graves of ordinary Jews *do* convey ritual impurity. The graves of Gentiles do not convey ritual impurity, but for a troubling reason: given that Gentile souls are not holy, their ensouled bodies are hardly different in status from their corpses or mere animal bodies. This undermines the full humanity of Gentiles by comparison with that of Jews. Aviner contends that his position is not racist or invidious, because his account of the superiority of Jewish human nature has to do with the fact that God made Jewish human nature for the sake of the blessing of the whole world. But Mittleman shows that this is hardly consoling, given the consequences of holding Jews to be ontologically on a different plane from Gentiles.

For Mittleman, it is crucial to avoid this kind of ethnocentric ethics, or (better put) this supposition that only those who are called to live according to God's higher law (Torah) are holy, and so all other people are not fully human. In this context, Mittleman also finds it necessary to address biblical texts that show God commanding the slaying of children or the slaying of whole peoples in *herem* warfare. Mittleman refuses to grant that the sole ethical norms by which the Jewish people (or any people) should live are those found in divine revelation, as mediated (in the Jewish case) by Torah and by the rabbinic Oral Torah. He insists that, even when we possess plausible divine commandments (or inspired interpretations of divine commandments), we may not follow the path of "subordinating ethical constraints for 'higher' purposes" understood to be religious duties (2).

This argument does not entail that we should reject divine commandments. But we should interpret them so that they do not stand against ethical norms drawn from human nature. Mittleman expends much energy sketching an account of human nature strong enough to ground such norms. Describing his position as "ethical naturalism," he proposes that the way to develop a natural ethics is to consider first the evolutionary emphasis on compassion and collaboration that one finds in higher primates and in human infants and toddlers. In his view, a sense of the sacred dignity of each human being becomes clear when a parent looks into the face of his or her baby: in the face of the child, there is a powerful call to value the life of the child and to seek the child's flourishing. In turn, the sacredness of the child is a pointer to the fact that human life bears a transcendent reference. Thus the Creator God can be known—though in an inevitably vague way—through nature. In dialogue with various philosophers, including both theists and non-theists, he moves from a realist account of human nature to a particular account of human flourishing anchored by virtues. He holds that "our deep sense of the goodness and the holiness of life" requires not necessarily

personal immortality but, at least, a belief that “there is a good beyond our own good” and that this good is eternal (137).

Mittleman connects that holiness that we (and the Bible) identify in things with the project of ethical holiness understood as virtue. He proposes, “In light of a coherent scheme of virtues, we channel the good toward our own flourishing and the flourishing of all, mitigating our selfishness and allying with a common good. In theistic terms, the virtues are the imitation of God. They grow, with much tending, from the soil of our human nature” (138). Connecting his position with that of Maimonides and the Jewish rationalist tradition, he urges that grasping the goodness of creation is a path to experiencing God’s presence. As he puts it, faith is fundamentally “confidence in the goodness of being. . . . Such faith entails that what confronts us as holy in the world, if it is compatible with our best understanding of the good, merits that we cherish and protect it” (153).

Mittleman distances himself, then, from an understanding of holiness that emphasizes the “numinous”—the mysterious, uncontrollable, awe-inspiring power of God to shock and overwhelm. Friedrich Nietzsche’s Dionysian sense of the “pre-ethical” does not persuade Mittleman, nor does Rudolf Otto’s view of the holy. Nor does Mittleman wish to reduce the “holy” to ethics, as Immanuel Kant does, even though Kant, joined by Maimonides and Moses Mendelssohn and Hermann Cohen, plays an important role in Mittleman’s book. Instead, Mittleman’s position accords most with that of Martin Buber and Abraham Joshua Heschel, for whom holiness involves not only ethics but also encounter or presence. In this respect, he allows for Heschel’s valuation of the Sabbath.

Mittleman cannot agree with Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s insistence that classical halakhah is necessarily “shielded . . . from the possibility of grave ethical violation” (82). He certainly cannot agree with Franz Rosenzweig’s view of the Jews as an “essentially distinct” people, as though it were true that “Jewish eternity is carried in the blood” (82)—though he adds that Rosenzweig’s valorization of “Jewish blood” is mitigated by Rosenzweig’s view that non-Jews will share fully in the eschatological consummation (84). Repeatedly, Mittleman emphasizes that “the misuse of holiness for violent purposes has a taproot in divine commands that supposedly override ethics, as in the genocidal conduct of holy war” (87). In an interesting twist, he finds support for his claim in the thought of the Jewish Zionist and mystic Abraham Isaac Kook, who on biblical grounds depicts a “natural morality (*ha-musar ha-tivi*) on which the morality of the revealed Torah builds” and which “remains in force . . . even after the revelation of the Torah” (16). Mittleman wishes to argue for this natural morality scientifically and

philosophically rather than strictly by appeal to the testimony of Torah to creation's goodness.

Mittleman shows that Jewish thinkers such as Aviner hold that "morality does not have an independent foundation; there is no cogent morality outside of halakhah" (183). Such thinkers have no issue with God's genocidal commandments because they assume that, because God commanded such things, these things must have been good—perhaps as a just punishment of the nations (as many Christian thinkers equally affirm). The problem is not biblical monotheism, since polytheistic cultures also portray their gods as commanding genocide. The problem instead is supposing that God is on our side when we commit violence, given that this enables us to dehumanize our victims and to justify our unjustifiable injustices. He gives the example of Puritan campaigns against the Native Americans, in which the Puritans invoked God's hatred for the Amalekites; and he notes that the Japanese in World War II justified their actions on the grounds that they were racially pure descendants of the gods sent to bring about world peace.

Mittleman's overall point is that there can be no "higher ethics"—whether Jewish obedience to Torah or Christian charity (as in the Edgardo Mortara case, which I have written about elsewhere)—that acts against the neighbor in such a way as to treat the neighbor "in a way that he or she does not deserve" (184). As my mentor Matthew Lamb liked to observe, indebted to Greek philosophy, "the higher does not negate the lower." Mittleman makes a powerful and persuasive case that any morality that lays claim to come from God cannot act against the natural justice that we would demand for ourselves: "Paternalism, instrumentalization, humiliation, and disrespect are incompatible with a moral point of view. An alleged higher ethics that sanctions such attitudes and attendant conduct is not higher but lower than morality. It is not holy. It is merely immoral" (184–85). To this observation, let Christians say a hearty "Amen."

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