

Book Reviews

Naming God: Addressing the Divine in Philosophy, Theology and Scripture by Janet Soskice (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023*), ix + 247 pp.

Like an *inclusio* encapsulating this lucidly written and rich exposition of what she terms “the divine names tradition,” Janet Soskice in her introduction (chapter 1) and conclusion (chapter 9) of *Naming God* invokes a crucial historical observation: “At some time in the early modern period philosophers and theologians spoke less and less about divine names and more and more of ‘divine attributes,’ with these understood as features of the divine nature which could be determined by reason alone” (197). The dichotomization of faith and reason concurrent with such an approach is evident in the usual suspects: Descartes, Hume, Locke, Freud, and Lacan are not spared from Soskice’s critical yet fair-minded judgment. Their shared modern posture, moreover, lies at the root of more recent Heideggerian denunciations of “ontotheology”: a reductive focus on divine attributes as mere perfections graspable by natural reason, to the exclusion of the personal act of “naming,” turns the three-personed God of revelation into an impersonal deity “before whom we can neither dance nor pray” (205). How, then, can the “divine names tradition” respond to this seemingly robust critique jointly posed by the moderns and their postmodern heirs, and thereby point the way to a living doxological posture not bifurcated between “the God of faith” and the “God of the philosophers”?

Soskice proceeds to answer this question with the help of key ancient and medieval authors: Philo of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine of Hippo, Dionysius the Areopagite, and Thomas Aquinas. Grounding her following reflections, however, is a consciously *biblical* ethos, and chapter 2, “Naming God at Sinai,” provides the scriptural scaffolding to bolster the rest of the monograph. The image of Moses ascending the mountain to converse with God and (later) to receive the Law runs throughout the subsequent

chapters, and is re-narrated attentively by Soskice to show how “Exodus 3 marks the high point in a series of names and naming, of people and places, which began in Genesis with Abraham and ends with the first of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, ‘I am YHWH your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery’” (20). Here we face the intimate, dynamic, and personal nature of divine naming which stands in contrast to the cold listing of divine attributes proper to mere “natural theology.” God and Moses speak to each other, and the patriarch comes to know the Lord not by God’s properties, but by the concrete historical lineage of deeds wrought for a chosen nation, a nation to which Moses, despite his foreign adoption, is himself inextricably bound. Yet the physical Mosaic ascent of the mountain mirrors another interior ascent; almost as if recognizing that the epithet “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” remains a supplementary identification, Moses’s insistent interrogative “who?” is at last met by the simultaneously revelatory and cryptic statement “I Am Who Am.” Soskice unfolds a fuller consideration of this divine self-identification with the help of the aforementioned historical interlocutors.

Chapter 3, “Philo on Knowing and Naming God,” emphasizes the continuity of Jewish and early Christian reflection on divine naming. A contemporary of Christ and the apostles, Philo is a philosopher whose reflections, as Soskice correctly notes, evince the mutual influence of Middle Platonism and Judaism in the first century. Arguing against philosophers like John Dillon, who might claim that, “as a philosopher, Philo seems to say little that is original or novel” (41), the chapter suggests a different perspective. “Philo reads quite differently,” writes Soskice, “if we approach him not as a mediocre philosopher but as an expositor of his own scriptures” (42). With this historical context, it is of critical importance to note how the ascent of Moses and the revelation of Sinai form the biblical background to Philo’s synthetic link between *knowing God* and *naming God*, a connection which Philo is one of the first to make explicitly (42). “It is vital to see already,” therefore, “in a Jewish writer of the first century CE, evidence of a shift that transformed western metaphysics, Christian and pagan” (45). Philo is forced to reconcile two contradictory notions: on the one hand, the transcendent God is strictly speaking unnamable, while on the other hand, we have a “language of prayer and praise and adoration” (50) that requires explanation. Returning to the revelation of the divine name, Soskice summarizes Philo’s contribution: “In the midst of metaphysics comes this *non-sequitur* of grace—God is unnameable but ‘by licence of language’ gives Moses a name so that the human race should not be bereft” (56). Accordingly, Philo’s

God is a self-disclosing God and “a personal being with which man has a reciprocal relation” (57).

Chapter 4, “Creation *ex nihilo* as a Revolution in Christian Metaphysics . . . and in Naming God,” explains exactly what the title indicates. Not only does the doctrine that God created all things from no pre-existing matter separate Christian revelation from the anterior insights of Hellenism; it grounds the possibility of divine naming itself. For, if God can be known only from God’s *vestigia*, and if all creations are the effects of God, then the finite creature cannot but help name God—imperfectly through truly—from the divine traces observed in creation. Hints of a future doctrine of analogy are glimpsed, for the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* “radicalises and transforms predicates which *were and are* used by the philosophers to describe the deity,” and consequently the “language of causation and existence is affected too” (80). Our human causality is not the divine causality, but there is something similar or common between the two which makes speaking of both possible. Building on this insight, chapter 5 (“Is ‘God’ the Name of God?”) returns to some themes already explored in Soskice’s 1985 work *Metaphor and Religious Language*. Words, she says, “do not refer—it is speakers using words who make reference” (90). The culturally conditioned and embodied nature of language is invoked to begin an investigation of what it means to call God by that word. While she first goes down the somewhat predictable route of distinguishing the meaning of “God” (as meant by monotheists) from “god” or “gods” (as meant by pagan antiquity), her more insightful example—the word “Mom”—gets to the heart of the personalist posture displayed throughout the entire work. “*Mom* carries some descriptive content (female parent)—but it would be curious to say that *Mom* just means ‘female parent’—to know this term’s significance is to grasp its use as an appellative” (109). To call one’s mother “Mom” is not the same as its usage in reference to another mother; the vocative address by title—and one can here think analogously of Christ’s address to his *Abba*—brings to bear a whole network of significations, memories, and genealogies rooted in the specific context of a given mother–child relationship. Likewise, when the Christian invokes “God,” he or she invokes the full network of biblical supplementary epithets and titles, as well as the whole of salvation history, which have as their ultimate cause the God who created *omnia ex nihilo*.

Chapter 6 (on Gregory of Nyssa) and Chapter 7 (on Augustine) show two further patristic developments of the doctrine of creation with regard to divine naming. For Nyssa, echoing Philo, “God must be profoundly unknowable and unnameable and our speaking of God at all made is possible only by God’s gift” (119), manifesting a more apophatic approach predicated

on the absolute distinction between God and creature. Augustine shows a perhaps more cataphatic sensibility which Soskice neatly summarizes in this way: “Human words, when they participate in love, are tokens of the Word through whom all things have their being” (157). For the Greek Father, the emphasis is on the descent on Christ the Word who alone makes human speech possible, while for Augustine, the quasi-Plotinian ascent of the philosopher requires some recourse to positive naming. This latter possibility, nevertheless, is likewise rooted in a divine gift. The mystical experience at Ostia shared with his mother, Monica, mirrors the Plotinian ascent toward rapture, whereby the One is glimpsed in a sudden and fleeting moment, followed by a return to, as Augustine says, “the noise of articulate speech, where a word has a beginning and end.”¹ Monica and Augustine’s joint vision of God, whom the Doctor of Grace calls *Idipsum* (“the Self-same”), and subsequent descent back into human conversation furthermore show the interrelation between cataphasis and apophasis, in that the ascent and descent, or *exitus* and *reditus* of the creature to and from God, require both an acknowledgement of God’s ineffability and the recognition that union with God (and the requisite ability to name him) is learned only within a communion of love—that is, the Christian community which is Christ’s body.

Chapter 8, “Aquinas: Philosophical Theology as Spiritual Practice,” is as much about the Angelic Doctor as Dionysius the Areopagite, the latter of whom—in line with the preceding divine names tradition represented by Philo, Nyssa, and Augustine—adopted the motif of Mosaic ascent in his own influential treatise *Mystical Theology*. Since this chapter is the one perhaps of greatest interest to readers of *Nova et Vetera*, I will here consider in greater detail one assumption underlying Soskice’s assessment of Dionysius and Thomas, hopefully suggesting a modified interpretation which would ultimately support her broader invocation of Aquinas against the hyper-rationalizing method of modern “natural theology.”

In general, Soskice seems to interpret Aquinas’s relation to Dionysius as one of considerable modification or adaptation. Although un-cited by her, this places *Naming God* within the same interpretative approach as Bernhard Blankenhorn’s, whose 2016 *The Mystery of Union With God* proposes that Aquinas adapts a cataphatic Dionysianism, synthesized with Aristotelian philosophy, to describe mystical union. This broad approach further signifies the wide influence of René Roques on Dionysian interpretation, who

¹ Augustine, *Confessions* 9.10, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

proposed that Dionysius was more neo-Platonist than Christian, and thus adjusted his neo-Platonism to fit the structure and lived experience of the sixth-century Syrian Church.² Accordingly, Soskice holds that, while “the conviction that God is the creator from whom all flows” is readily accepted by Thomas from Dionysius and other neo-Platonists, the Angelic Doctor nevertheless “seems uncomfortable with some of Dionysius’ more fulsome pronouncements,” instead finding in Maimonides and Aristotle “a more sympathetic vehicle for this thought” (182). As a result, for Soskice, “there is little in the *Summa [theologiae]* which marks him strictly as a disciple [of Dionysius], and at times Aquinas introduces Dionysius’ views only to qualify, if not apparently to contradict them” (171). One example cited by Soskice is *ST I*, q. 13, a. 3, where Aquinas concludes that “some (positive) things may be said literally of God, a point of departure from both Maimonides and Dionysius” (189). In the corresponding footnote, Soskice explains further: Aquinas “makes evident his difference from Dionysius, whose views are set up in posing the question of article 3, can we say anything literally about God? ‘Now according to Dionysius it would be truer to say that God is not good or wise or any such thing than to say that he is. Hence no such thing is said literally of God’” (189n36). However, it is clear that, in this instance (objection 2 of the same article), Aquinas considers the conclusion of this objection as presenting an improper or at least incomplete representation of Dionysius, which is clear in the reply to the objection: “Such names as these, as Dionysius shows, are denied of God for the reason that what the name signifies does not belong to Him in the ordinary sense of its signification, but in a more eminent way. Hence Dionysius says also that God is above all substance and all life.” Far from a “difference from Dionysius,” Thomas is in fact operating within the Areopagite’s *triplex via*, which will be so important for Aquinas’s developed understanding of analogical predication. The sense in which something can be said literally of God, for both Aquinas and Dionysius, pertains to the first way of *affirmation* (which highlights a similarity between God and creatures), without rejecting either the second way of *negation* (which emphasizes the disparity between God and creatures) or third way of *aphareisis* or “transcending negation” (which points to God’s supereminence beyond the prior affirmation and negation). The *triplex via* does not denote successive phases in naming, whereby the literal is eventually left behind in favor of an ultimately negative approach. Rather, it denotes a simultaneous process which dynamically illustrates the paradoxical

² René Roques, *L’univers dionysien: structure hiérarchique du monde selon le Pseudo-Denys* (Paris: Aubier, 1954).

possibility of naming Who cannot be named, as well as the namer's posture of humility before the ineffable God.

Reconfiguring our understanding of Dionysius and Aquinas as more closely linked than heretofore presumed—a formidable task already taken up with great vigor by Urban Hannon³—can further bolster Soskice's overall strategy by illustrating how the disparate authors representing this “divine names tradition”—whether Eastern or Western, patristic or medieval—in fact stand together on the issue of divine naming. Critiquing those who would consider the divine names of *Ipsium esse*, *Idipsum*, or *Qui est* as “offensive” to the notion of a personal God whose most proper name might rather be “Mercy,”⁴ Soskice writes: “We should not simply purge offensive language. We need not cease speaking of God as ‘eternal,’ ‘almighty,’ ‘infinite,’ ‘One’ and even as ‘Being Itself’—all appellations with biblical warrant. Better would be to return to seeing these not as free-standing philosophical determinations but as divine names profoundly anchored in Scripture” (198). On this point, Soskice finds herself in good company with Dionysius and Aquinas, with Philo, Nyssa, and Augustine, and ultimately with the Bible—all of whom resist the Heideggerian critique of ontotheology and modern separation of faith and reason on which it stands. Soskice's *Naming God* is to be commended for its clear and lucid prose, its deeply scriptural sensibility, its recourse to a breadth of authoritative figures in the “divine names tradition,” and especially for pointing a way toward the re-consideration of philosophical theology not as impersonal and abstract speculation, but as a virtuously lived and thoroughly embodied spiritual practice, as epitomized by her chosen saintly interlocutors. N.V

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³ Urban Hannon, “Aquinas and the Areopagite: Or, on the Primacy of the Good Against the Existentialists,” *Divinitas* 2 (2022): 36–68.

⁴ Soskice's conclusion (at 205–7) in fact features a moderate critique of Walter Cardinal Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014).

Pride, Politics, and Humility in Augustine's *City of God* by Mary M. Keys
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), xi + 253 pp.

No one can doubt that the theme of pride and humility is crucial to understanding the thought of St. Augustine. Pride and humility loom large in studies of Augustine's thought on spirituality, the moral life, moral psychology, cognitional theory, and so on, as well as in the importance of the themes of pride and humility in Augustine's *Confessions*, his sermons, his commentary on Psalms, and others. But the themes of pride and humility have always seemed like something of an embarrassment when trying to grapple with Augustine's political thought. Christianity's critics—and Augustine's critics in particular, both ancient and modern—have oftentimes treated Augustine's elevation of humility and condemnation of pride as a weak spot to be exploited in attacking Augustine's approach to politics. It is a welcome development, therefore, to have Mary M. Keys's new book, *Pride, Politics, and Humility in Augustine's City of God*.

Professor Keys fills a gap in two ways. First, she utilizes these two themes in order to offer an intelligent reading of the whole *City of God*. The *City of God* is a mammoth work, overwhelming even to those who study it as scholars. Everyone who has tried to teach it, especially while wearing the straightjacket of the semester-length course, knows that there needs to be a way to focus in order to teach the book responsibly. Keys has provided a very useful textbook for focusing on an inarguably important part of the whole book. *Pride, Politics, and Humility* will be a welcome aide for teachers guiding their students through the *City of God*.

Second, she regards Augustine's treatment of pride and humility to be a strength rather than a weakness in articulating his thinking on politics. Keys goes to great lengths to show how detrimental pride is to the political—and human—good, and conversely, how much humility contributes to political and human flourishing. Far from being embarrassed about the two themes, Keys goes so far as to make them the centerpiece of her discussion of Augustine's political thought in his most political book and, further, to show in detail what riches Augustine opens up to the study and practice of politics thereby. Second, Keys uses the themes of pride and humility comprehensively and thoroughly to walk through the *City of God*—a task that, to my knowledge, has not yet been attempted in a book-length study.

Keys summarizes her approach early on, presenting Augustine's argument that he seeks to defend a "virtuous humility" as distinguished from "counterfeits or mistaken iterations," and that, "paradoxically, a virtuous, ennobling form of this lowly quality does exist, and that it is wise to seek and cultivate

it" (9). Prudently, Keys acknowledges that there are these counterfeits and mistaken iterations of humility, which would be neither ennobling nor virtuous. Keys similarly qualifies pride, calling the type of pride Augustine criticizes "vicious" (10). Just as humility ennobles and opens its cultivators to the truth, so pride leads to delusion and various types of evils and miseries. By so qualifying the types of pride and humility Augustine by turns blames and praises, Keys throws down the gauntlet to Augustine's critics that they need to address the realities Augustine actually spoke of instead of caricatures or straw men.

Ultimately, Keys argues that Augustine's presentation of humility is inseparable from his Christology. "How then," Keys asks, "can we humans understand humility aright and cultivate it in our lives? Augustine's ultimate answer is a religious one: by learning to know and love Jesus Christ, in whose incarnation, life, and death the astounding and inspiring humility of God is fully revealed" (13). If Augustine's argument rests ultimately on theological principles and faith in Christ, what are the prospects for dialogue with those critics of Christianity Augustine seeks to address? Those grounds are not, perhaps, to be found in theological disputation, although Keys is at pains to present Augustine's consistent, indefatigable work to make accessible what would later be known as the *praeambula fidei*—especially in refuting common criticisms of Christianity. Keys's final chapter discussing Augustine's arguments in favor of the credibility of miracles is especially notable in this regard.

Keys presents pride and humility as a red thread that runs through the entire *City of God*, constantly at work and inseparable from the various arguments Augustine deploys in different parts of the book. By examining pride and humility not only as theoretical principles, but as they affect the lives of different types of human beings, from philosophers to monks, from statesmen to bishops, Keys presents Augustine as inviting the reader to judge what the effects of pride and humility are on human beings in the living of their lives, both individually and in communities, including and especially in political communities. Consider, for instance, Keys's explanation of the ways of life of the two cities, the city of God and the earthly city:

When the reader finds him or herself seeking superiority or human praise above all, for instance, he or she is tending toward the earthly city; when by contrast that same reader seeks to direct all the goods of this world, including political and philosophical goods and earthly honors, toward the glory of God and giving gratitude to God, content to dwell justly and moderately amongst ontological equals, then

the heavenly city is gaining ascendancy in his or her soul. When political leaders aim to offer their people—understood to be their equals—good counsel and public service, and other citizens aim to act in conformity with justice and right counsel, they reflect a degree at least of humility, the heavenly city's signature virtue. When by contrast they seek to rule over others, to exercise mastery over others as an end in itself, then they reveal pride and the earthly city's presence. (169)

Keys focuses on the effects of pride and humility—effects that are visible to all, or at least, to all who are observing closely, and do not depend on theological principles or faith in Christ to be visible. If there is a ground for meeting Christianity's—or Augustine's—critics, the examination of the visible effects of pride and humility in human affairs would be a promising start.

If there is a problem with Keys's book, perhaps it is in the fact that Augustine's ancient and modern critics are not given a hearing. But perhaps that is not so much to point out a problem with the book Keys actually wrote, as a request for further writing. The present volume is dedicated to pride, politics, and humility in the *City of God*. But all, or most, of the readers of Keys's book will know of the no-holds-barred critiques of humility in politics levied by later critics of Augustine. It would be helpful and useful for Keys to address those critics. Do they have a point? After all, even Augustine's contemporary friends, such as Ernest L. Fortin or Pierre Manent, have understood Augustine to have been involved in something like a noble risk. To destabilize the functioning of the earthly city—even its vicious functioning—with a foreign element might risk making things even worse than they already are for the human beings who unavoidably dwell therein. Does Keys think that there is a risk to humility in politics, or is there only upside? Additionally, are Augustine's critics targeting straw men, those “counterfeits or mistaken iterations?” Or have they rightly identified and described what Augustine expresses?

Scholars of St. Augustine will welcome Professor Keys's book as a thorough, eminently helpful, and admirably clear presentation of the role of the themes of pride and humility in Augustine's political thought. Teachers of the *City of God* will welcome her book as a tremendously helpful aid to focus both in preparing to teach that text and in guiding students through it.

N·V

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The Political Soul: Plato on *Thumos*, Spirited Motivation, and the City
by Josh Wilburn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), xxvi + 340 pp.

This text is a welcome addition to the literature on *thumos* in Plato, particularly in how the author recasts spirited motivation and applies his vision to reading Plato's political theory. Josh Wilburn advances three theses, one minor and two major. The minor is that Plato is deeply committed to psychological tripartition—the division of the embodied soul into rational, spirited, and appetitive elements—with “each of the three parts of the soul . . . understood as a distinct source of psychological states and activities, including especially the ones that constitute *motivations*” (xxii; emphasis original). This straightforward reading of tripartition becomes the foundation for the two major theses, where Wilburn explicates the nature and effects of *thumos* in personal and political life. The first major thesis is a conception of spiritedness that is atypical. In the traditional understanding, spiritedness is grounded in love for honor and victory, and usually manifested through traits of aggression, competition, and ambition. On Wilburn's reading, however, Plato “also recognizes a second, cooperative or gentle side of spirit that is responsible for feelings of familial affection, friendship, and political fellowship” (xxii). *Thumos* therefore has a dual aspect, which duality leads to Wilburn's second major thesis: “That spirit is the distinctively *social* or *political* part of the soul. . . . It is what makes us capable of cooperating together in united social and political groups and protecting those groups against outsiders” (xxii; emphases original).

Wilburn makes his case in four parts over ten chapters. Part I dedicates a chapter to each of his three theses. Chapter 1 defends reading Platonic tripartition to mean that the embodied soul has three discrete (15) or distinct (16) sources or subjects of psychological states and activities, with emphasis on motivation. Chapter 2 argues that *thumos* has a dual orientation, based on the philosophical dogs of *Republic* 2, who exhibit “savageness and aggression toward the foreign or *allotriion*, . . . and gentleness and affection toward the familiar or *oikeion*” (54). Supplementing this reading, Wilburn offers a table of some thirty-five aggressive/competitive and twenty gentle/cooperative traits that are manifestations of *thumos* (55–56). In the former category we find psychological conditions such as anger (*orgē*), envy (*phthonos*), and courage (*andreia*), and in the latter we see softness (*malakia*), friendship (*philia*), and moderation (*sōphrosunē*). Chapter 3 develops the duality of spiritedness into an argument that spirited motivations are what make possible social and political life; that socio-political education occurs through the formation of *thumos*, especially through teaching what is praiseworthy and

blameworthy; and that the civic strife and faction that threaten political unity are produced by spiritedness that is captive to appetitive or “pleonectic” purposes (61, 91). Parts II–IV are the application of the schema of part I to three different eras in the Platonic corpus (xxiii), reading the dialogues through a moderate developmentalism. Part II tackles spiritedness and precursors to explicit tripartition in the so-called early dialogues. Wilburn focuses on the Great Speech in *Protagoras* (chapter 4) and also treks through *Symposium*, *Gorgias*, *Menexenus*, *Meno*, *Apology*, and *Crito* (chapter 5). Part III deals with two dialogues where tripartition is plain to see: *Republic* (chapters 6 and 7) and *Timaeus* (chapter 8). Wilburn argues that the musical and gymnastic regimens in the *Republic* are ordered to forming *thumos*, and that developing dual-facing spiritedness in the context of tripartition means making spirit allied and auxiliary to reason but aggressive and opposed to appetite (165, 189). His treatment of the *Timaeus* takes up the problem of how the discrete and distinct parts of the tripartite soul communicate and offers a creative solution employing psycho-somatic activities of perception, memory, and imagination (211–21). Finally, Part IV works out the importance of spirited motivation in latter-day Plato, arguing that the weaving together of the dispositions of *andreia* and *sōphrosunē* in the *Statesman* is profitably understood as integrating the two sides of spirit (chapter 9) and that the proper formation of *thumos* is still an integral part of the healthy constitution explored in the *Laws* (Chapter 10).

To note the virtues in Wilburn’s argument is a simple task. The work is compelling and challenging. The parts and chapters are well defined, making clear what each section is accomplishing. The argument is lucid, with Wilburn leading the reader comfortably through themes that often risk being philosophically and linguistically arcane. His words also possess verve: beyond his arresting theses, he has the cheek, for instance, to chide fellow scholars for promoting “especially promiscuous versions” of dubious interpretations (13n37). Further, the project is an achievement of scholarship. Wilburn compasses and deploys a striking range of scholarship and classical sources. One thus comes to grasp the state of the art and to be exposed to a wealth of salient literary, historical, scientific, and philosophical authors that are antecedent to, contemporary with, and heirs to the texts studied. For teaching and research, the book is a valuable resource.

Methodologically, Wilburn’s approach is welcome. He eschews an extreme unitarian reading—Parmenidean Plato—that takes psychological tripartition to be always and everywhere the same every time spirited motivation appears in a dialogue, and avoids an intensely developmentalist position—Heraclitean Plato—that takes Plato to change his mind so radically that the

latter works are *tout court* repudiations and rejections of the former. Indeed, Wilburn devotes space to argue explicitly against a clumsy developmentalism that would blind us to how spirited motivation appears across the corpus (126–38). And, as outlined above, Wilburn has no time for the ideologically atomic stance—Democritean Plato—that is suspicious of reading any particular dialogue in light of the others. Finally, Wilburn’s exposition and analysis of *thumos* has real stakes. The main thrust of his theses is to trace the promise and peril of spiritedness in social and political life. His arguments that virtuous *thumos* is critical to maintaining and protecting the integrity of the city and that vicious spiritedness is a force for fracture and disintegration are, fundamentally, convincing. So, does that mean his novel treatment seems to me a perfect argument? Not quite. Being such a thumotic gadfly to the traditional view(s), Wilburn cannot but rouse attention and raise questions. I shall sketch three *kinds* of questions stalking me.

The first sort regard the extent of the Platonic corpus surveyed. For a study of *thumos*, I was surprised that not much was made of the *Phaedrus*, where the tripartition of the souls of men and the gods is prominent in Socrates’s palinode (245c–249d). It is not cricket to complain that an author did not write the book you wanted him to write; nevertheless, Wilburn invokes the *Phaedrus* in his very first line (xi), but does not turn sustained attention to the dialogue. The tripartition *Phaedrus* is relevant in part because Wilburn claims that the two sides of *thumos*, aggression and gentleness, are equally fundamental, “both basic expressions of spiritedness, and neither is reducible to the other” (60). But, in the tripartite divinities of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates takes pain to point out that envy (*phthonos*) is absent from divine psychology (247a); and the same claim about the gods lacking envy can also be found in the *Timaeus* (29e), while in the *Philebus* (48b) and *Laws* (731a), envy is linked to viciousness. Given Plato’s ethical imperative of godlikeness, capacities for friendship/benevolence and aggression/envy do not appear metaphysically equal. Also, I wish more use would have been made of *Phaedo*, mainly because Wilburn generally treats the social and the political as equivalent, possibly identical. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates likens people with violent psychology to wolves and hawks, and those with civic virtues to bees, wasps, and ants (82a–b). In passing, Wilburn characterizes the latter animals as “political” and “gentle” (123n16). While a collective is likely a social situation, more needs to be said to argue that a hive is a political arrangement. The condition of bees and ants is one of slaves or a herd under a single “mind,” and unthinking devotion does not seem to be an expression of political spiritedness, though Wilburn takes it thus.

The second kind of questions follows from the picture in the *Phaedo*:

Wilburn's conception of *thumos* as both aggression and gentleness puts significant linguistic strain on the term. Under Wilburn's view, dialing up one's spiritedness would just as likely mean becoming gentler as becoming more aggressive. But the vast majority of "hyperthumotic" cases studied—Medea (66), Achilles (68), the bronze race in Hesiod (69)—clearly belong to the aggressive type. Wilburn would have us not just conceive but actually *see* overly soft and sheepish followers, people who meekly go along with whatever is commanded, as having overgrown *spiritedness*. Were our author to be indicted for impiety against the Hellenic tongue, I fear his apologia would need rhetorical skill surpassing Gorgias and Lysias. Relatedly, the insistence on aggression and gentleness, rather than the traditional victory-loving, produces curious results: under aggressive psychological states he classifies desiring praise, resisting injustice, and being high-minded; while under gentle states he places being inclined to praise, submitting to justice, and being averse to the shameful (55–56). There does not seem to be much of a difference between aggression and gentleness. And, as a number of the classified traits do not appear to be intrinsically related to aggression or gentleness, the requirement that they fit the taxonomy applied to them feels somewhat Procrustean.

Finally, there are my substantive questions, a few of which I will quickly mention. Wilburn insists on the distinctness and discreteness of the three parts of the soul, but his account appears to argue that it is subordination to the appetitive that makes spirit overly aggressive (75), and that it is obedience to right reason that makes it healthy and appropriately loyal (178). As such, *thumos* does not ultimately seem to be its own source of motivation. Relatedly, the conception of the three parts of the soul as "distinct, independent sources or subjects of motivation" (203) has its own challenges. To explain how the parts communicate, Wilburn appeals to faculties of sense-perception, memory, and imagination (219). Perhaps I am unfairly pedantic, but it seems that perception, memory, and imagination are also distinct sources or subjects of psychological states and activities; in Wilburn's view they are distinct producers of the content that the three parts attend to (and he does not consider the possibility that perceiving, remembering, and imagining might be shaped by reason, ambition, and appetite). With such a populous psychology, one might come away with a sense that the soul is a collection of faculties and that its name is Legion. Lastly, I only gesture at the claim that *thumos*, not reason, is what makes us political. Wilburn ends up here because he conceives of friendship as essentially spirited. When he offers a declension of souls with increasing capacities for friendship—isolated animals, then social animals, then humans (60)—he

does not consider that higher and higher forms of reasoning is the relevant variable. While he rightly sees that politics depends on friendship, and that friendship depends on what is common (*koinon*), he does not ask if the highest friendship is based in the highest common good, the True and the Good, which is a good available only to *logos*. It is on the basis of the True that the gods of the *Phaedrus* are friendly to each and envious toward none. They, I wager, are Plato's model. The political capacity to *recognize* another as familiar (*oikeion*)—beyond personal whim and whimsy, beyond kith and kin, beyond class and party—seems to me an achievement of *logos*. It is on account of *logos*, not *thumos*, that, despite our disagreements, I recognize and recommend Wilburn as *oikeios*, a comrade and companion in the pursuit that is philosophy. N.V

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The Inner Life of Catholic Reform: From the Council of Trent to the Enlightenment by Ulrich L. Lehner (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022*), 312 pp.

In *The Inner Life of Catholic Reform*, Ulrich Lehner explores an overlooked aspect of Catholic Reform, one he considers central. This 250-year period—its beginning marked by the Council of Trent (1545–1563)—is normally understood through institutional and political lenses. Lehner, however, attends to its “inner life,” or the “practices and beliefs” of the time “that would spiritually transform the individual” (ix). Shifting focus from exterior to interior, from macro to micro, Lehner's work provides fresh insight into the nuances of Catholic Reform. He labors to prove its centrality not simply to the socio-political systems that individuals operated inside of—as has long been established—but to the spiritual experiences, beliefs, and practices they operated through and from.

Lehner employs “Catholic Reform” in lieu of “Counter-Reformation” because his treatment of the movement is not in reference to the Protestant Reformation. Rather, he deals with Catholicism's reform on its own terms. However, as he notes in the preface, the work is not meant to exhaustively chronicle Catholic Reform's many events, as he focuses specifically on the beliefs and practices of spiritual transformation. Lehner says that, in writing

the book, he “took only a small bag of pearls from the treasury and left the rest untouched” (xi). The work is thus intended to supplement rather than replace other histories of Catholic Reform.

Though Catholic Reform is commonly associated with Trent, Lehner outlines in the first chapter how this is somewhat misleading. Trent, he argues, “never articulated a passionate vision of reform,” as it “served more like a symbol than an actual force of reform” (3, 157). He therefore deems “Tridentism” an unsuitable designation for what he is concerned with in this book. Lehner argues that, instead, this “reform” ought to be understood via two senses associated with the word: (1) *reformatio in pristinum* (reformation into the former) and (2) *reformatio ad melius* (reformation for the better). The first is oriented to a normative past, the second to a normative future. By taking these together—reform as recovery and innovation—Lehner underscores a common historiographical error in the treatment of Catholic Reform. In understanding it primarily in reference to the Protestant Reformation, historians have too often interpreted the project as a form of reactionary conservatism. While Catholic reformers sought to preserve theological orthodoxy, they nevertheless encouraged new developments in discipline and catechesis.

The “adaptation of old ideas to new circumstances” was in fact prominent during Catholic Reform (6). In adapting old ideas, reformers were chiefly concerned with the *cura animarum* (cure of souls), “in overcoming the bifurcation between theological erudition and lived faith” (9). Therefore, Lehner’s study is primarily one of devotional theology, drawing on “the catechism, the homily, the prayer book, and the hymn” (9). In doing so, he depicts the Catholic reformer as one who sought, above all else, to conform their will to God’s, a self-transforming pursuit of holiness. This pursuit was by no means stoical, but emerged in and through converting passions into affects, ordering them unto the love of God. Pedagogically, a “dialectical pattern of fear *and* mercy” was thought to be instructive in this work of converting passion to affect, as Lehner demonstrates throughout (94).

The individual reformer’s affective inner work was conceived as deeply connected to their communal relations, specifically families. According to Lehner, post-Trent theology “recognized [the family] as the center of all church reform” (11). Thus, in discussing the inner life of Catholic reformers, Lehner never locates them in isolation from their societal structures. Rather, he rightfully discovers the telos of these structures in reference to the spiritual perfection after which they sought.

Because Lehner does not spend precious word count on the major events and persons which are common in sequential overviews, he is able instead

to devote his attention to “the ordinary faithful” (1). Herein lies one of the book’s most valuable contributions. Lehner forgoes lengthy discussion on prominent theologians, popes, and bishops to talk about the spirituality of laypersons. While the Protestant Reformation is often acknowledged for making Christianity accessible to ordinary people, Lehner shows that Catholic Reform ought to be also. This fact of Catholic Reform is perhaps best epitomized by “salvific egalitarianism,” a popular notion of the time that denoted societal status as having no bearing on one’s salvation. Its implications were such that “one could pray as a butcher just as fervently as a merchant” (159). This made it so that “everybody who wished to engage more profoundly in religious affairs could do so” (160). Therefore, Lehner identifies spiritual development not in ivory towers and hagiographic tales, but primarily in lay movements, in family life, and from the pews.

Salvific egalitarianism shaped not only the way laypersons approached spirituality but also the manner in which Catholicism spread globally. Lehner argues that, during Reform, “an ‘enchanted’ Catholic imagination developed that allowed and encouraged a diversity of expression,” without which “Catholicism would not have become a world religion” (165). By making class, race, ethnicity, and so on irrelevant to salvation, Catholic spirituality was quickly contextualized across Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Lehner demonstrates this with a Dominican catechism for Nahuatl people which taught that “the natives were ‘consecrated’ by the Spirit, just as all the other members of the worldwide church” (50). However, this egalitarianism was limited to the supernatural, and so it was often employed to “justify, promote, or condone” oppressive practices and structures in the natural world (50). Without sidestepping this reality, Lehner highlights the diverse manifestations of Catholic spirituality that emerged during Catholic Reform. The breadth of source material he draws upon allows for a more robust account of the inner life of Catholic Reform, as he engages its presence all around the world.

Lehner zooms in on not only the individual lives which comprise the Reform, but also the objects they used and imbued with meaning, often making astute connections with their corresponding practices, attitudes, and theologies. For instance, to demonstrate a prevailing hamartiology which shifted its focus from society to the individual, Lehner notes St. Charles Borromeo’s invention of a closed confessional. As conceptions of sin became more personalized, so did confessions. There was consequently a need for greater privacy, which the closed confessional box provided.

While Lehner covers quite a bit of ground in this concise treatment, he does not provide any account of a sacrament I think would have been

apropos: extreme unction (the anointing of the sick). Though omissions are inevitable and necessary, this one seems odd, especially given his constant reference to topics such as salvation and spiritual growth and how they intersect with the vagaries of normal life. This sacrament, which mystically unites believers to Christ in times of morbidity, is a crucial aspect of Catholic spirituality. Surely its omission is not due to a lack of relevance, as Trent doubles down on its status as a sacrament. In any case, as Lehner himself admits, “every author must make choices” (xi).

That Lehner was not shy in making choices renders his work all the more readable, in keeping with his belief that “books should be read and not just consulted” (xi). This book, with ten chapters spanning only 165 pages, can and should be read, not just consulted. Lehner is thorough but never pedantic; his style is clear and easy to read. *The Inner Life* will thus serve the layperson and historian alike, a fact befitting Reform spirituality, which was not esoterically exclusive but available to all who longed for more. This book is likewise for all who long for more than the institutional and political descriptions of Catholic Reform. With *The Inner Life*, Lehner successfully fills a “lacuna” in Catholic Reform’s historical corpus. He elucidates not only *what* this reform entailed, but also *why* it matters. After reading this, one will surely conclude with Lehner that, by failing to attend to the inner life of Catholic Reform, “the historian not only loses sight of the church’s reason for existence, . . . but also of the multifaceted religious actions and intentions of the time” (158). NEV

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The Abuse of Conscience: A Century of Catholic Moral Theology by Matthew Levering (*Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021*), viii + 360 pp.

In the maelstrom of modern morals, can we find sense in the cacophony of voices that flood the air with their assertions about Catholic morality and conscience? The sounds of too many ethicists and moral theologians create not a blessed harmony, but a disturbing dissonance regarding matters that range from life to death, male to female, heaven to hell. In response, Matthew Levering offers us a “sourcebook” that catalogues the thoughts of some of the

most important twentieth-century thinkers on one of the most dominant and controversial issues in this realm: conscience (1).

The book consists of four chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion, all of which deploy the characteristic encyclopedic scholarship that readers have come to expect and appreciate from Levering. In addition to the text itself, the extensive endnotes of nearly one hundred pages comprise a veritable commented bibliography that deserve a close reading by moral theologians.

There appear to be three starting points to which Levering is responding. First, there is the Pinckaers-Dominican tradition from which he comes. As he describes in the introduction, training in that tradition left him surprised (7) by the importance that conscience has held for ethical thinkers outside of that tradition—not only in centuries gone by, but also up to the present day: “I had imagined that conscience-centered moral theology was a thing of the past, or at least it was no longer attractive to the church of the present or the future. It became clear that I needed to relearn twentieth-century Catholic moral theology to understand the ongoing centrality of conscience” (8). The second starting point represents the failure of thinkers outside of the Dominican tradition to revitalize moral theology. Authors such as Fritz Tillman, Emile Mersch, S.J., and Gérard Gillemen, S.J., among others, worked in the 1930s and 1950s to renew moral theology away from the focus on conscience, yet their project mostly failed. Finally, the last starting point is offered by Brian Besong’s important 2015 article in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, “Reappraising the Manual Tradition”—for Besong presents a challenge to thinkers who have denigrated moral manuals. Levering states that, in reading the manuals more closely, he came to realize that they “were richer than is often supposed,” but the main critiques against them—exemplified in Pinckaers’s *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (English trans. 1995)—are fundamentally accurate. Levering’s work, then, reconstructs part of the history of contemporary Catholic moral theology and diagnoses the causes that immediately led to the present situation, in which conscience-centered morality now exists in a “more problematic form” than before the Second Vatican Council (1).

From the beginning of the book, Levering signals that he does not intend to “explore magisterial teaching” on conscience (17). Methodologically, then, the book excludes a treatment of the thought of John Paul II, who has contributed greatly to a reliable theology of conscience, as seen in works such as the 1984 *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (esp. §§18, 25, 26); the 1993 *Veritatis Splendor* (esp. ch. 2, pt. II, “Conscience and Truth” [§§54–64]); and the 1995 *Evangelium Vitae* (esp. §§24, 40, 69). Likewise, Karol Wojtyła

addressed the issue in *Person and Act*, chapter 4, sect. 2, “Self-Fulfillment and Conscience,” among a number of other places. Despite the methodological exclusion of John Paul II, Levering treats Joseph Ratzinger *and* Benedict XVI in the chapter “Conscience and German Thought” (192–93).

Related to the book’s central theme are the issues of probabilism, tutorism, and laxism. Although, as noted, the author means to avoid exploring Catholic magisterial teaching on these issues, in the course of discussing Dominic Prümmer, O.P., he notes Pope Alexander VIII’s “censuring of Jansenist tutorism” (81)—condemned because the “safer” (*tutior*) way often leads to do-nothing quietism, which minimizes human effort because it expects God to do everything for us. Readers might also be interested to know of magisterial acceptance of certain forms of tutorism, seen in documents contained in Gratian’s Decretals, included in the article that Levering cites (52, 234n12), Thomas Deman’s 1936 “Probabilisme” in volume 13.1 of the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*. Meanwhile, Alexander VII seriously censured *laxist* propositions in 1665–1666. When those censures were ignored on “moral” grounds, his successor Innocent XI in 1679 further condemned even more laxist propositions—mostly sourced from Jesuit casuistry. Many of these propositions coincided with the very citations employed by Pascal in his 1657 *Provincial Letters*, which biting and effectively flay the overindulgent morals reasoning of certain casuists in his day. These facts should help counter-balance Levering’s implied critique of “the Jansenist rigorist Pascal” (118), for the French author was not attacking *probabilism* as such: he was against the tendency of Jesuit casuists to use their moral system to excuse the bad behaviors of the wealthy and the powerful. Finally, it is worth noting that, although probabilism could *seem* “the most ‘lax’ option other than laxism,” while not being “laxist” (66), it was accepted by the Church within bounds enunciated by Innocent XI. The Pope’s acceptance of some forms of probabilism was on the grounds that the average person should not be expected to expertly sift the fine details of fraught moral choices, but reasonably can look to a reliable expert whose opinion is *probably* true, all things being equal. The complexities of this centuries-long dispute illustrate how closely magisterial and non-magisterial sources are intertwined in the history of moral theology.

The second chapter of Levering’s work addresses “Conscience and the Bible.” Not all the authors are “biblicists” or experts in exegesis, but their influential interpretations seem to merit exposition, such as that of the notorious ex-Jesuit George Tyrrell, or that of Yves Congar, O.P., and Richard B. Hayes. Levering treats authors of lesser importance, such as Hastings Rashdall and Johannes Stelzenberger; in other chapters, Thomas J. Higgins

and Anthony Koch. By including them, Levering provides a fuller historical picture than readers would get from an exposition of only the “greatest” thinkers, as seen in works such as Fergus Kerr’s 2007 *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*. The conclusion to the chapter is eminently reasonable, and even eloquent: “The New Testament references to conscience support a role for conscience, but a limited one. For Paul, faith, hope, and cruciform love have primacy. They are spelled out in a virtuous life, in imitation of Christ and under the Spirit’s transformative direction of believers as adopted children of God and members of Christ’s body” (48).

The third chapter, “Conscience and the Moral Manuals,” makes an important qualified concession to Besong: “The manuals’ casuistry can be said to have offered a training in the paths of prudent decision-making. But I think the moral manuals’ conscience-centered morality was not adequate to articulating the Christian moral life and did indeed minimize the virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit” (54). This points to the real but circumscribed value of the manuals as collections of “decisions” that resolved difficult cases in light of Catholic moral principles. Manuals pose a danger when the totalizing tendency of some casuists sees their work not as a useful tool in service of a greater whole, but as a sufficient means to moral goodness.

Particularly striking in the third chapter is the account of Michael Cronin’s response to John Henry Newman’s description of conscience—influenced by Joseph Butler: “If one views conscience as the ‘voice of God’ rather than as the judgment of practical reason, one will have difficulty distinguishing what is forbidden because it is intrinsically evil from what is forbidden simply of God’s will” (72). Likewise, one will have difficulty distinguishing between, on the one hand, obeying a command or exhortation that could stem from a human authority’s imprudence and, on the other, obeying a command because it comes from divine revelation itself. After reviewing some prominent manuals, Levering concludes with an implicit critique of Pinckaers’s simplification of the nuances in the history of moral theology, although he adopts Pinckaers’s general conclusions: “Contrary to caricatures, [moral manuals] often begin with beatitude and demonstrate a rich understanding of human freedom. The manualists also recognize that there is much more to Catholic moral theology than obligation and law. Their engagement with modern philosophers is often profound” (82). However, as stated, the approach and the contents of the manuals is insufficient, and the emphasis on conscience “distort[s] the shape of Christian ethics” (82).

The title of the third chapter, “Conscience and the Thomists,” makes one wish for a chapter dedicated to Jesuits, as their influence in moral theology has been profound, continued, and—with a few notable exceptions, such

as Gérard Gilleman, S.J.—authority- and conscience-centered. “Thomist” is a slippery term, since most Jesuit moralists prior to Vatican II would have liked to identify (at least some of) Thomas Aquinas’s thought as their starting point and chief influence, as required by their constitutions. As things stand, the authors examined in this chapter, aside from Eric D’Arcy, are all Dominican friars: Benoît-Henri Merkelbach, Michel Labourdette, Reginald G. Doherty, and the already-familiar Servais Pinckaers.

Of special note in chapter 3 is the discussion of Doherty’s correction of John of St. Thomas’s equation of prudence and the act of conscience (107–14). In one instance, it is unclear whether an interpretation comes from Levering or Labourdette, but the text inaccurately equates a “morality of conscience” and “probabilism” (97). Additionally, Labourdette seems to overlook the complexities of decision-making when he states: “For modern tutorism, the supreme category is security, just as for laxism it is liberty. For St. Thomas, . . . the supreme category is *truth*” (99). This might be an accurate psychological analysis, but in prudential matters, where particular circumstances shape the nature of an act, the chief concern is the moral *goodness* of means toward a fitting end. Aside from cases in which the object of the act is indisputably an intrinsic evil, one cannot have scientific certitude of the truth of an action’s moral quality, but instead one must rely on a probable judgment about what ought to be done. One of the critiques that casuists have lobbed against virtue proponents is that virtue theory is well and good, but it provides little help in knowing what to do in concrete situations. A virtue theory response might include an account of well-ordered moral intuition, in which the virtuous person’s practical judgment has been habituated by rational deliberation and choice (see the helpful quotations from Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, 234n9). A casuist might rebut and say that to develop a quick-working and accurate moral judgment, one must have had at least initial recourse to careful thinking (either one’s own or that of a better and more-informed thinker), which is going to look very much like casuistry.

The fourth chapter, “Conscience and German Thought,” offers perhaps the broadest offerings, as it covers not only well-known figures such as Karl Rahner, S.J., and Joseph Ratzinger, but also the philosophers Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, as well as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Protestant minister better known for his adherence to conscience against the Nazis than for his writings on conscience. This chapter, more than the previous ones, explains how previous emphases on (1) how conscience’s obligation to be obedient to papal law shifted to (2) conscience’s obligation to express individual freedom and authenticity. Both views of conscience, it seems, are voluntaristic at root, but the first adverted more to an exterior magisterial authority and

the second to an interior authority of “authenticity” and personal liberty. Perhaps Heidegger’s widespread adoption by seeming progressive causes and thinkers—including Rahner—preserved him from early “cancel culture,” but Levering rightly does not shy away from noting that Heidegger supported the Nazis for years in significant ways—whatever his theoretical contributions to ethics may have been (127). The inclusion of Joseph Fuchs, S.J., and Bernard Häring in this chapter is welcome, as their thought considerably shaped the present state of Catholic morals.

Levering’s work ends by giving readers a stark choice “forward”: either a morality like that of James F. Keenan, S.J., or one like that of Reinhard Hütter. On the one hand, in line with his prolific output, Keenan advocates for a further emphasis on conscience (200) and has had significant influence in ecclesiastical circles. Readers would benefit from knowing that the research of Mark Jordan and John T. Noonan, among others whose conclusions are disputed, has led Keenan to conclude: “These historical investigations have served as correctives and repudiate the manualists’ general claims regarding the unchangeability of moral truth.”¹ On the other hand, Hütter, a German author now teaching in the United States, not included in the fourth chapter, offers a more integrative theology of morals and Christological-Trinitarian mystery. Levering indicates Hütter’s vision is faithful to Catholic doctrine, Sacred Scripture, and indeed, reality itself as revealed and redeemed in Christ. Hütter’s position is encapsulated in a phrase: “To be good is to do the truth” (205).

Levering’s book may be seen as a fair and judicious summary of how some of the most important voices in the twentieth century have addressed the issue of conscience and adjacent concerns. Clearly developing insights in line with Pinckaers, but without serious polemic, it would serve historians of moral theology as a sourcebook whose contrast with works such as Keenan’s deserves careful consideration. Along with Richard Sorabji’s 2014 *Moral Conscience Through the Ages* and Matthew K. Miner’s 2022 *Conscience: Four Thomistic Treatments*, Levering’s book will help the next generation of moral theologians to develop a proper understanding of conscience within the life of sanctity to which we are all called. N·V

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¹ James F. Keenan, S.J., *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 44.