

Book Reviews

Conscience: Four Thomistic Treatments by Benoît Henri Merkelbach, O.P., Reginald Beaudouin, O.P., and Michel Labourdette, O.P., translated and edited by Matthew K. Miner (Providence, RI: *Cluny Media*, 2022), i–vii + 362 pp.

IN THIS VOLUME PROFESSOR MINERD presents four essays written by three twentieth-century French Thomist thinkers: Benoît-Henri Merkelbach, O.P.; Michel Labourdette, O.P.; and Reginald Beaudouin, O.P. Miner states that he hopes the work will contribute to the project of recovering “the best of the Thomist teachers from the previous era and ask[ing] how to organically develop our theology today” (iv), especially as regards the debates surrounding probabilism (i.e., the question of “just how probable” one’s knowledge must be regarding one’s moral actions). Miner makes it explicit that he conceives of his project as a historical one, and does not seek to engage the debates on these topics that have arisen since the Second Vatican Council.

The four essays translated by Miner “present some of the most technical discussions of conscience in the Thomist school” (76). Merkelbach’s first essay presents an overview of the development of the treatise on conscience starting in the fourteenth century, and concludes with his own treatment of conscience. Beaudouin’s essay is an impressive (and some might say eye-crossingly) technical and carefully detailed attempt to synthesize a Thomistic account of conscience with the equiprobabilism of St. Alphonsus. It is included “as a monument to the Thomist school” which inspired authors like Ambroise Gardeil and Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange. Labourdette’s essay is an introduction to (and criticism of) the technical discussions that took place over probabilism, including his concerns about too closely identifying conscience and prudence. It can be seen partially as a critique of the positions taken by Merkelbach and Beaudouin. Merkelbach’s second essay, taken from his *Summa Theologiae Moralis*, is a similar project to Beaudouin’s. It is more compressed (being

one-fifth as long) and is less concerned with the problems that arise from limiting the discussion of conscience to the treatise on human acts.

In addition to the helpful footnotes accompanying each translation, Minerd has included his own essay, "A Synthetic Overview of Conscience and Prudence in Moral Reasoning." This essay maps out the different stages of moral reasoning from a Thomistic perspective, as a way to clarify several different ways the term "conscience" has been used throughout the history of Catholic and Thomistic thought.

Minerd breaks the essay into four main parts. In the first part (which is worth the price of admission on its own), Minerd identifies five main acceptations of the term "conscience": (1) self-awareness ("psychological conscience/consciousness of self"); (2) the sense for ultimate moral values ("*synderesis*" and "faith-infused *synderesis*" in the order of grace); (3) a particular power of mind related to judging moral matters ("moral sense" or practical reason); (4) the voice of God deep within our souls intimating to us what is right or wrong; (5) in strict Thomistic terms, "an application of knowledge to a particular act whether past, present, or future."

Minerd says that (5) has three subdivisions within the Thomist school:

(5a) Conscience is a judgment of "moral science," and is somewhat speculative (or "speculatively practical") in character. It is distinct from prudential reasoning because it may be concerned with the morality of a particular act performed by any given person, not necessarily myself.

(5b) Conscience is a judgment of prudence or imprudence and is practical. (If one speaks of it as "speculatively practical," it is only because "practically practical" is reserved for the commands of prudence.) This kind of reasoning is about a particular act and is given to a particular person (not any person in particular) and seems to involve some degree of prudential reasoning. Minerd (with some caveats) identifies Beaudouin and Merkelbach as proponents of this position.

(5c) Conscience is some sort of unique judgment used to ascertain the rightness or wrongness of a potential act to be performed. This judgment is distinct from both prudence and moral science, and considers the potential act without considering its fittingness for me, the particular agent, in my particular circumstances.

In the second part of the essay, Minerd distinguishes between moral philosophy and moral theology, laying the conceptual groundwork for the rest of the essay and properly situating the meaning of “moral reasoning.” The third part of the essay is dedicated to analyzing the stages of moral reasoning, from the generalized realm of the “speculatively practical” to the judgments of prudence in particular scenarios. The final section gives a summary of the different kinds of moral judgments considered in the previous section.

The translations themselves are solid: clear, serviceable, and rendered in an English that admirably avoids the sometimes-cumbersome tendencies of nineteenth-century academic French. The footnotes are useful without being intrusive, and direct readers to potential topics of future research.

If I may offer a criticism of the work, it is that Minerd often gestures towards the conclusions this volume might serve, but usually stops short of making (or endorsing) those arguments himself. For example, although Minerd claims to fire no shots regarding the debates surrounding conscience that have arisen since the Second Vatican Council, he does direct us to many ready ammunition piles (e.g., Professor Matthew Levering’s recent book, *The Abuse of Conscience: A Century of Catholic Moral Theology*). This criticism may come from frustration at my own tendency to obscure my views on controversial topics behind the irenic veil of “just doing historical research.” But to say that the works of these three authors deserve renewed study is to make an implicit argument about the perspective and conclusions their works serve.

A second critique probably shows more of my shortcomings as a reader than Minerd’s excesses as a writer. Be that as it may, I must say something about the footnotes. The introductory essay is seventy-eight pages, and has 191 footnotes. These footnotes (which I am tempted to call “shin-notes,” or perhaps “knee-notes,” as they often reach a third or a full half of a page) can be deeply absorbing, to the point of distracting from the main essay. To Minerd’s credit, they are insightful, and often humorous. But, as mentioned above, the footnotes that accompany the translated texts do a much better job of helping without being overly intrusive. *Sed contra*, the footnotes that accompany Minerd’s essay do an excellent job of drawing the reader’s attention to points of interest that could be avenues of future research, which is one of the book’s stated goals. Minerd, as prolific as he is, could not possibly pen all the articles he would need to write in order to clean up his essay’s footnotes. So in a sense, their exuberance is a gift, albeit a distracting one.

Overall, I recommend Minerd’s work wholeheartedly to anyone interested in the historical development of the notion of conscience, nineteenth-century Thomism, or the debates surrounding probabilism.

The volume provides an insightful introductory essay, well-translated texts, and robust, thought-provoking commentary. Miner's work is a helpful resource which fills a clear need in the scholarship, opening doors for researchers who wish to help recover the past traditions that inform our contemporary discourse in moral philosophy and theology. N.V.

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Principles of Catholic Theology, Book 1: On the Nature of Theology

by Thomas Joseph White, O.P. (*Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2023*), xii + 177 pp.

THOMAS JOSEPH WHITE'S *On the Nature of Theology* is the first book of a projected four-book series whose overall aim is to "explore the central mysteries" of faith. Book 3 will treat God, the Holy Trinity, Creation, and Christ; book 4 is slated to deal with the Church, Mary, and grace. Book 2 leads up to these central mysteries; it is an apologetic essay and deals with the credibility of faith from the perspective of natural reason. But the present introductory volume, book 1, maps the territory of contemporary theology, considers the central goal of theology, and ponders the use of philosophy within theology. It indicates the approach White aims to take throughout the series as a whole, and also demarcates Thomism within the modern history of Thomists.

Karl Rahner wrote an essentially interminable series of "theological investigations" and Hans Urs von Balthasar a series of "explorations." Is there anything to be noted in the title of White's series, "principles of Catholic theology?" Yes. It is programmatic. The "principles" in the end are the revealed mysteries of the Christian religion, but they are treated as principles in the Aristotelian sense of first principles, both ontological and epistemological. So, if principles are a beginning, and the principiated an end, then White's investigations are not interminable and he thinks he has a map antecedent to any explorations he makes. Of course, the mysteries are disclosed in the Scriptures that speak of them—it is a scriptural word—but thinking of them as principles is to regard them philosophically. The very title, then, is an advertisement of the Thomist nature of the contents: sacred doctrine will be presented as a science.

Perhaps one more word should be said about “principles” by way of illustration. Suppose we take the analogy of faith as an epistemological principle (Rom 12:6; *Dei Verbum* §12). It is a principle in the sense that at the outset of theological thinking organizes it. It tells us our science is to seek a *nexus mysteriorum*. Once we chart this interconnectedness, we observe the primacy of the Holy Trinity as the cause of all things, and then, taking the Trinity as an ontological first principle, we can (for instance) factor in the processions of Word and Spirit as causes of the emanation of all things from God in the theology of creation. First principles pertain “both to what is the case metaphysically (God in himself and the mysteries of revelation) and to our epistemological framework of explanation (the science of theology as a study of who God is and of what he has accomplished in works of creation and grace)” (8).

Principles is governed by four guiding concerns: first, Catholic theology should be self-consciously pre-Kantian, not in the sense that it does not engage Kant, but in the sense that it should be metaphysical and able to show the epistemic warrants that make the perennial philosophy still vigorous each spring after every torrid idealism or positivist winter; second, the Catholic theology White offers us is almost ineluctably Thomist (more on that below); third, it will engage contemporary modern alternatives to Thomism, alternatives whose antecedents are Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Barth; and last, it will be guided by the theological vision of the Second Vatican Council. This last concern governs the order of presentation. “The internal ordering of the essays present in these books is inspired by the Creed, reread in a contemporary way in part by reference to *Lumen gentium*: the soteriological initiatives of God in the world culminate in Christ and are realized in the Church.” Therefore: “The order passes from consideration of God as Trinity, to Christ in whom God is manifest, to the Church, . . . to the universality of the activity of grace” (23–24).

There are five essays in book 1: the last two concern Thomism and contemporary Thomism; the first three concern theology more generally conceived and in its modern context.

“The *Analogue Fidei* in Catholic Theology” is a wonderful example of dialectical theology that indicates to a beginner or graduate student the lay of the theological land in the twentieth century. It begins with two rival versions of modern theology, Schleiermacher and Rahner on the one hand, Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar on the other. Schleiermacher understands that, if theology must work within the limits of reason as Kant draws them, then doctrines can be merely edifying but not informative, and that the task of theology is to undertake an anthropological search for

the religious experience of the Absolute. As it happens, Christianity is the high point of this search and finds the paradigmatic religious experience in the human consciousness of Christ. Rahner's supernatural *exisential* likewise ensures a universal experience of God moving toward us in grace, the unsurpassable manifestation of which in human consciousness is to be found in Jesus of Nazareth. Barth too thinks Kant delimits the bounds of natural reason, but supposes that revelation supplies us with a word of and about God that enables a true dogmatics. The Catholic Balthasar holds with *Dei Filius* to the capacity of reason to know God, but follows Barth in supposing that the revelation compassed in the humanity of Christ tells us also of his divinity that it contains within it a prior kenosis, suffering, and darkness by which we are eternally already saved before the foundation of the world. For these post-Kantians, the psychological analogy for the Trinity goes by the boards, and the metaphysical knowledge of the simplicity and immutability of God that can help us interpret what God tells us of himself is side-lined.

It is rather Gottlieb Söhnngen's intervention in the controversy between Erich Przywara and Barth on the kind of analogy theology uses and seeks that is the way forward according to White, since it (1) supposes the possibility of a true metaphysics available apart from revelation (contra Schleiermacher and Rahner's at least practical denial of this), (2) does not think the discernment of similarity and dissimilarity between God and the world is the exclusive work of theology (contra Barth), and (3) assigns what is philosophical to philosophy and what is theological to theology (disambiguating Przywara). That is what we find in St. Thomas as understood by White.

That being said, the four senses of the analogy of faith that Söhnngen elaborates give us a list of the distinct tasks assigned to the theologian. The first sense is an understanding of the unity of Scripture and its senses, an understanding of the interconnectedness of revealed truth. The second sense is the unity of Scripture and Church dogma as explicating Scripture. The third is the unity of the mysteries themselves. And the fourth is the unity of the understanding of the mysteries with natural knowledge—the unity of the obedience of faith and reason that gives rise to “Christian philosophy.” The descending wisdom that Barth recognizes is complemented by an ascending wisdom of philosophy which plays a secondary but still indispensable role.

White's second essay, “On the Nexus of Mysteries,” elaborates the third sense of the analogy of faith Söhnngen picks out, and it illustrates the dialectical nature of theology. The goal of theology just is an understanding of

each mystery and the relation of each to the others. How does one achieve this understanding? There is a first, apophatic moment, in which is perceived how not to understand the mystery. For the Trinity, neither Arius nor Sabellius can be right, nor, for the Christ, neither can Nestorius nor Eutyches. White illustrates this first moment by adverting to the Eucharist, grace, and development of doctrine too. The second moment seeks some imperfect and analogical understand of the mystery. So, for the Trinity, the understanding of the persons as subsistent relations, distinct from one another, not distinct from the one divinity, gives us some positive glimpse of things, as, for understanding Christ, does the distinction of nature and person, the idea that the human nature subsists in the person of the Son, and the idea that it is related to the one agent in Christ, the one Son, as an instrument for action within the created economy of salvation.

Dialectical comparison with other opinions (Arius, Sabellius; Nestorius, Eutyches), analogical insight—the procession of a mental word is like the procession of the divine Word, and the humanity of Christ is like an instrument—and a final ordering of mysteries delivers the *nexus mysteriorum* in hierarchical arrangement: the ecclesial grace of Christ and the sacrament of the Eucharist presuppose the Incarnation, the Incarnation presupposes the Trinity, and the development of doctrine across the board supposes the contemplative tradition of the hierarchy of mysteries within the history of the Church. This essay serves wonderfully to introduce a graduate student into the careful deployment of the history of dogma, of the closure on revealed reality in the judgment dogma invites us to assent to, and in the act of the systematic understanding of revelation in its wholeness and unity.

The third essay, “On Theology as *Sacra Doctrina*: Catholic Theology, the Pluralism of Catholic Schools, and the Ecumenical Aspect of Catholic Theology,” exemplifies the fourth sense of the analogy of faith Sönnigen lists, which concerns the unity of nature and grace and the unity of natural and supernatural knowing, and is doubtless the most challenging of the book. A “school” of theology, White reminds us, will be in part constituted by the privileged philosophical instrument employed, and, where all the schools adhere to the dogma of the Church, as do Barth and St. Thomas to Chalcedon, for instance, will be careful to distinguish the imputation of error from the indictment of heresy. In this essay, White returns to the seemingly intractable and unprofitable controversy between Przywara and Barth with the presuppositions that, while there is never any nature without grace, neither is there any grace without nature, from which it follows that, in the gnoseological order, there is no theology that is philosophically

innocent. The disagreement of Przywara and Barth rests on two wholly unhistorical presentations of Catholic and Protestant theology. Przywara is wrong to say that the analogy of being, understood as included within theology once account is taken of revelation, is the fundamental form of Catholic theology, as if the right metaphysics is the starting point of theology, and Barth is wrong to maintain that natural theology and some form of the analogy of being is the main difference between Catholic and Protestant theology. Protestant scholastics of the eighteenth century would be surprised to learn that there is no natural theology. Especially, once the light of Christ has dawned, why cannot there be a robust metaphysics, one externally directed but not internally constituted by revelation? Both thinkers give quite eccentric characterizations of the theologies of their confessional allegiances, and both are wrong. The division rests in fact on questions of the mediation of grace by Church and sacrament, not on whether there are good arguments for the existence of God. And, White asks, how important is the difference between recognizing and not recognizing the legitimacy of natural theology? Is it something that should be Church-dividing? And especially is this a relevant question when Barth's own theology of an eternal intra-Trinitarian kenosis has demonstrably if unacknowledged Hegelian roots.

To be sure, White will not carry every Barthian or even Thomist with him with his attempt to dissolve this controversy. But the attempt shows the aspiring theologian what it takes historically and philosophically and theologically to engage in contemporarily relevant discussion across the divisions, not just of the sixteenth century, but also of the twentieth. The test for White is what offers the best understanding of how it is that Christ in his Passion and death reveals his Father and their eternal mutual Love. Must we think the human will of Christ reveals a filial will distinct from his Father's, or will such an understanding lead us into the error of a crypto tritheism? The human obedience of the Son nonetheless reveals a filial personality, one who receives all from his Father but who wills the whole economy of salvation with the one will of Father, Son, and Spirit, including the Passion and death of Christ. This gives us a greater understanding of divine reality than one that makes the processions and Son and Spirit objects of freedom like that of the emanation of creation from the power of God. The distinction between God and the world becomes more manifest.

White invokes all four of the senses of the analogy of faith defined by Söhngen in responding to Barth, including the fourth sense that co-opts a philosophy whose terms and theses have been purified by revelation. The way forward in theology, then, is to get hold of an understanding of the

mysteries (third sense) making use of a philosophy purified by revelation (fourth sense), in view of the Christological center of Scripture (first sense) and within the limits of Church doctrine (second sense) (108–9). White recalls Barth's admission that, if the analogy of being was what Sönnngen said it was, he had no difficulty with it. But this is ground already traversed by Balthasar.

The last two essays, as mentioned, deal more pointedly with Thomism. "Thomism after Vatican II" takes inspiration from Cornelio Fabro and Yves Congar. With Fabro, there are core philosophical and theological commitments—principles—that belong to any Thomism worthy of the name; Thomism is not just an attitude or an aspiration. Even so, if any Thomism is alive, it will, like Thomas himself, engage the issues theological and political and existential facing the Church, as Congar points out. Here, White argues, there is no "school" still functioning with enough institutional heft and intellectual power to deal with the quite conflicting but, for Catholic theology, equally deleterious claims of post-modern relativism and scientistic positivism. What other movement than Thomism can offer a framework of sapiential unity to modern science and culture, a framework that celebrates a synthetic appreciation of dogmatic coherence within ecclesial academies, and can begin to face questions of sex, gender, and the intimate ethical issues that modern technologies raise and political arrangements facilitate? The last paragraph of this essay is a call to spiritual arms that should enliven the heart of every Catholic theologian.

The last essay, "Ressourcement Thomism," charts the history of Thomism from the Leonine revival, through the challenge of the *nouvelle théologie*, the post-conciliar continuation of the excavation of the historical constitution of St. Thomas's thought begun by E. Gilson and M.-D. Chenu and carried on by J.-P. Torrell, unto ressourcement Thomism itself, where exacting historical excavation serves the purpose of demonstrating the superior explanatory power of Thomas in thinking about such things as the revelation of the Trinity in the economy of salvation through the missions of Word and Spirit (addressing Rahner again) and the two natures of Christ, where the human nature ought not itself be taken as a cypher for the divine nature (addressing Barth and Balthasar again). This essay, originally composed for *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, is perhaps most useful for its extensive list of the contributions to this form of Thomism from Matthew Levering to Reinhard Hütter and Bruce Marshall, and not forgetting the contributions of G. Emery, S. Bonino, Simon Gainé, and many others.

Throughout this review, beginners and graduate students have been

envisaged as a sort of ideal readership of this book. But then, no theologian ever stops his preoccupation with locating, refining, and employing the principles of his craft, just so that he can grasp the principles of created and redeemed reality, and indeed, the Holy Trinity itself. N.V

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Principles of Catholic Theology, Book 2: On the Rational Credibility of Christianity by Thomas Joseph White, O.P. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2024), viii + 352 pp.

THE OVERALL AIM OF THOMAS JOSEPH WHITE'S *Principles* is to "explore the central mysteries" of faith. The first book deals with the goal of theology within our contemporary setting, finding a way between Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Barth. Book 3 treats of God, the Holy Trinity, creation, and Christ, and book 4 is slated to deal with the Church, Mary, and grace. The present volume, book 2, leads up to these central mysteries; it is an apologetic essay and deals with the credibility of faith. *Principles* is Thomist, and so self-consciously pre-Kantian, which is to say metaphysically unapologetic, and aims to be guided by the theological vision of the Second Vatican Council, which guides the order of presentation. "The internal ordering of the essays present in these books is inspired by the Creed, reread in a contemporary way in part by reference to *Lumen gentium*: the soteriological initiatives of God in the world culminate in Christ and are realized in the Church." Therefore he states in book 1: "The order passes [in books 3 and 4] from consideration of God as Trinity, to Christ in whom God is manifest, to the Church, . . . to the universality of the activity of grace" (1:23–24). But we come to these strictly theological principles only by faith; the act of faith is responsible only if what is proposed to it can be known to be rationally credible; hence book 2.

Except for about fifteen pages, none of the material in *Rational Credibility* has been published before. The chapters proceed from the reasonability of religious belief (chap. 1) to arguments for the existence of God (chap. 2), and thence from the historical coherence of Trinitarian monotheism (chap. 3) to the natural desire for the vision of God (chap. 4). Perhaps it is best to think of the book as one large (very large) argument

for the rational credibility of Catholic Christianity, which can be cast as follows.

Christ, and following Christ the apostles, the New Testament, the early Church, the Catholic Church today, all present us with his revelation of the Trinitarian God as the creative source and supernatural goal of human destiny. Why should we believe this representation of an ultimate explanation of all reality? We believe it most rationally, which is a call to believe it in a way befitting our nature, only if we have independent cognitive access to the personal God who could so speak to us about his interior reality and our destiny (chap. 2). But there is no reason antecedent to revelation to suspect the existence of such a transcendent and personal God unless the realities he putatively creates adumbrate him as the best explanation of their unity, intelligibility, truth, goodness, and beauty in a way no other explanation can approach (chap. 1). Still, the putative revelation by Christ of the Trinity as our creator and goal and its preservation in Catholic Christianity has to be made historically plausible—plausible to natural reason in its historical mode—as constituting one thing across its various expressions in Christ's own life, the witness of the apostles, and the New Testament, and in the subsequent witness of the apologists, Nicaea, and the post-Nicene fathers (chap. 3). Further, we will have no interest in believing this revelation unless by its light we come to know our natural desire for happiness in a better and more confident way in appreciating its more-than-natural fulfillment, and unless there is some concrete evidence of this more-than-natural fulfillment in the lives of the saints (chap. 4).

Chapter 1. Why not be an atheist? Because it is not a very intelligent thing to do. To be an atheist on contemporary materialist grounds is to think we are products of an unintelligent universe operating according to laws discoverable by the empirical sciences. The appeal to chance interactions of material things to explain human persons makes things worse. Chance is not, after all, a cause; to call on it is just to say there is no causal nexus between one state of affairs and the next one following (22). It is to declare not only that an unintelligent, but an unintelligible universe gives us beings—ourselves—who intelligently look for intelligibility. Even chance depends in the end on some pre-existing causal chains that interfere with one another, each orderly in itself. And where there is order, must there not be mind? White next considers how some forms of Buddhism and Hinduism propose an immaterial, but still impersonal, principle of all reality. Human persons, and any ultimate import of their moral action, fit into such pictures just as awkwardly as they do into the materialism of Epicurus or Richard Dawkins (34, 36). Is then the turn White makes to

a transcendent personalism—God—as the final explanatory principle of things merely a “what is there left” kind of move? By no means. The genius of this first chapter is White’s inventory of the things around us in terms of the transcendentals—the one, the true, the good, the beautiful. By this inventory, by bringing the things of our experience—all of them—to some initial intelligibility, White fosters our trust in a comprehensive metaphysical realism that sets us up to ask the questions that lead to theism (45–46). White’s review at this juncture of such principles as non-contradiction and sufficient reason is strategic (52). The introduction of these principles works with the review of reality in terms of the transcendentals to establish the antecedent probability of theism, for they introduce natural reason to the very ideas of contingency and necessity, of a hierarchy of forms and a hierarchy of causes (76–78). They suggest an *idea* of God, although we cannot know if it is a good idea until we know God exists (78–79). These considerations establish also the rational possibility of revelation (80–82), and White concludes the chapter with a review of criteria of reasonable religious belief drawn from *Dei Filius* of the First Vatican Council—such things as the openness of reason to revelation, the coherence of revealed mysteries, the signs of credibility, and very important for the next chapter, the illumination of natural things by supernatural things, which bears on historical claims for divine revelation (89–90). Furthermore, by including the true and the good in his inventory of earthly realities, White not only sets us up for a personal God, but provides remote preparation for the Trinitarian God.

Chapter 2. The antecedent probability of theism is then confirmed by way of St. Thomas’s arguments for the existence of God: the argument from the *De ente et essentia*, the Five Ways, and a last argument from the immateriality of the human soul to a transcendent creator of that soul. This argument is to be found in chapter 87 of *Summa contra gentiles* II and warrants some further notice. The immateriality of mind and freedom are rooted in an immaterial principle. Since it subsists in itself by way of an act of existence proper to it and not to the matter-form composite of the human being, it cannot be explained by, which is to say, it cannot be produced by, any exercise of the causality of bodies or material substances. This argument links us nicely to a Trinitarian cause of human reality, the cause of a subsistent soul whose distinctive operations are knowledge and love. White’s argument undertakes to establish the immateriality of the intellect by way of an analysis of the abstraction of the quiddity of material things from the data supplied by the senses. The abstractive process is indeed mysterious, But the book does not cash out abstraction in terms

of questioning phantasm in the light of first principles, and so, I think, leaves this process more opaque than it is. The chapter ends by rightly noting that the arguments for the existence of God are all based on the philosophical realism the modern empirical sciences take for granted, which includes presuppositions about causality and the intelligibility of being and sufficient reason (171–73). Of course, since the sciences limit themselves to seeking the intelligibility of quantitatively characterized being, they can have nothing to say about these principles, nor can they defend or impugn such things as the immateriality of universals or the rational necessity apprehended in argument. If the arguments for God are rejected as too “metaphysical,” then it seems one must similarly reject the objectivity of physics, chemistry, biology. The rejection of God in contemporary culture, despite the protests of the New Atheists, is a matter of will, not of science (176).

Chapter 3. With chapter 2, we have strong metaphysical, philosophical warrant for the monotheism espoused by Catholic Christianity. But the God of Catholic Christianity is Father, Son, and Spirit. The credibility of the revelation of the Trinity depends not simply on the match between human persons who know and love and divine persons that proceed by way of mind and love, which it certainly does, but also on making good the historical claim that the revelation of the divine persons by Christ is credible, as well. It must be the case that reason in its historical mode can see a real continuity—a verifiable identity—between the claims of Jesus about himself, his Father, and the Spirit he promises and the apostolic witness to these claims in the New Testament, and then between this witness and the teaching of the Church of the first centuries that leads up to and then subsequently elaborates the conciliar teaching of Nicaea. The apologists prior to Nicaea and such fathers as St. Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and St. Augustine have to be in the same dogmatic ballpark. Apart from a reasonable assessment of the truth of this continuity, then, the present teaching of the Catholic Church as to the Trinitarian nature of the one God is incredible. Thus, the credibility of the revelation of God Catholicism claims to possess requires not only a philosophical access to the existence of God independent of the event of revelation (chap. 2), but a historical verification of the original content of the revelation and the preservation of the content in the Church (chap. 3). Such a verification is probabilistic, but nonetheless necessary for the vindication of rational credibility (201). Chapter 3 is carefully constructed to show not only the continuity of the content of Trinitarian revelation, but its roots in the Old Testament. Old Testament concern for the knowledge of God,

its anticipation of the call of the nations to covenant with God, and its eschatological hope matches the Incarnation, Cross, and resurrection of Christ. The Incarnation of the Son of the Father by the overshadowing of the Spirit completes the knowledge of God; the covenant with God is opened to all by the death of the Servant who dies and gives ransom “for many”; and the resurrection refines the content of the eschatological goods anticipated in the Old Testament and warrants our hope for them in Christ. White extends this threefold pattern into the New Testament, and it gives unity to what must inevitably be a very compendious chapter that adduces material from over four hundred years in the Christian era alone. But it is just such compressions of masses of material, however, that produce the credibility which is the object of the book. Christianity is a large idea, as we might let John Henry Cardinal Newman remind us, and therefore the presentation of its credibility is a large undertaking.

Chapter 4. Does the revelation of the Trinity illumine our own understanding of ourselves and our fundamental desire? If there is a philosophical verification of a natural desire to see God, then the supernatural fulfillment of the desire in sharing the knowledge of the Father’s subsistent Word and sharing the love of his subsistent Spirit gives us a knowledge of the dignity and nobility of the human person than which no greater can be conceived. Its corroboration of what reason alone can know of our desire is itself evidence of the credibility of the revelation of the Trinity (269). This revelation as fulfilling our nature by raising it to share in Trinitarian communion even in this life is, moreover, impressively witnessed to by the saints, who maintain the primacy of the contemplation and love of God within the happy discharge of their duty of loving their neighbor as themselves into sharing the reality of Trinitarian communion. White’s understanding of what does and does not belong to “natural” desire is governed as it should be by careful attention to question 62 in the *prima secundae* of St. Thomas’s *Summa theologiae*.

White’s survey of ultimate answers to the “whence” of reality and the meaning of life in chapter 1 does not address what is perhaps for many the most serious objection to the credibility of Christianity. This is not the modern materialism or the immaterial impersonalist stance of Buddhism or Hinduism, but modern materialism allied with the claim of Friedrich Nietzsche to have brought down the Christian hope of heaven to the earth of slavish resentment of the noble savage, and Christian charity to the psychological and even physical violence of the slaves once they get their hands on real power. The steady drip of postmodern acid makes ridiculous the very idea of an intellectual marketplace supposed in chapter 1, and

turns it instead into an arena where all contenders are rather forms of the will to power. Hence the book's coda, "Aquinas and Nietzsche on Truth and Moral Agency," where White addresses the postmodern challenge of thinkers who have carried on the Nietzschean critique, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida most prominently.

White's exposition of Nietzsche is greatly to be admired, but that can only be declared and not shown in a brief review. Although Nietzsche can sometimes seem to credit the modern empirical sciences with giving us the final goods on reality, in fact the scientist's will to truth is but the last disguise of the will to power. The intellectual virtues of Aristotle and Aquinas are collapsed into the practical virtue of art for Nietzsche. This art is especially the power to *interpret*, and so fashion whatever convenient instrument is needed for the further exercise of power (315). The infinite interpretability of the real and of prior interpretations of the real produces the radical perspectivalism of postmodernism where the will to power of each man constructs a unique canon of truth, goodness, beauty (316). Each man is a mini-creator inhabiting a world that is incommensurable with his neighbor's by design—a world that makes even the idea of a "neighbor" impossible. Suppose we accede to the Nietzschean table of values that he supposes survives his own criticism of the nihilism he imputes to Platonism and Christianity. Prominent on this table are the values of the "earth" and life itself, especially courage. What fosters courage and what restores earthly things to us? Both Nietzsche and Aquinas, White explains, think that the intelligibility of being and the nature of love are "deeply interconnected" (329). For Aquinas, the factual intelligibility of human intellectual desire for goods that are beheld and not made enables a person truly to love the other for his own sake. But this seems impossible in Nietzsche's world, where there is no antecedent intelligibility or good given to us in existence prior to what we impose on the real, and so no good I can wish for or give to my friend. White asks:

How are we supposed to take seriously a philosophy that simply forbids one from contemplating the strangeness and wonderment of existence and that has nothing to say about friendship? Is the embrace of such a philosophy really so courageous? (330)

The reduction of all human relations to master–slave relations seems to leave no space for friendship. For Nietzsche, Jesus is not our friend. For St. Thomas, he is our best and wisest friend.

In book 1 of *Principles*, White raises the question as to where in the

contemporary Catholic intellectual landscape there remains a philosophical and theological tradition that can give a coherent, unified address to the “constructivistic postmodernism” and “scientistic positivism” one meets in today’s university (1:133). Evidently, we should look in the Thomist tradition as instantiated by *Rational Credibility*, for these are the very issues taken up in his coda (postmodernism) and chapter 1 (positivism), respectively, and in addressing both things, White takes up the Thomist reading of the transcendentals. They are a proof against both ways to deny a world that could be receptive to and recognize the message of the Gospel. N.V.

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The Inspiration and Truth of Scripture: Testing the Ratzinger Paradigm by Aaron Pidel, S.J. (*Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2023*), xviii + 278 pp.

THIS BOOK SURVEYS AND SYNTHESIZES the thought of Joseph Ratzinger / Benedict XVI on the nature of Scripture as a divinely inspired human book, drawing together several works and otherwise un-synthesized essays to show consistent principles of Ratzinger’s thought. However, as reflected in Pidel’s title, his is not aimed to be a mere historical investigation of one theologian, but to offer Ratzinger’s view as a “new synthesis” and “new paradigm” for Catholic bibliology (8, 14). Pidel’s broader “purpose in writing this book has been to treat in a more sophisticated way questions that it nowadays seems unsophisticated to pose. What does it mean to say that the Bible is the word *of* God, not just words *about* God? Just how true is the Bible?” (1). It is a book about big questions, and the nature of the project requires at least two layers of demonstration: a synthetic explication of Ratzinger’s own thought and, in the process, an argument that Ratzinger’s model is more “serviceable” or “more adequate” than others (see 8, 12–14).

Pidel sets the stage in his introduction and chapter 1. He first sketches the problems of biblical truth and inspiration across the changing fronts of the biblical battle in the last two centuries, ultimately reaching a synthesis within the salvation-historical schema of revelation in *Dei Verbum*. But, as Pidel puts it nicely, *Dei Verbum* offers “not so much a theory of Scripture’s divine and human origins as a catalogue of various elements to

be affirmed in faith. The council lays down the doctrinal ‘pegs,’ in other words, leaving it to theological ingenuity to stretch a theoretical fabric over them” (48). Pidel offers a “representative” (11, 53) set of such theories in dialogue with Ratzinger. First is Pierre Benoit’s more Thomistic model (focusing particularly on Benoit’s earlier work), in which God is author of Scripture by employing authors as instrumental causes, and in which biblical truth is evaluated especially in accord with the divinely guided judgments, affirmations, and intentions of those authors. Second is Karl Rahner’s Molinist model, according to which God’s causality in inspiration works predefinitively—from the “outside,” as it were—so that God is author and cause of what is written by God’s “arrangement of ‘external’ circumstances” (29), but not in the sense that God is a literary author; the inspired literary product here (though unfailingly faithful to God’s intent) is thus less a depository of pronouncements than a sedimentation of the “faith consciousness” of the early Church (30–31). Third is the model of David Tracy, who draws on Heidegger (via Gadamer and Ricoeur) to speak of Scripture as a kind of “classic,” a “permanently active site of disclosure for the truth of human existence,” which discloses a compelling “world” that strikes us as having normative value (39–40) and whose truth and meaning are discerned and even grow along with its ideal readers.

Each model accounts more and less for beliefs to which *Dei Verbum* commits Catholics about God’s self-disclosure through and to God’s People, the divine inspiration of human texts, and the potential of the texts to be read with fuller meanings over time. To these Pidel adds Ratzinger’s model, which he argues “combined elements” (242) of all three and offers a model which, if imperfect, proves to be the “least inadequate” of the options (see 52, 96, 102, 127, 143).

Chapter 2 sketches Ratzinger’s understanding of Scripture and inspiration. Rather than Aquinas, Molina, or Heidegger, Ratzinger’s thinking is sourced especially in Bonaventure—which Pidel traces back to Ratzinger’s 1955 *Habilitationsschrift* on revelation and salvation history in Bonaventure. Pidel characterizes this model by means of several adjectives: “mystical, subjective-inclusive, historically progressive, and rationally corrective” (55). In this *mystical* model, the terms “revelation” and “inspiration” are somewhat interchangeable, inasmuch as revelatory events in history must bear the “interior self-disclosure of the divinity” in order to be truly revelatory to human beings (59). For the Bible to be divine Scripture, and not merely a collection of often-religious texts, it must be both written and received by its “animating subject” (80, and elsewhere), the People of God who have received God’s self-disclosure.

The very notion of inspired Scripture is therefore *subject-inclusive*. The Church is “the principal created subject of Scripture, without whose faith-filled understanding the Bible would not be divine revelation” (65). God reveals himself to the People of God, and individual authors hand on this testimony as they have received it within and from that People, operating as “organs of a collective personality” (136). Pidel evokes the image of a Russian doll in describing the authorship of Scripture: beyond individual writers, the People of God “is actually the deeper ‘author’ of the Scriptures,” and that People is always led and addressed by God, who is the addressing subject in Scripture “at the deepest level” (64). The site and subject of inspiration, then, is the single “living organism” (63) of the People of God, which is always situated in history and grows and matures over time. This model of inspiration and truth is therefore *historically progressive*, and Scripture can accrue “‘reality’ over time” (69) as the one People which authored the texts learns better its own mind and is drawn closer to the Christ proclaimed in Scripture. The need for such progressive understanding (among the faithful generally or by the magisterium) is further complemented by the *rationaly corrective* character of the model: Bonaventure begins not with the capacities of reason in itself but with reason as already marred and darkened by sin, stressing also the historical situatedness of all knowledge systems. Pidel, summarizing Ratzinger, likens this to a linguistic community: “Everyone who uses language for self-expression, no matter how original or idiosyncratic, nevertheless stands embedded within a kind of corporate subjectivity. . . . Any attempt to pass on an unrepeatable religious encounter by symbolic communication”—including divine self-disclosure—“requires a transgenerational communal authority analogous to that of a linguistic community” (72).

This model has consequences for how biblical truth is affirmed and evaluated, as Pidel illustrates in chapter 3. Ratzinger, with others, seems to take for granted that there are things one could call errors in both Testaments (examples on 109–10). While many emphasize that truth can be judged only in what the inspired authors intended to “affirm” (cf. *Dei Verbum*), Ratzinger broadens the goal to seeking not only the intentions of a text’s historical, individual author, but those of the transhistorical and still-living “People of God,” the corporate personality that animates Scripture and is its “author” at a deeper level (65). “One cannot identify what Scripture *intends* to teach, and thus what it teaches without error, without first discerning the intentions of its corporate author” (107), which as a transhistorical personality is also subject to change over time. The revelatory center and corrective function of this progressive model play a role, too,

as the Christological center of revelation calls one to evaluate truth symphonically in the canon as well as diachronically, hearing the People's voice over the course of various layers of salvation history in the OT, the NT, the early Church, and today (111–13). Ratzinger offers a “battery of tests for discerning the intention of Scripture’s corporate ‘author’” (107) to evaluate which affirmations in Scripture are truly core elements of the faith or alterable or cancelable elements of ancient authors’ worldviews: attention to the whole OT and its reception in the NT, the person and work of Christ, ecclesial reception and (where relevant) empirical science. Pidel helpfully elucidates Ratzinger’s use of these tests regarding the existence of Satan: within the canon, demonology increases from OT to NT; the biblical proclamation of Christ is drastically altered if “Satan” is mere metaphor; the Church has continued to affirm the existence of the demonic in liturgy, doctrine, and the saints’ self-perception of their growth in holiness. Contrast the geocentrism in some biblical texts, whose relevance seems to decrease across Scripture, with the theology of creation ultimately finding its center in Christ the Word. Pidel also considers Ratzinger’s account of the development of Mariology via the spiritual senses of Scripture, which for Ratzinger are “nothing other than the meanings that emerge when the pilgrim Church reads Scripture as an organic whole” (134). “In virtue of its communal subject, then, Scripture will sometimes claim less than (as in the case of cosmology) and sometimes more than (in the case of Mariology) and sometimes as much as (as in the case of demonology) a surface reading would indicate” (136).

Chapters 4–5 further illustrate the utility of Ratzinger’s ecclesial model. Chapter 4 reviews Ratzinger on the *porneia* clauses in the Matthean divorce logia (Matt 5:32; 19:9). While there is not enough academic consensus on the precise sense of *porneia* on which to base solid teaching, Pidel shows that Ratzinger interprets consistently in terms of the tests mentioned above, though he changed his conclusions in light of different information over time. Ultimately, Ratzinger discerns in the diachronic layers of the gospels an ecclesial authority to “sound out the ‘limits of the applicability of the Lord’s saying,’” as the historical author of Matthew did when he created these “redactional additions to Jesus’ *ipsissima verba*” (172). Chapter 5 considers the contradiction, which Ratzinger takes for granted, between the Last Supper chronologies of John and the Synoptics, ultimately deciding that John’s placement of Christ’s death on Passover has the firmer historical foundation; Mark (followed by Matthew and Luke) builds on that foundation, however, by changing Jesus’s Supper to a Passover meal in his chronology, because Mark discerned something of

the later Tridentine affirmation that the Mass is a representation of Christ's Paschal mystery. A concluding epilogue summarizes his findings regarding Ratzinger's contribution and the promise it holds for Catholic theology.

As noted above, the nature of this project involves a kind of double demonstration, first a synthesis of Ratzinger's model and then an argument that this model better fits *Dei Verbum* and the standards of faith and reason. My concluding evaluation will address each in turn.

As to the explication of Ratzinger here, Pidel has done major bibliographic and conceptual work in synthesizing Ratzinger's thought on a topic that Ratzinger himself did not lay out systematically. Pidel has considered Ratzinger's postgraduate and academic work, papal writings, articles and interventions, and even book reviews that show development or alternate expressions of Ratzinger's Bonaventurian thinking. Where Pidel argues implicit conceptual connections or development across documents, he does so convincingly and with documentation. Pidel has put students and scholars of Ratzinger in his debt. And bibliologists, sometimes inclined to quote their favorite line or two from the former pontiff's writings, must consider those lines within the compelling and documented framework detailed here by Pidel.

As to the "serviceability" of this model as a new paradigm, I think that I am less convinced than Pidel of its strength. Pidel's evaluations are positive but qualified, holding Ratzinger's to be the *least un*-satisfactory of the models. At the same time, the array of dialogue partners is limited, and recent proposals or more nuanced updates of Rahner or Benoit might compare more favorably. Pidel suggests that the model would benefit from further "scholastic supplements" (144), especially in explaining how the transhistorical People of God "'authors' Scripture in a more-than-metaphorical sense" (99). I agree, though I am uncertain how well a corporate personality view will hold up, at least without accounting for divine intention through the specific communicative judgments and impulses by persons who produced (wrote, edited, copied, etc.) these texts. *Dei Verbum* does not speak merely of revelation received and discerned by the People, but—within the community of revelation, to be sure—of God's direction of individuals to produce texts that have a uniquely revelatory quality and purpose. The Bonaventurian conflation of *revelation* and its reception with textual *inspiration* seems to create unnecessary problems. If they are kept distinct, the claim that the NT discloses God "more excellently" (§17) may not require a theory in which the NT text is more "inspired" than the OT (which Pidel argues is an advantage of Ratzinger's model [87–96]). Likewise, a distinction between revelation

and inspiration preserves Scripture's unique authority within tradition, which Ratzinger affirms but does not integrate explicitly into this model (81–85). There is a subjective element in the phenomenon of revelation and “growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down” over time (§8; cited p. 67). But is this because the meaning of the text grows with its subject or because such realities are already, by divine intention, latent in the words handed down by virtue of their prior inspiration?

The above is not intended to downplay the benefits of Ratzinger's model. The question that confronts me is whether Ratzinger's insights and considerations should be deployed to strengthen another foundational framework rather than replace it. But in asking such questions about the future of Catholic biblical interpretation, one is standing alongside Pidel, who offers Ratzinger's synthesis not as an end to conversation but as a fresh beginning. This book injects new vigor into this conversation. To whatever extent readers find Ratzinger persuasive, the insights, questions, and new avenues Pidel articulates will prove beneficial to anyone asking the big questions about the inspiration and truth of Scripture. N.V.

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God, Evil, and Redeeming Good: A Thomistic Theodicy by Paul A. Macdonald Jr. (*New York: Routledge, 2023*), ix + 267 pp.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL—how God could be so good and yet his world so apparently full of suffering—has stimulated debate at least since the time of Job. But the issues which most provoke skeptics have evolved in the centuries since solutions were first ventured by Eliphaz, followed by Lactantius, Augustine, Aquinas, and Leibniz. And these issues have shifted considerably even in the last half-century. In our own day, an increasingly psychological portrait of the human person, as well as a greater attention to Darwinian “profligacies,” has markedly altered the expectations placed on a Christian theodicy. And yet Paul A. Macdonald Jr., in his recent *God, Evil, and Redeeming Good*, is wise to treat the contemporary formulation of the problem by first reaching back to the framework offered by Aquinas.

Macdonald's book of seven chapters attempts to treat an impressively

broad range of topics touching on the problem of evil. In his introductory chapter, Macdonald describes his project as a theodicy, not a “defense,” of God’s existence. Whereas the latter project concerns “arguing *that* God exists” (or could exist) despite the existence of evil, Macdonald thinks it is important to further articulate “*how* the truths concerning God and evil are, in fact, compatible” (8). He writes later:

The question before us is not whether God exists, given the existence of evil in the world. Instead, the question before us is, *since* God exists, and is the highest good, then why does evil also exist? And, again, *since* God exists and is the highest good, then how does God providentially confront or deal with the evil that he clearly allows to exist? (59)

Macdonald thus critiques the theodical works of Brian Davies (namely, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*) for their preoccupation with dismantling the apparent, theoretical contradiction between the existence of God and the existence of evil, rather than responding to the modern anxiety in the concrete: how is it exactly that evils fit into God’s overall plan for the good? (13–14).

But even if Macdonald finds abstract theodical arguments insufficient in the contemporary context, he nevertheless values them as part of his larger project, and his second chapter contains one of his own. This argument, which he calls the “theistic argument from evil,” attempts to turn the problem of evil on its head, contending that evil is better evidence of God’s existence than of his non-existence. In doing so, Macdonald is retrieving a remark from Aquinas which receives relatively little attention:

In *The Consolations of Philosophy*, Boethius introduces a philosopher who asks, “If God exists, whence comes evil?” But this man should have instead argued that if evil exists, so must God. For there would be no evil apart from the order of good, the privation of which is evil. But no such order would exist apart from God. (*Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] III, chap. 71)

I will comment on Macdonald’s use of this argument below.

In his third chapter, Macdonald embarks upon theodicy proper. He begins by extracting from Aquinas the claim, which Macdonald labels (C1), that a world with some evil is better than a world without any, in part because of the way evils serve as the ground for higher order goods, such

as martyrdom (63). He then claims, at Aquinas's prompting, a principle called (C2): as long as worlds W1 and W2 are good considered as a whole ("ultimately good cosmic wholes"), then God is justified in making W1 no less than W2, even if W1 contains more evil than W2 (70). Macdonald then works up to his strongest claim, which seems to be the central tenet of his theodicy—and at the same time his definition of what it means to "redeem" evil:

(C3) In any world W God would create, God would redeem each and every evil *e* in W by ordering *e* to the goodness of W as a whole, thereby also ensuring that *e* contributes in the end to the goodness of W as a whole. (70)

Macdonald is aware that, as far as evolutionary evil is concerned, (C3) initially seems implausible, and as far as moral evil is concerned, (C3) potentially grates against human free will when combined with (C1). So he closes the chapter by attempting to dismiss these worries.

The remaining chapters treat auxiliary issues. Chapter 4 defends the traditional doctrine of the fall against popular objections: Has not evolutionary anthropology debunked the fall? (106–14). What would have motivated our sinless first parents to sin? (114–20). Is it not unjust that we share in Adam's guilt? (120–27). Chapter 5, in turn, produces a thesis about human suffering which looks like (C3) applied to the level of the individual, labeled (R): "God redeems each and every evil *e* in which a person participates . . . by ordering S's participation in *e* to S's ultimate good, which is life lived eternally with God" (139). But as Macdonald argues in chapter 6, his theory of redemptive suffering is consistent with the existence of a populated hell, "so long as God affords every damned human being he creates . . . a life characterized by enough goodness to make such a life genuinely worth living, even for all eternity" (203). Nevertheless, Macdonald dares to hope—and perhaps even finds it more becoming of God's goodness—that hell be empty (208–11).

Macdonald's concluding chapter takes a more pastoral turn, investigating the virtue of hope. He argues at length a thesis which the preceding chapters, if successful, should have by now rendered unremarkable: "It is both possible and reasonable to hope in God in the face of evil" (246). But he also interestingly and drastically departs from Aquinas, arguing that our hope may reasonably include the resurrection of animals (232–40).

As the preceding summary indicates, among the book's chief merits is its comprehensiveness. Macdonald deals with a full spectrum of issues,

and his treatments of them are rarely superficial. He seems aware of all of the hardest contemporary objections against his theses, and he invariably handles these objections with fairness. Macdonald, like Aquinas, is not one to straw-man his opponents. The reader often finds himself thinking “But what about . . .,” only to learn that the issue is addressed on the next page.

Macdonald’s second chief merit concerns his engagement with Aquinas. He finds in Aquinas a powerful framework for theodicy—most notably the Scholastic conviction about the universe’s perfect, teleological structure—but in arguing his case, he neither hides behind the authority of Aquinas nor is unduly reluctant to improve upon Aquinas’s claims (12). And while readers seeking a strict exegesis of Aquinas’s theodicy will need to look elsewhere, it is precisely Macdonald’s flexible use of Aquinas that enables him to treat the full force of *contemporary* formulations of the problem of evil. Macdonald has thus successfully produced a theodicy *ad extra*. It is only unfortunate that Macdonald does not engage more with B. Kyle Keltz’s *Thomism and the Problem of Animal Suffering*, another recent book which takes a comparable approach.

These merits notwithstanding, it seems that Macdonald struggles to keep the book focused on his central theme. Powerful claims like (C3) and (R) require a wide-ranging defense, to be sure, but it is not always clear how the chapters, diverse as they are, combine to make a synthetic argument. Chapter 6, for example, devotes an entire section to the impassibility of glorified bodies, and Macdonald does too little to show that such a topic has anything more than a tenuous relation to the book’s title. Indeed, the book at times has the feel of a sandwich thesis (see vii), and the reader is likely to find that the individual chapters have more value than the narrative which connects them.

In the space that remains, I wish to present some theoretical challenges to Macdonald’s work, not at all with the intent of derogating from his admirable contribution to contemporary theodicy, but rather with the hope of eliciting and then learning from his responses, or the responses of equally adept thinkers. And I will refrain from targeting the usual suspects—namely, universal salvation and animal resurrection.

My first challenge concerns Macdonald’s theistic argument from evil, as presented in chapter 2. Drawing from *SCG* III, chap. 71, Macdonald structures his argument as follows:

If God does not exist, then it is not the case that evil exists;
 Evil exists;
 Therefore, God exists. (21)

Most of chapter 2 is thus devoted to a defense of the first premise, which Macdonald argues as follows. If we reject theism as the skeptic suggests, then we are left with a “naturalistic worldview” according to which sentient beings “were produced by unguided, purely natural, and so valueless physical, chemical, and biological events and processes over the long course of our planet’s evolutionary history” (23). So, if evil exists, how can the skeptic account for it? Only valueless things arise from valueless things, “for the realm of value is completely different in kind from the realm of non-value” (23). Thus, without “the metaphysics of value that theism provides” (30), says Macdonald, there can be no evil, and therefore, the skeptic who believes in evil, ought to believe in God.

Note, however, that Macdonald’s defense of his theistic argument from evil relies on a distinctly un-Thomistic foundation, namely, a strong fact–value dichotomy. But my objection here to Macdonald is not that he has departed from Aquinas by presuming such a dichotomy, but rather that, by such a presumption, Macdonald, a Catholic (9), will be committing himself to theses that he probably wishes to avoid. Most importantly, he will have to distance himself from the principle of the convertibility of being and goodness, and I fear that without this thesis, he will not be able to salvage an intelligible conception of good and evil. On the same token, he may have to reject the classical doctrine of natural law, perhaps in exchange for a divine-command ethic, a rejection which already emerges in his claim that, “even if it is true that rape . . . violates the interests of all rape victims in a way that matters negatively to them (a fact about their particular psychologies), it does not follow that it is genuinely evil or bad for those interests to be violated (a moral fact)” (36).

Moreover, by supposing that goodness is supernaturally imposed upon creation top-down, Macdonald prohibits the atheist from treating goodness as an analogous concept, a concept which remains legitimate when predicated relatively. In actuality, theists and atheists can discern equally well that a table bad for dining will be good for burning; or a turtle good at swimming will be bad at flying. And this is because legitimate judgments of good and evil can be made without sourcing the goodness down to bed-rock. But it is just this initial and genuine recognition of order—of good and evil—*apart from* God which allows the skeptic to ultimately move towards belief in God. Thus, if Macdonald’s argument is to be understood as a variation on Aquinas’s fourth way, his variation seems only to work by invalidating a central presupposition of Aquinas’s first, second, third, and fifth ways—namely, that the universe is intrinsically ordered.

A question then arises for Aquinas, as a firm proponent of the

convertibility of goodness and being. How can he argue that the existence of evil forms a proof for God's existence, as he seems to do in *SCG* III, chap. 71? The answer, of course, is not that Aquinas here suddenly takes a Humean turn, as if he thought creation would have been devoid of all good and evil until God superimposed values upon it. For what, again, does Aquinas actually say? "There would be no evil apart from the *order* of good, the privation of which is evil. But no such *order* would exist apart from God." Thus, the correct rendering of the argument seems to be as follows:

The existence of evil implies the existence of order in the universe;
 There could be no order in the universe apart from God;
 There is evil in the universe;
 Therefore, God exists.

In other words, Aquinas is simply re-presenting a cosmological argument for God's existence, but is starting one step earlier: rather than beginning with the manifest order of the universe, he begins with an attribute of such order, namely, evil. This explains why Aquinas does not add a "theistic argument from evil" to his five ways, and perhaps also why he does not himself make the argument, but rather puts it into the mouth of Boethius's philosopher.

My second challenge for Macdonald, which follows from the first, concerns whether he has applied a clear and consistent definition of evil. I think Macdonald is quite right to follow John Lamont in distinguishing a "teleological conception of good and evil"—in which good and evil appear as fulfillments or derailments pertaining to a specified end—from an "accounting conception of good and evil," which treats good and evil as quantifiable features of the world (69). I furthermore think that Macdonald correctly endorses the teleological view as that which can produce a viable Christian theodicy, for indeed, the whole task of Christian theodicy, as I see it, is to move a person from an accounting conception of evil to a teleological one. But I think that Macdonald fails to consistently adopt the teleological view in his engagement of objections, and thus his defense of (C3) and (R) ultimately comes up short. The accounting conception of good and evil seems to dominate the background of his thought, with both frequent allusions to the summation of goods and evils and a prevailing concern that the net total will favor the side of the good. He writes, for instance, that "it is precisely because God has total control over what good *and* bad S's life contains, then, that God is able to ensure that S possess[es] an ultimately good life in the end" (172). But on the

teleological conception, the “ultimately good life” is the touchstone for the determination of particular goods and evils, not the other way around. To take an example from the natural order, it is good that certain sharks cannibalize their siblings simply because this behavior is characteristic of their species-specific form of flourishing. To say that shark siblicide is evil is to prejudice what “good” means in the case of sharks.

Finally, I wish to challenge Macdonald’s tendency—which he shares with most contemporary theodacists—to try to explain natural evil under the same rubric as moral evil. Natural evils and moral evils are both evils only by analogy, and to dismiss them under a univocal principle such as (C3) is not only to make something of a category error, but also to pass over the theodical import of some of the most venerable doctrines of Christian revelation. As I have begun to argue elsewhere, the Scriptures and Church Fathers have two very different conceptions of natural and moral evil, and thus they divide the problem of evil into two problems, providing two very different answers. They solve the problem of natural evil via the doctrine of creation’s goodness, namely that, despite appearances, no natural evil is properly evil. The natural world is very good, even the postlapsarian natural world. So there is no problem of natural evil, once the terms are correctly understood.

Moral evil, on the other hand, is the genuine article. What comes from within a man is what defiles (see Mark 7:15). But here lies my chief concern with Macdonald’s theodicy. Macdonald puts so much stress on divine providence and predestination—so much stress on God’s ability to draw good out of evil—that he fails to adequately appreciate that sin itself, not only for Aquinas but in truth, is *contrary* to God’s will. God wills “the evil of natural defect, or of punishment, . . . by willing the good attached to such evils,” but God “does not will the evil of sin *in any way*” (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 19, a. 9). Why not? Because sin has no goods attached to it, no “concomitant goods.” And while God may determine after the fact, as it were, to bring good out of sin—*O felix culpa!*—he does so out of the abundance of his mercy, not out of strict justice. In other words, even if God did nothing to redeem sin, his goodness could not be impugned.

So, contra Macdonald, there is no need to try to justify hell’s existence by supposing that the damned consider their lives “genuinely worth living, even for all eternity” (203). God is not to be faulted for hell; we are. What we find disagreeable about hell is nothing other than what we find disagreeable about ourselves, albeit multiplied *ad nauseam*. Of course, hell is only disagreeable subjectively speaking. Objectively speaking, it is perfectly agreeable that sin be punished. Thus what answers the theodical

question about hell—and about sin considered in itself—is not so much the “redemption” of good, but the punishment of evil.

Nevertheless, I do not deny that “redeeming good” has a role to play in moral theodicy. It plays, I think, an important role in understanding the traumas one experiences through *another* person’s sin. But I would caution against calling this phenomenon “redemption.” For, inasmuch as Christians answer theodical questions—questions of strict justice—in terms of “redeeming good,” they are bound to misrepresent the redemption proper. For Christ did not come to prove that God is just; he came to show that God far exceeds what justice requires.

More will have to be said at another time. But I hope that Macdonald has the next word, seeing as he has now, by his recent book, distinguished himself as among the most versatile theodacists of our era. N.V

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