

be meaningless. Beliefs cannot be equal even if the people holding them are'. He wants this translated into law. 'No country should take a neutral view about the worth of beliefs'. What counts for Trigg are beliefs which are religious. He admits to imprecision about what constitutes religious versus other kinds of belief but he knows what religious belief excludes: liberal, secular, humanist, relativistic beliefs about democratic society. These are temporary, unreliable, and not robust enough upon which to build a truly free society. Religious beliefs are superior to these, even superior to conscience which is a typical liberal individualistic concern. While he is unclear who is competent to define such beliefs, he has no doubt that some religious beliefs are better than others. And if there are 'better' beliefs there must be 'best'. It is these which must be recognised juridically and whose liberty must be defended as in the legal system: 'Rights to equality [of persons] cannot trump those of religious freedom [of beliefs themselves]'.

Equality, Freedom, and Religion has a genre problem. If its claims are purely philosophical then its extrapolations into theology – from the constituents of human nature to the transcendental nature of the divine – are theosophical and of suspect orthodoxy. If its claims are based on divine revelations, it does not disclose either their content or source and the reader is left confronting a vague fideism. The book may consequently alienate even those 'liberals' who are sympathetic to his views on the importance of religion in political life. Those who are unfriendly toward religion are likely to be horrified by the enormous, and enormously undefended, claims. His conclusions will confirm the suspicions of any who believe there is a conspiracy by the religious right to return to the good old days of conservative persecution of almost any group not adhering to true belief.

Equality, Freedom, and Religion is a polemic, and probably effective as such. But its contribution to the current political debate is therefore likely to be at the extremes, among the fundamentalists of the left as well as the right, who will only be reinforced in their opinions by it.

MICHAEL BLACK

POPE JOHN PAUL II AND THE APPARENTLY 'NON-ACTING' PERSON by Pia Matthews, *Gracewing*, Leominster, 2013, pp. xxvi + 286, £15.99, pbk

This is an important book. Its topic is the status of people with profound learning difficulties and those in a so-called 'persistent vegetative state' (PVS) understood from the perspective of bioethics and of the theology of disability, and in particular through the writings of Pope John Paul II.

The author shows an extensive knowledge of the works of John Paul II (with more than three quotations on most of the more than three hundred pages, and references to a wide range of material not only the more well-known encyclicals). The book also includes a well-researched account of the current state of bioethics and links the idea of human 'non-persons' found in academic bioethics with the more populist idea of people in PVS being 'better off dead'.

The longest chapter (Chapter 9) engages with what is perhaps the most controversial area in contemporary Catholic moral theology, the treatment and care of people in PVS. This chapter is a robust and well-argued defence of the teaching of John Paul II on the requirement to provide assisted nutrition and hydration to people in this state. The key arguments of Matthews are not new. They were articulated by Anthony Fisher OP in the pages of *New Blackfriars* two decades ago. What makes this analysis fresh and gives it a depth not found in previous treatments of the subject is the placing of these arguments within an extended theological reflection on the significance of a life with profound disability. It should be required reading for any who mistakenly believe that, in his teaching

on the treatment and care of people in PVS, John Paul II diverged from the previous Catholic moral tradition.

The most speculative chapter in the book is Chapter 10 where Matthews draws a parallel between the spiritual lives of those with profound intellectual disabilities and the experience of the “dark night of the soul” described by St John of the Cross. This analogy is summed up in the following quotation:

‘In the natural order both [Karol Wojtyła and St John of the Cross] agree that ‘the will cannot love anything unless the intellect first knows it’. But in the supernatural order ‘God can infuse love and increase it without any corresponding increase of knowledge in the intellect’ (p.250).

According to Matthews, one cannot discount the possibility of those with cognitive impairment having an inner spiritual life because, in relation to knowing God ‘all human intellects are inadequate’ (p.239). It might seem that the book is suggesting that there can be faith without intellectual acts, but on closer reading the argument seems to be that through grace and the disposition of faith given by God, the intellect of the person may be active but not through self-conscious acts of deliberate choice. Indeed a reiterated theme of the book is that all living human beings are active in a personal way. All living human beings have a biographical story, a subjective perspective, and an inner life. This is evident in the title of the book, the profoundly disabled are acting, they are only ‘apparently non-acting’.

What is different here from the traditional account of how faith is in the soul of the person without capacity (the young infant or injured adult) is that faith has generally been regarded as present in such persons only as a disposition, not as one that could be in act. What Matthews suggests is that there might be graced active attentiveness to God with inner peace ‘without any acts and exercises of the faculties of memory, intellect and will’ (p.247). This is speculative (as Matthews acknowledges) and some would see it as romanticism but it is not contrary to the teaching of the Church. In practical terms, this implies giving the benefit of the doubt with regard to the spiritual life of persons with profound learning disabilities, as well as having a greater recognition of the personal aspect of their behaviour, in part by being attentive to their language of the body.

A more dangerous form of romanticism is the tendency to regard people with learning disabilities as free from guilt or sin as if by nature. ‘[P]eople with profound disabilities may have of an openness and simplicity towards the world and other human beings. That receptiveness to a spirituality that is not reliant on knowledge or perhaps clouded by the complexity of day to day living... There is a strong temptation for some to see disabled children as angels, as if they do not quite belong in the earthly realm. Undoubtedly this springs from an appreciation that the profoundly disabled child is pure and free from the guile and deceit that affects other human beings’ (p.55, p. 164).

Matthews shows why this temptation is misleading. A theme running through the book is that a false angelism would deprive the apparently non-acting person of the spiritual help he or she needs. ‘... ‘each one of us’ [is] separated from the mystery of original innocence by original sin. This of course includes the disabled... Thus it is important to acknowledge that even the most profoundly disabled person has spiritual needs’ (p.84, p.92). In particular, ‘the profoundly disabled are human beings and they live human lives so, as Christians they also are to have the sacraments, take part in the liturgy and pray as far as they are able’ (p.164). Such access to the sacraments is a matter of justice.

This book is a work of theology, but it does not need the claim that ‘for St Thomas, there is no formal separation of theology and philosophy’ (p. 43). There is some equivocation here. Certainly, for Thomas, ‘the human person is most fully understood by reference to God’ (p. 43). Human beings are created by God

and can find complete fulfilment only in the vision of God. Yet this conclusion remains at the level of natural reason, that is, of philosophy. It does not require revealed theology. Furthermore, while there are truths about human nature which can be known only by revelation (such as the promise of resurrection) this does not show that natural reason has no understanding of the human person. Thomas appreciates the illumination of human understanding provided by the gospel, but sometimes he confines his arguments to what can be known by the natural light of reason. This is particularly evident in his commentaries on Aristotle and in much of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*.

The enduring role of philosophy in moral reflection even after the revelation of the Gospel is of political importance, given the contentious status of theological claims in public policy discussion and indeed much of what Matthews says can be said without recourse to theology. Nevertheless, what the book ably demonstrates is that theology can take us further and can take us there more securely.

DAVID ALBERT JONES

GOD & MORAL LAW. ON THE THEISTIC EXPLANATION OF MORALITY by Mark C. Murphy, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, pp.192, £37, hbk

This book is animated by a simple, but important question: If theism is true, then should not the truth of theism penetrate to the core of the correct view of morality?

Mark C. Murphy argues that we should answer 'yes' to this question, and begins making his case by using a simple example. He asks us to consider a bowl of water in a locked room that is empty on your return after a week away. It could be that the water has simply evaporated, which would have been the most plausible explanation were it not for the cat present in the room that could not have survived without drinking the water. To settle for this explanation is to use a feature of the situation (i.e. that cats need to drink water if they are to survive for a week) to provide an explanation of what needs explaining. This can be extended by analogy to the theistic explanation of morality, where God is, for want of a better word, a feature of the situation. Just as we need to include the cat at the centre of the explanation of the empty bowl, so we need to include God at the centre of our explanation of morality. This, in effect, becomes a criterion for assessing explanations of morality from a theistic perspective: satisfactory explanations of morality must include our understanding of God at their centre.

What is at issue here is not the role of theistic and religious beliefs informing positions on specific ethical matters (e.g. abortion, the dignity of humanity etc.), but rather with theism playing a central role in explaining morality in general. The obvious candidates for an explanation of morality that allows the truth of theism to penetrate to its core are forms of theological voluntarism, where moral status is determined by acts of God's will. Such theories are, however, open to the serious objections that they sideline the natural order and fail to give an adequate justification of ethics, that an act is right/wrong for no other reason than that God decrees it so. It is because of considerations such as these that Murphy is forced to reject theological voluntarism and his search for a way forward continues.

Whilst natural law accounts, where moral status is determined with reference to concepts such as flourishing, are consistent with theism, Murphy thinks that they fail to accord God the central and immediate role in moral explanation that he seeks. Murphy clearly has much sympathy for the natural law approach, and by subjecting it to what is a comparatively rare objection in the philosophical context, that natural law is inherently insufficiently theistic, he makes an interesting contribution to the literature. Murphy assesses five lines of defences that the