



Reviews

AQUINAS ON VIRTUE: A CAUSAL READING by Nicholas Austin SJ, *Georgetown University Press*, Washington DC, 2017, pp. xxiv + 233, \$34.95, pbk

HOPE AND CHRISTIAN ETHICS by David Elliot, *Cambridge University Press*, Cambridge, 2017, pp. xv + 264, £75.00, hbk

The revival of virtue ethics is now well established, and an author writing an introduction is faced with a dual task: to address those who are unfamiliar with or even hostile to virtue theory, and to engage with the growing corpus of literature within the field. In addition, works in theological ethics must address the question of theological virtue and how it differs from naturally acquired virtue. One of the great virtues of Nicholas Austin SJ's *Aquinas on Virtue* is the manner in which it speaks to these various demands.

Austin lays his cards on the table with the book's title in which he proposes 'a causal reading' of Aquinas's virtue theory. By causal he means the Aristotelian understanding of the four causes which act as explanatory principles in diverse fields of enquiry, and not the modern reduction of cause to the role of mechanical explanation. The challenge facing Austin is to show why an account of virtue requires the four causes and how we can make sense of them in the context of modern science. The two sides of this challenge play against each other: if we can make sense of the four causes then we will begin to see their application in an account of virtue, and conversely seeing the need for the four causes to make sense of virtue we come to see that they are not made redundant in the modern context. The success of the book in pursuing the uninitiated or unconvinced will depend of whether the reader is willing to engage in this interplay.

For those who are already influenced by Aquinas's virtue ethics, the book provides an important overview of the interconnections between Aquinas's logic, metaphysics, physics and ethics. In stark contrast to approaches to virtue ethics which downplay or even deny the importance of these connections, Austin's careful reading of Aquinas coupled with his clear presentation of key arguments and discussions show how Aquinas's thought forms an integrated whole. To this end Austin explains how Aquinas uses the four causes to understand the nature of virtue, and moreover how they remain relevant for contemporary questions in virtue ethics.

The reader may question Austin's solutions to given questions, such as how to understand how those with the infused virtues can continue to find it difficult to perform good acts (p. 193). Austin argues that we

can make sense of such struggles if we give up the teaching that infused virtues are received all at once, and understand infused virtues, such as temperance, as growing more like the acquisition of natural virtue in a gradual process. The problem with this solution is understanding what could be meant by inchoate theological virtue. Austin's proposal to extend Cajetan's 'distinction between infusion and reception' (p. 196) already assumes that reception can be a gradual process, which as Austin immediately shows, is not the case for Aquinas. The challenge is to understand how a person can receive the theological virtues, for example the infused virtue of temperance, while continuing to struggle to do the good. Austin rejects the extension of Aquinas's example that the courageous person nevertheless finds little delight in risking their life on a battlefield, as in this case the obstacles to taking delight in virtuous action are external rather than the internal struggles of the person who finds it difficult to act temperately. Here I would suggest that the Christian tradition provides resources for understanding the inner struggle of those who have put on Christ, in a manner which respects the psychological complexity of the struggle, while avoiding a dualism between the new self and the old self.

These are not easy questions and understanding the workings of grace in the theological virtues will continue to occupy theologians as it has throughout the ages. It is one of the many merits of Austin's book that it engages so fruitfully with these questions in a manner which both respects Aquinas's texts and the writings of his major commentators, together with a wide range of contemporary writings on Aquinas and virtue.

David Elliot's examination of the theological virtue of hope, *Hope and Christian Ethics*, also addresses both those who are outside the virtue tradition and those who are firmly rooted in it. The book begins with a specific problem, the *eudaimonia* gap, in order to engage with contemporary moral philosophy. The *eudaimonia* gap is the distance between virtue and happiness: the ancient philosophical problem that those who live a life of virtue do not always receive virtue's reward; at least not in this life. Our present life is finite, and even the most deserving of happiness may find themselves the victim of great misfortune. Elliot runs through contemporary responses to this problem, and how ethical approaches as varied as neo-Aristotelianism, utilitarianism and Kantianism all struggle to find answers without involving theological arguments. As such, the proponents of these approaches develop secularized versions of theological concept; recognising the need for these borrowed resources, but locked in a purely secular worldview. The concept of particular interest to Elliot is hope, and he notes how neo-Aristotelian thinkers such as Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse import the virtue of hope into their secular ethics.

Elliot challenges these secular thinkers and those who follow them to accept the theological implications of their positions. After making this

challenge to secular ethicists, he next shifts his attention to attacks on the traditional understanding of the virtue of hope as it is understood in the tradition from Aquinas. Here Elliot acknowledges that Jürgen Moltmann, despite his underlying pantheism and his criticisms of Aquinas, did a great service by placing hope at the centre of this theology. The challenges Elliot examines, however, come from more recent writers, such as Timothy Jackson and Jeffrey Stout. The variety of these challenges, which cover both the personal dynamics of hope and its social implications, demonstrates how central the virtue of hope is for living the Christian life. Elliot's excellent exposition of hope in Aquinas is not merely an exercise in historical interpretation, but finds application in the broad discussion he develops covering the contemporary context in which the virtue is practised.

Anyone familiar with Aquinas's questions on hope in the *Summa Theologiae* will recognize how Elliot follows Aquinas in expounding the virtue through its accompanying gift of fear and in contrast to its opposed vices, despair and presumption. These discussions again are given flesh through their application to the contemporary context, and provide a valuable renewal of themes which are often neglected in theological ethics. In particular Elliot shows how the virtue of hope is essential in enabling us to walk the narrow path between despair and presumption; sustaining us on our journey through this life in a manner which urges us to work for the good of others, without making early social progress our ultimate goal. Together with Austin's book, Elliot's work is to be highly recommended to anyone interested in how virtue ethics can help us to understand our life in Christ.

DAVID GOODILL OP

ACTING LITURGICALLY: PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS ON RELIGIOUS PRACTICE by Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018*, pp. ix + 306, £45.00, hbk

This is an extraordinary book – both stimulating and thought-provoking.

In his preface, Professor Wolterstorff notes that, whilst liturgy has long been the province of historians and theologians, there has been seemingly little interest in the subject on the part of philosophers. This book – which he freely acknowledges has been a difficult book to write – attempts to explore some of this philosophical *terra incognita*, seeking, in the author's words 'to contribute to creating a new subfield within philosophy of religion, namely, philosophy of liturgy' (p. viii).

As such, the book is wide-ranging. The author brings to bear the techniques of modern analytical philosophy, and especially 'speech-act' theory, on various aspects of the liturgy, in particular on 'what is done