

**REPETITION AND IDENTITY, by Catherine Pickstock, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, pp. xxii + 211, £12.99, pbk**

From the outset, the critique of modern secularity enacted by the movement known as Radical Orthodoxy has been concerned to blur the rigid demarcation of interdisciplinary boundaries, inviting theologians to play on all nine muses whilst faithfully mining the classic seams of the theological and philosophical tradition. The contribution, then, of a monograph by Catherine Pickstock—one of Radical Orthodoxy’s luminaries—to a series examining the state of literary education in the contemporary academy, exemplifies the movement’s longstanding concern to inculcate a reinvigorated approach to literary ‘reading for wisdom’. This sapiential hermeneutic is grounded in an analogical worldview, reflecting a concern to avoid both an instrumental account of reading for measurable cognitive ends (a reductive *episteme*) and the Cartesian city’s spatialisation of knowledge that seeks ultimate *mathesis* (explored in Pickstock’s earlier *After Writing*, and briefly revisited in the present volume, p. 122).

Notwithstanding its advocacy for a distinctive role for literature in the formation of culture (thereby implicitly critiquing the univocal representationalism of modern epistemology), *Repetition and Identity* is primarily a work of theological metaphysics, offering a philosophical account of ‘thinghood’ that is grounded in the doctrine of God (an authentically theological reology, cf. pp. 11–15). Here, Pickstock makes a contemporary contribution to the ancient problem of the one and the many, accounting for the ontic and noetic individuation of particulars as instances of universals (and the enduring identity of entities possessed of ‘thinghood’) by reference to a Kierkegaardian ‘non-identical repetition’ (derived in dialogue with Bergson and Péguy, *inter alios*), which Pickstock maps onto the ‘Thomistic discovery that the existential is irreducible to essence at the general ontological level’ (p. 13). Thus, for Pickstock, a thing’s enduring identity depends upon repetition, paradoxically invoking the dispersion of the stability of thinghood across time (an entity’s temporal *diastasis*) and thus necessitating the connective function of the mediatorial signifier (discredited by the post-structuralist *Zeitgeist*, but rehabilitated by Pickstock as sacramentally disclosing the real). This alignment of thinghood with the materiality of the semiotic situates Pickstock’s principle of individuation within the ambit of Thomas’s axiom that ‘matter individuates’, without multiplying metaphysical complexity by the addition of Scotist *haecceity*.

As Chapter 6 demonstrates, Pickstock’s theological reology is antithetical to univocity, exemplified by Freud’s monistic ontology of identical repetition. Freud, Pickstock notes, construes reality as governed by a primordial (i.e. pre-repetition) reality that is derivatively the object of ‘mere repetition’, in acts of instantiation and iteration. Pickstock opposes Freud, not only by deconstructing his (quasi-)materialism, but constructively, by characterising life as ‘cosmo-generated [in] non-identical repetition’ (p. 113), i.e. by affirming analogy and its metaphysical antecedents. This avoidance of univocity (and the determinism of ‘simple’ repetition) emerges as a doctrine of creation (although not explicitly named as such), invoking the ‘vertical plane [as that] from which [the] finite existence [of the horizontal plane] is derived as a participation’: the consistency of horizontal identity across time is, then, a function of the non-identical repetition (creatively) communicated in the vertical dimension. This Kierkegaardian rearticulation of an ontology of *methesis* offers Pickstock a way out of the violence of opposing equivocal-univocal repetitions, metaphysically accounting for the ‘eternal consistency of personal identity’ in temporal development (p. 139). Pickstock’s reology, therefore, contributes to a theology of temporality and its relationship to divine

simplicity (a doctrinal locus implicated in much modern theology): time, for Pickstock, is an ecstatic reality (p. 58) constituted by a remote repetition of eternity (p. 140), breaking out of linear temporality governed *simpliciter* by the ‘myth of passage’.

This is, however, no mere re-hash of Radical Orthodoxy’s characteristic emphasis on participation—an ‘unmediated mediation’ that Pickstock finds to echo a ‘non-repeated repetition’ (p. 159). Rather, *Repetition and Identity* is implicitly structured by an *exitus-reditus* schema (somewhat reminiscent of the *Summa Theologiae*): the protological coordinates of Pickstock’s reology (outlined in the Chapters 2 and 3) are made patent in her eschatological account of ‘rupture and return’ in Chapter 9, which associates the idiom of non-identical repetition with the language of patristic soteriology. Here, Pickstock rehabilitates Origen’s (somewhat discredited) notion of *apocatastasis* by associating its universalism with Irenaeus of Lyons’ appropriation of the Pauline category of *anakephalaiosis* (the ‘recapitulation’ of *Ephesians* 1:10), integrating both with the priestly language of *anaphora* and *epistrophe*. The fall of Adam is thus conceived as an attempt to flatten the ‘non-identical’ nature of true repetition into univocal iteration: the fall is, in authentically Irenaean terms, a symptom of adolescent insecurity, ‘a fear of what is to come next, of what reality holds in store’ (p. 178), compounded by Adam’s almost teenage denial of the symbolic in a silence before God that constitutes a ‘sulky refusal to offer any signs’ (p. 179). (The influence of the post-Freudian psychoanalyst Lacan cannot be far away).

At stake in the symbolic mediation of non-identical repetition, then, is the gathering up of all things into the glory of God, the first cause and final cause of repetition and creaturely identity. It is, however, only in this pan-temporal scope—spanning incarnation, Paschal mystery and *parousia*—that the significance of Pickstock’s reology for theology and the disciplines becomes clear. In terms of theological method, non-identical repetition offers a model through which doxology and the drama of history can be fused (p. 176) as a means of escaping the ‘deceit of a supposed mimetic purity’ (p. 158), thereby reconciling the theologian to the decisive (and enriching) fluidity of traditional memory (p. 156).

Like all similarly adventurous and constructive theologies, *Repetition and Identity* does not offer an entirely unproblematic theological programme; the loose ends that remain, however, in no way distract from the valuable theological vista that Pickstock’s reology offers. There are some signals of potential future development: the ‘negation of negation’ that echoes Hegel (p. 165) might be drawn into dialogue with Eckhart’s *negatio negationis* (which Radical Orthodoxy has often taken as a radicalisation of the Thomistic worldview, rather than its antithesis). Perhaps surprisingly, there is relatively little engagement with the category of metaphor, despite its interdisciplinary significance and theological provenance (Soskice, Ernst, Gunton, *et al.*): in particular, examination of ontological metaphor, which approximates Pickstock’s non-identical repetition, could deepen the Christocentric turn of the *reditus*, strengthening the already explicitly incarnational perspective of recapitulation (pp. 178–182). From a theological perspective, however, the category of non-identical repetition is perhaps most suggestive of Eucharistic *anamnesis*, which is only treated briefly. This, taken together with the *oikonomia* or ‘house building’ strand of historical non-identical repetition, which Pickstock treats more extensively (p. 176ff), points to a latent ecclesiology that awaits full germination (a development that would contribute to a renewed awareness of the catholicity of non-identical ecclesial repetition as the form of Tradition). In its capacity to stimulate further theological reflection, the penetrating insight of *Repetition and Identity*—robust, provocative and

well-argued as it is—will certainly provoke non-identical repetition in its own right.

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**THE NATURAL LAW READER** edited by Jacqueline A. Laing and Russell Wilcox, *Wiley-Blackwell*, Oxford, 2014 pp. x + 458, £65.00, hbk

Natural law, the idea of an unwritten, immutable, moral law based on nature, has had a profound influence on the Western world over the course of more than two thousand years of history. Although the Romans first coined the term *ius naturale*, it is the Greeks who are credited with first contending that moral knowledge is possible through connaturality. It was not until the medieval period, however, that a singular contribution to this school of thought was made in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. His achievement consisted not only in offering new insights, but also of incorporating preceding reflections from Aristotle, St Augustine and other interlocutors.

In *The Natural Law Reader*, Jacqueline Laing and Russell Wilcox have assembled a body of texts which are unapologetically Thomist, or at least contributed to St. Thomas's thinking as precursors. Striking out with such a confident editorial policy, giving precedence to what they call a 'central natural law tradition' in which the centre of gravity is the thought of St. Thomas, facilitates the observation of a continuity of themes such as the nature of justice, without the distraction of tangential excursions, which in any case often lead to altogether different philosophies outside the tradition. For example, the editors largely exclude contractarian theorists such as Locke and Hobbes. The failure to exercise such discretion would have been likely to result in a unwieldy assemblage. Thus the decision to maintain a fairly strict Thomistic focus was a masterstroke and one that serves to make this volume hold together on a conceptual level.

In the first section of the collection, the book traces the historical development of the natural law tradition through texts from Heraclitus to Hugo Grotius, from Plato to Pinckaers – an unsung hero of the revival of interest in the natural law, if ever there was. Each period is briefly introduced by a helpful commentary which detail the particular contribution of the text to the development of the tradition and situates it in its context. Throughout the work, the editors' commentary is characterised by a judicious restraint, allowing the texts to speak for themselves.

There follows a survey of contemporary Natural Law in the second section of the book. It contains a pleasing array of essays from authors including Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, and Alasdair MacIntyre. Comparatively recent disagreements are explored in these chapters, which serve to inject the tradition, and this work, a certain freshness. Although a chapter is given to the 'New' and 'Old' Natural Law Debate, their treatment of this controversy is, to my mind, disappointingly brief. Critics of the 'new' Grisez-Finnis school such as Russell Hittinger and Henry Veatch are referred to in the introduction to the chapter but their important writings are not featured in the volume except insofar as they are characterised by Robert George who argues their objections labour under misapprehension. The resulting situation is rather akin to hearing the closing speech for the defence without having heard the prosecution's case. Inevitable pressures of space no doubt also prevented the inclusion of such classics as 'The Traditional Concept of Natural Law' by the late Columba Ryan OP as well as notable recent scholarship from Jean Porter, which is a pity. On the other hand, Martin Luther King Jr's famous defence of civil disobedience contained in his