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## Runzo, ed., ETHICS, RELIGION, AND THE GOOD SOCIETY

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4. *Ibid.*, p. 225.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Robert H. Stein, *The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1987), p. 177. For a list of concerns of the early Church for which little or no interest is reflected in the Gospels, see R. T. France, "The Authenticity of the Sayings of Jesus" in *History, Criticism & Faith*, edited by Colin Brown (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), pp. 124-26. One would not expect matters to be this way if the Church modified the words and deeds of Jesus to meet the needs of the community.

7. For more discussion of the historical reliability of the Gospels, see Stein, *The Synoptic Problem*, pp. 187-216.

*Ethics, Religion and the Good Society: New Directions in a Pluralistic World*, edited by Joseph Runzo. Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992. 200 pp. & xxiii.

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This collection explores a number of new directions in religious ethics. It comes at a time when new directions seem necessary to navigate this well-trod field, for there is in politics, in religion and in the academy a new and heightened awareness of the pluralism to which the volume's subtitle refers. Moreover, as the book's preface and cover text suggest, pluralism now meets with a different attitude than once it did. Pluralism, editor Joseph Runzo writes, once seemed a "regrettable set of wounds to be sutured" (p. xii). Now "[p]eople living in a pluralistic age [...] consider it both natural and enriching for humankind."

There are, of course, a plurality of pluralisms and exploring the new directions all demand would be an enormous task. The preface suggests that *Ethics, Religion and the Good Society* will treat of just two: pluralism "within a specific religious tradition, like Christianity" (p. xii) and "the collective pluralism of the great world religious traditions" (p. xii). In fact these remarks significantly understate the scope of this ambitious anthology.

The book contains twelve essays, plus brief comments on five of them. In the first, Brian Hebblethwaite defends a plurality of models of the good Christian life. In the second, Robert Adams offers a metaphysics of goodness that purports to explain the plurality of intrinsic goods. Two essays on Christianity and social philosophy take as their starting point the pluralism of contemporary liberal democracies. John Langan's essay does not address any form of pluralism, but contributes to the pluralistic character of the volume by providing a Catholic voice. There is a section on religious pluralism world-wide, with contributions by Buddhist and Islamic scholars. The book's closing essay suggests that there are a plurality of moral "voices," since it alleges the distinctiveness of female moral experience. The essays together exhibit a plurality of methods, ranging from Adams's philosophical argument to McClendon's biographical approach. Runzo's own essay considers a plu-

rality of philosophical positions, though whether this plurality results in a species of pluralism is hard to say. Presumably he does not consider this diversity of positions "enriching for humankind" since he tries to reduce it by refuting one of them.

Whether or not Runzo's essay indeed treats of one of the forms of pluralism with which the book professes to be concerned, the essays collectively address a bewildering number of pluralisms. As a result, the volume lacks the thematic unity the title and preface promise. It would have been better to have focused on one or two sorts of pluralism in this book, reserving the rest for another volume. Better to chart a couple of new paths carefully than to point out a larger number of promising trailheads.

In addition to its lack of focus, the book exhibits some odd imbalances. The essays on Buddhism and Islam are extremely interesting, in part because of the unfamiliarity of their subject matter. They are also extremely brief and the book would have profited greatly from their expansion. There are some unfortunate omissions. An essay by a conservative theologian who is ambivalent about or distressed by pluralism would have been quite interesting. The example of John Courtney Murray, who once described religious pluralism as "lamentable,"<sup>1</sup> shows that such a position is compatible with a commitment to the dialogue across divides that this book is meant to encourage.

Despite these shortcomings, *Ethics, Religion and the Good Society* provides a valuable introduction to the diversity of contemporary religious ethics and to the diversity of concerns that move those who practice it. Even if the papers do not fit together as well as they might, they are singly very interesting and some are of extremely high quality. I will examine three of these essays in what follows.

In "The Varieties of Goodness," Brian Hebblethwaite argues against the claim that there is a single model of life to which Christians should attempt to conform. Christians should concentrate on cultivating a proper relationship with God (pp. 4-5); this is, he intimates, both necessary and sufficient for a good Christian life (cf. p. 5). It is also compatible with recognizing that there is a wide variety of equally worthy ways to be a Christian.

Hebblethwaite thinks his pluralism a departure from the traditional Christian ethics of, for example, Thomas Aquinas's virtue theory. Thus he writes of his concern with "the common assumption that Christian ethics itself is a uniform discipline, that Christianity has one identifiably moral ideal, and that the *summum bonum* can be spelled out as a single paradigm" (p. 4). A page earlier, he makes clear that he thinks he has parted company with Aquinas; there he suggests that Aquinas elucidated the *summum bonum* by elaborating one paradigm of the ideal Christian life (p. 3). A bit later, he indicates why he thinks virtue theory needs to be supplemented: to focus on the virtues, he suggests, is to neglect the "many different ways of being a Christian moral individual" (p. 6).

Hebblethwaite's equation of the *summum bonum* in Aquinas with "a single paradigmatic ideal of human life" (p. 3) betrays a confusion. Eliminating the

confusion suggests, in a way that Hebblethwaite's paper does not, how he might supplement virtue theory along the lines he indicates. The *summum bonum*, in Aquinas's view, is not an ideal way of life. It is a good, namely God, enjoyed by those whose lives are characterized by an exercise of the theological virtues. Hebblethwaite could therefore retain Aquinas's idea of the *summum bonum* and maintain his own "Christian pluralism" simply by holding that there are a number of ways to enjoy and participate in that good. He could assimilate his position to virtue theory by arguing that the various ways to enjoy that good all engage the virtues in whose exercise a good life consists.

Let me discuss an example that will make this possibility more vivid. Hebblethwaite correctly claims that some theologians, like Aquinas, seem to think that there *is* a single best way of life; often enough, as he intimates (cf. p. 7), this is a clerical life. Consider in this connection Aquinas's discussion of mendicant poverty. Aquinas argues that it is better to live under a vow of poverty than to give alms regularly from property over which one retains *dominium*. His argument turns on the premise that the virtues associated with property-holding are better exercised in the mendicant's single irrevocable renunciation of property than in the layperson's episodic giving of alms<sup>2</sup>. This seems to me a highly dubious claim. Someone denying it could appeal to Aquinas's discussion of virtues associated with the use of property to bring out the goodness of both the mendicant's life and that of the generous layperson. The example thus illustrates modification of a traditional virtue theory that edges it closer to Hebblethwaite's pluralism.

Hebblethwaite advocates a supplementation rather than a rejection of virtue theory and I have tried to illustrate in what this supplementation might consist. But why prefer supplementation to rejection? Hebblethwaite does not say. Let me indicate where he might fortify his view by judiciously grafting pieces of virtue theory onto it. Hebblethwaite stresses that one reason good Christian lives diverge is the diversity of circumstances in which Christians find themselves (p. 10). I would stress in addition that an ingredient of a good life is the ability to shape one's life to one's circumstances. This is an ability traditionally associated with the virtue of prudence. A fuller account of Christian pluralism would, I believe, have to include it. Moreover, Hebblethwaite notes that the diversity of good Christian lives "exhibit a family resemblance, recognizable in manifestations of the fruit of the same spirit and in the effects of personal relation to the same Lord" (p. 11). It is not clear what these "manifestations" and "effects" are. If they are habits of thought, sentiments, and conduct regarding the goods available through a relationship with God, then they are probably best conceived of as theological virtues. If this conjecture is correct, then a nuanced discussion of the theological virtues—Aquinas's, for example—could be exploited to fill in the details of Hebblethwaite's view.

The enjoyment of divine goods is the subject of Robert Adams's essay "Platonism and Naturalism." In the view Adams defends "God would occupy [...] much of the role that is assigned to the Form of the Good in the 'middle dialogues' of Plato." God, on this view, is the supreme and transcendent good; other good things derive their goodness by "imaging" God. Among the strengths of this theistic Platonism, Adams argues, is its ability to explain significant features of our moral lives better than do alternative theories of value. In this essay, Adams argues that the explanatory power of his theory exceeds that of James Gustafson's theistic naturalism.

One of the more interesting comparisons concerns the ability of each theory to explain why securing some goods—Adams considers ecological goods—is worth the sacrifice of certain human aims. Adams argues that the preservation of a species from extinction is an intrinsic good and that its intrinsic goodness gives humanity a reason to seek it even at the expense of projects of our own (p. 36). This intrinsic goodness, the intrinsic goodness associated with preservation of the African elephant, for example, is explained by the fact that the elephant "images" God. For Gustafson, on the other hand, our reasons for preserving the elephant depend upon our ability to discern divine purposes in nature, an ability Adams rightly questions (p. 33).

I concede *arguendo* that theistic Platonism adequately accounts for what we are inclined to regard as intrinsic goodness and can do so better than naturalistic theories. There are, however, some values for which we might think other theories provide a more persuasive account. I want to query how Adams's theory might account for these. Adams notes that the notion of divine "vocations" will have a role in his theory (p. 37) and that there are proper and improper vocations for us to pursue, which depend upon God's purposes for us. How would theistic Platonism account for the goodness of individuals choosing their vocations for themselves rather than having them chosen for them by some Zossimaesque figure to whom they have submitted their will and who, *ex hypothesi*, will choose the appropriate vocation for them?

Intrinsic goods are such that their goodness gives a reason to secure them. If the choosing-of-appropriate-vocation-V were itself intrinsically good, then the goodness of that complex would itself furnish a reason to secure it. It would therefore furnish a reason to make the choice of vocation V. But what gives reason to make a choice is the perceived appropriateness of vocation V, not the goodness of choosing it. Intrinsic goodness thus seems an unpromising account of the goodness of choosing a vocation for oneself. So too does instrumental goodness. While choosing may sometimes be a means or instrument to the thing chosen, this seems not to be so in the case of the choice of a vocation. Let us think of a vocation, roughly, as a commitment to values and projects that are central to one's plan of life. Then by the very act of choosing a vocation, an agent makes the commitment in which having a vocation consists. The act of choosing a vocation is therefore performative rather than instrumental.

The performative character of the choice of a vocation suggests one way in which Adams might account for the goodness of choice. He might note that in choosing a vocation, one is doing something else—expressing one's autonomy, perhaps—and might exploit this other description of the performance to explain its goodness. Perhaps Adams would say that in choosing the appropriate vocation, agents are faithfully imaging God and that the goodness of their choosing for themselves resides there. This would fit nicely with Adams's claim that goodness consists in imaging God. It would also dovetail neatly with Aquinas's claim that humans are made in God's image insofar as they possess the faculties necessary for choice<sup>3</sup>.

How humans might image God by choosing a vocation is no doubt a complicated matter. It cannot be that agents image God by wanting the same object that God wants, since what is to be explained is not how agents image God by wanting, but how they image God by choosing. Moreover, as Aquinas points out, an agent's will can be good, not by her choosing what God wants, but by choosing what God wants her to choose. Adapting an unfortunate example of Aquinas's makes this clear. Someone may take it as her vocation to secure clemency for death-row inmates. Her choice will be good if this is the vocation God wants her to choose, even if God in fact wants the executions to take place for the sake of justice<sup>4</sup>.

It might be that in choosing an appropriate vocation for herself, an agent makes a choice that is significantly like a choice that God makes. She thus resembles or images God because of the similarity of her choice to God's. According to Adams, God's nature is such that the whole created universe is an appropriate object of God's and only God's providential care (p. 31; p. 42n4). Exercising this care over the universe is thus God's proper vocation. An agent might image God by choosing for *her* vocation a commitment to and care of an object appropriate for *her* nature and circumstances. But among the features of God's choice of vocation is that it is purely unconstrained. God freely chose to create the universe and God's purpose in doing so were arguably self-established. If the goodness of a human choice of vocation is located in its similarity to God's choice, then divine autonomy raises questions about how the goodness of human choice depends upon humans setting purposes for *themselves*.

I allude to these questions, not because I think Adams lacks the resources to answer to them, but because one of the strengths of Adams's theory is its ability to account for intrinsic goodness. At least some alternative theories of value derive strength from their ability to explain, not intrinsic goodness, but the significance of choice. It is therefore crucial to determine how Adams's theory might account for it. I allude to these questions also because belief in the goodness of autonomous choice seems a natural concomitant of the attitude toward pluralism that the book under review purports to explore.

John Langan's contribution critically examines crucial parts of John Paul II's *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. I want to focus on two points Langan makes near the close of his essay. Langan says that "this encyclical manifests a high proportion of assertion to argument and frequently crosses with unwarranted facility from analysis to admonition." These features, Langan continues, "trouble" him (p. 142). Langan also says that the encyclical seems to "put[] humanity in a box clearly marked for laggards and sinners" (p. 143), who are responsible for both the presence and the reform of unjust institutions. He canvasses a number of ways to escape the "box" and endorses one he thinks exemplified by the bloodless revolutions of Eastern Europe. To effect their escape, he argues, people must "understand that, in order to bring about this new order of society, they must withdraw from their involvement in the sinful structures of the old order. [...] They must without resorting to force or relying on the weight of routine, break the hold of sin on their lives and their society" (p. 145).

Langan's discussion makes no mention of what if any role religious belief, religious ethics or divine grace should play in people's "break[ing] the hold of sin on their lives and their society." Perhaps he thinks that secular political philosophy suffices to awaken a sense of injustice and elicit the motivation to change. But these are also legitimate objectives for religious ethical discourse. Moreover they are, at least under some circumstances, objectives better achieved by religious than by thoroughly secular discussion. Finally, they are objectives that can rarely be achieved by argument alone. Hortatory as well as analytical discourse is often necessary if people are to recognize "the hold of sin on their lives and their society" and to resolve to break it. If these suggestions are correct, then the escape route Langan plots presupposes a role for religious discourse that is hortatory in character. It presupposes, that is, a role for just the sort of discourse that "troubles" Langan in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*.

*Ethics, Religion and the Good Society* includes a number of other essays that repay careful reflection. The volume is a fine sampler of the diversity of contemporary religious ethics. It merits the attention of those interested in what new directions the field might take in an increasingly pluralistic world.

#### NOTES

1. John Courtney Murray, S.J., *We Hold These Truths* (Sheed and Ward, 1960), p. 74.
2. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, 186, 3.
3. See *ibid.*, I-II, *prologus*.
4. For the point and the example, see *ibid.*, I-II, 18, 10.