

## OTHER BOOKS OF INTEREST

Commentary on Thomas Aquinas's Virtue Ethics

**J. Budziszewski**

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017 (322 pages)

This commentary covers eighteen articles from Aquinas's treatment of virtue in his *Summa theologiae*. It follows on J. Budziszewski's previous commentary on Aquinas's treatise on law. The present commentary seeks to be beneficial both to scholars and beginners. As such, it follows the Blackfriars English translation of the *Summa*, and includes Budziszewski's paraphrase. Although the Latin text is not reprinted here, the author does work with the original Latin when necessary. It is important to note that the commentary treats only selected articles from the *Prima secundae* and *Secunda secundae*. In his introduction Budziszewski admits that he opposes virtue pluralism—the notion that all views about virtue are equally admissible (or equally flawed)—and he believes that “the classical way of investigating the virtues is correct” (xx). So, although he seeks to help the reader understand Aquinas's text, he also advocates for Aquinas's account of virtue over against alternatives. One finds criticisms of these alternatives scattered throughout the work. More frequently, however, Budziszewski provides illustrations and contemporary examples that reveal the enduring relevance of Aquinas's account. This commentary, while certainly (and understandably) not exhaustive, is still helpful for the articles it does treat, and it serves as a good entry point for beginners, and as a good reference work for scholars, on one of the most influential presentations of virtue ethics ever written.

## Great Economic Thinkers: An Introduction—From Adam Smith to Amartya Sen

**Jonathan Conlin (Editor)**

London: Reaktion Books, 2018 (311 pages)

This collection consists of essays on the lives and contributions of thirteen influential economists. As D’Maris Coffman writes in her introduction, the essays blend the two approaches to economic history as distinguished by Joseph Schumpeter: the history of economic thought and the history of economic analysis. That is, authors are attentive both to the historical context out of which these economists and their theories arose and to the content of those theories. As is typical of economics textbooks, the volume begins with Adam Smith, though Coffman does mention antecedents “in Renaissance and Reformation Europe” (9), briefly discusses the mercantilists, and notes the contributions of William Petty, David Hume, and the French Physiocrats. After the chapter on Smith there are chapters on Ricardo, J. S. Mill, Marx, Marshall, Schumpeter, Keynes, Hayek, Friedman, Nash, Kahneman, Sen, and Stiglitz. The biographical portions of many of the essays are engaging, which is perhaps not a common feature of introductory works on the history of economics. One curiosity is an opening signal that “most of the contributors to this volume” reject “neoliberalism” (19). It is unfortunate that this comment was included since it invites questions about the possible ulterior motives of the contributors. It also further leads the reader to wonder which authors fall into the “most” and which are among the dissenters. That quibble aside, this book offers a very readable survey of modern economic thought. The endnotes and suggestions for further reading are particularly helpful for guiding readers into a deeper consideration of the contributions of these great economic thinkers.

## Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law

**Kody W. Cooper**

Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018 (341 pages)

Kody Cooper cuts through the thicket of literature on Thomas Hobbes and seeks to establish a revisionist thesis about Hobbes’s concept of law. He argues that Hobbes “maintains key features” of the “classical natural law” tradition—namely, two key features: (1) the human good, grounded in human nature, provides basic reasons for action, and (2) the norms and precepts corresponding to the human good have a legal character (2, 95). Along the way Cooper has to respond to many contrary interpretations of Hobbes, including the secularist thesis that claims Hobbes has no place for God in his moral or political thought and the reading of Hobbes as a nominalist. Cooper presents ample evidence through careful reading of Hobbes’s texts that Hobbes was a genuine theist and that his “views of moral and civil science” are in continuity with “the tradition of realistic philosophy” (20). The thicket through which Cooper travels requires him not only to navigate contrary interpretations of Hobbes, but also various philosophical challenges, as well as aspects of early modern history and theology. This is a tall task, but Cooper shows that he is up to it by painstaking

ingly working through each bramble. Cooper's provocative book addresses much more than Hobbes's ethics and political philosophy, and it should be on the reading list of any Hobbes scholar. Those interested in early modern philosophy and theology, and those interested in modern debates about natural law ethics, should also take note of this work.

### Work: Its Purpose, Dignity, and Transformation

**Daniel M. Doriani**

Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2019 (243 pages)

There is no shortage of Christian books about work and vocation. Daniel M. Doriani, professor of theology at Covenant Theological Seminary, has added to this literature *Work: Its Purpose, Dignity, and Transformation*. Doriani notes that work is what most people (including Christians) spend most of their time doing, and so most people at some point ask questions about the significance and purpose of their jobs and vocations. As Doriani frames it, some of those people just want to know whether their work matters. Others want, or even expect, their work to change the world. Doriani argues that there is a distinctively Christian view of work and that one's Christian faith ought to have an impact on one's work. His book is guided by twelve biblical and theological principles of God-centered work. Among these are the recognition that God himself works, God created humans for work, human work is marred by sin, and Jesus's hard work of redemption means that we should also work hard. Doriani also argues against the sacred-secular distinction and affirms that all work can please God if it follows his law and is motivated by love. The book is aimed at a general audience, though it is conversant with some of the recent Christian literature on work and vocation. Discussion questions are included at the end of each chapter.

### The Virtue of Nationalism

**Yoram Hazony**

New York: Basic Books, 2018 (285 pages)

Yoram Hazony's *The Virtue of Nationalism* has garnered much attention. While the author claims to add clarity to political theory, the opposite is unfortunately the case. All political philosophies are made to fit a false dichotomy between nationalism, which affirms national sovereignty, and imperialism, which seeks to dismantle it. Hazony is aware of nationalism's fraught history, but he dismisses this history by claiming that past nationalists such as the Nazis were *really* imperialists and by redefining "nation" as having nothing to do with race but rather shared religion or language. The first part of the book combines an idiosyncratic reading of the Bible with a counterfactual reading of history, an ill-informed understanding of Christianity, and gross misrepresentations of such figures as John Locke, Immanuel Kant, and Friedrich Hayek. Quotations of their works are highly selective, and, when read in context, one often finds nearly the opposite position from the one Hazony claims they held. The second part is the most helpful because it contains Hazony's positive case for his brand of nationalism. Nevertheless, even this

is hampered by the author's too-narrow paradigm and self-undermining observations. A nation, he insists, consists of people with a shared language or religion, yet he bemoans that definition's logical extremes, such as the way the French have expressed "their national freedom through the suppression of languages and religious practices" (136). The entire third part of the book is an extended *tu quoque* fallacy, highlighting the evils of imperialism in an attempt to exonerate nationalism, but even ignoring this, the argument raises questions. For example, Hazony claims that European animosity against the state of Israel derives from the fact that, despite its perceived European heritage, it insists on its own national self-determination. He then lists examples of other nations that have suffered similar "vilification," including "the apartheid regime of South Africa" (215). While he later claims apartheid was morally outrageous, he nevertheless defends such an outrage in the name of nationalism. Examples of this sort of double-sided posturing could be multiplied, and they fatally overshadow any virtues Hazony's nationalism may contain.

### Incentives to Pander: How Politicians Use Corporate Welfare for Political Gain

**Nathan M. Jensen and Edmund J. Malesky**

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018 (268 pages)

The thesis of this book may seem obvious and commonsense to some readers: government investment incentives and benefits for businesses are a tool politicians use to pander to voters. That is, politicians at all levels of government find that by offering incentives to attract businesses to their districts they can claim credit when a business moves into their district and avoid blame when a business chooses not to relocate. This is an effective strategy for attracting votes. Though the thesis may seem obvious, proving the point with economic and sociological data is a task that requires careful research. And this is what we find in *Incentives to Pander*, which is chock-full of survey evidence, investment allocation data, cost-benefit analysis, and summaries of the current state of research. The authors' thesis answers a number of puzzles, including why politicians use these policies when the broad economic consensus is that the "use of incentives to attract investment is bad policy" (9), and when it seems that politicians often know that incentives are bad policy (25–26). The most significant challenge, perhaps, to the authors' thesis is that authoritarian regimes offer even greater incentives to firms than electoral democracies, which would seem to indicate that credit claiming and pandering to voters is not the underlying purpose. The authors argue, however, that there is a phenomenon of "pandering upward" in authoritarian governments, where lower-level and regional officials seek to impress higher-level or central government officials in order to achieve promotion. Chapter 4 of the book is an excellent summary of the case against investment incentive policies. Nathan Jensen and Edmund Malesky have delivered a book that deserves a wide readership. Since the data-driven, academic nature of the book will likely keep it from being widely read, one hopes that the authors will write a distillation of the book that can be more easily digested by a general audience.

**The Skillfulness of Virtue: Improving Our Moral and Epistemic Lives**

**Matt Stichter**

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018 (209 pages)

In this monograph Matt Stichter, a professor at Washington State University, defends the thesis that “the acquisition of a virtue is a process of acquiring a skill” (1–2). The book is not merely philosophical, however, but extensively engages psychological literature and research on the practice of virtue. Stichter responds to many of the critics of the virtue-as-skill thesis (including Aristotle). The last chapter addresses the situationist critique of virtue, which has arisen from experiments in social psychology that indicate that people act morally or immorally not because of possession (or lack) of virtues, but because of largely irrelevant situational factors (144). Part of Stichter’s response is to show that the virtue-as-skill thesis actually may square well with this experimental data because it holds that expertise in the practice of virtues, just as expertise in any skill, is rare and requires intentional strategies and practice to attain. Stichter also has an excellent discussion of moral disengagement as an overlooked factor in explaining some of the experimental data on immoral human behavior. *The Skillfulness of Virtue* is a fine contribution to the field of moral philosophy and psychology, and to virtue ethics in particular. Readers may also benefit personally from Stichter’s discussion of virtue acquisition and the practices of self-regulation that are required to become more virtuous.