

simply exceeds its grasp. “After modernity?” is a very good question. Unfortunately, the answer to this question, at least if this collection is any indication, would not yet appear to be “clarity.”

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Ethics Without God? The Divine in Contemporary Moral and Political Thought

**Fulvio Di Blasi, Joshua P. Hochschild,
and Jeffrey Langan (Editors)**

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Ethics Without God? is an unusual collection of four short original articles, followed by two separate “book discussions” of John Rist’s *Real Ethics* (2002) and Russell Hittinger’s *The First Grace* (2003), wherein each author responds to his reviewers. The collection is aptly introduced by the editors when they state that the original essays and reviews, “bring a theological perspective to bear on a range of current political and theoretical questions” (x).

In “God, Nietzsche and Contemporary Political Philosophy,” Jeffrey Langan uses the Declaration of Independence as an exemplar of how the existence of God can be affirmed publicly within a polity. Langan proceeds to outline the theistic presuppositions of the Declaration, comparing it with contemporary readings of Locke’s deistic natural rights theory and William Connolly’s revived “immanent naturalism.” Set against Nietzsche’s premature pronouncement that God is dead, the article begins to explore what is living and what is dead in the Declaration of Independence’s underlying philosophy without drawing any hard-and-fast conclusions beyond the document’s continuing general relevance.

“Preserving Kantianism from Consequentialism,” by James Krueger critiques Christine Korsgaard’s reformulation of Kantianism in her book, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. Krueger contends that Korsgaard, by sidelining Kant’s practical postulates of God’s existence and the immortality of the soul, ends up propounding a form of consequentialism with an otherwise Kantian hue. Using so-called tragic cases such as those of the Maltese conjoined twins, Krueger tries to demonstrate that Korsgaard invidiously countenances doing evil to achieve good. Though Krueger laudably concludes by stressing the import of the highest good and ultimate ends in moral reasoning, his focus on so-called hard cases limits the effectiveness of the overall critique.

Laura L. Garcia’s forthright essay, “Ethics on One Wing,” takes clear aim at three contemporary theorists: Kai Nielsen, Michael Moore, and Steven Pinker. Using a typical example of each author’s work, Garcia takes them to task for inconsistent eclecticism, reductionist materialism, and amateur philosophizing, respectively. There is a whiff of polemic in some of her asides against each author, but many of her fundamental points

are well made. With a coda containing a plea for a return to metaphysics in morals and natural-law ethics, Garcia reveals the influence on her thought of Ralph McInerny and other proponents of Aristotelian-Thomism.

David Thunder's essay, "Public Discourse without God?" finds the Rawlsian principle of restraint and Habermas's communication ethic too restrictive of public discourse within the political domain—especially in relation to religious justifications of legislation. Calling these approaches "rule centered," he contrasts this approach with his own favored "virtue centered" ethic of communication within a political community. Developing Mark Kingwell's work on political virtues, Thunder helpfully sketches how such virtues can prevent an open and agonistic discourse in the political domain from becoming antagonistic or uncivil.

The discussion of John Rist's *Real Ethics*, a work arguing for a revival of an unabashed Platonic-Augustinian moral realism, mainly focuses on how the volume could have been strengthened by a better use of Aristotle's natural philosophy and moral theory, and an even stronger theistic grounding for Rist's (confessedly unfashionable) ethical perspective. Daniel McInerny's and Barry David's treatments stand out from the four collected, while John Rist's response to the discussants directly and concisely deals with all of the critical points.

The book concludes with a discussion of Russell Hittinger's *The First Grace*. Three of the four discussants focus principally on Hittinger's understanding of Aquinas's natural-law theory, while Matthew Levering looks at religious liberty and the legacy of the Second Vatican Council. Michael Zuckert's contribution is the highlight here, with his dissection of Hittinger's view of the promulgation of the natural law. Hittinger's response gives little ground to the criticisms leveled by the reviewers and helpfully clarifies certain aspects of his influential understanding of Aquinas's moral and legal philosophy.

Ethics Without God? is a mix of original short essays and reviews that does not entirely hang together. Even the longer contributions average fewer than twenty pages. As a consequence, the essays framing the first half of the book have a sketchy feel and do not have the space to develop some interesting themes. All the contributors propound a strong form of moral realism and are universally critical of certain modern Western cultural developments and many forms of modern philosophy. The influence of Aquinas, Augustine, and Aristotle pervades the collection.

The book will be of greatest interest to graduate students of ethics or political theory who are researching the interface between philosophy and theology or the compatibility between natural-law theory or moral realism and forms of political liberalism. The collection gives a wide range of perspectives on these themes at the cost of coherence and comprehensiveness. The lack of an index does not seriously hinder the reader given the nature of the collection.

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