

would go away. That is not to say that we would then live in a perfect world but that much of what we suffer is what we have brought upon ourselves. On this point, Brand and I are very often in agreement. At this point in time, though, it seems to me that simply calling for a reduction in the size of the welfare state is nothing more than a call for only doing a little bit of evil rather than a lot of evil. To be sure, there is no golden age where government was kept in its proper role, but we should not confuse principle and practice.

Despite this criticism, as I said in the beginning, my overall impression of the book is very favorable. Dr. Brand has, for the most part, undertaken a book on a subject that required him to stretch himself a bit beyond his expertise, and he has done so in a way that does considerable justice to the topic. While there are other issues of debate here and there, he generally reaches solid conclusions. In an age when most people believe a set of lies, half-truths, and myths about political economy, especially in the Christian community, Professor Brand's book is both timely and important.

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**The Common Good of Constitutional Democracy:
 Essays in Political Philosophy and on Catholic
 Social Teaching**
Martin Rhonheimer
William F. Murphy, Jr. (Translator)
 Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press,
 2013 (560 pages)

Martin Rhonheimer, professor of ethics and political philosophy at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome, is best known in Anglophone circles as a Catholic philosopher engaged in some of the more interesting debates about the natural moral law, Thomistic action theory, and applied ethics. Collections of his essays and two monographs in these fields have been published by the Catholic University of America Press and Fordham University Press since 2000. *The Common Good of Constitutional Democracy* is the first work in Rhonheimer's *oeuvre* published in English that squarely addresses central issues in political theory. Almost all of the essays presented in the book had been previously published, but only five of the fourteen essays have appeared in English before.

Rhonheimer sets out his stall clearly in his opening chapter, "Why Is Political Philosophy Necessary?" This essay, along with the third chapter, "The Democratic Constitutional State and the Common Good," and chapter 14, "Christianity and Secularity," sets out his methodological stance for the whole collection of essays by outlining an approach that refreshingly takes political ethics to be distinct but not separable from other aspects of practical philosophy. So well-conceived are these reflections on method, I would venture to suggest that some (or all) of these core essays should be required reading in academic programs focusing on political theology or political theory from a Catholic orientation.

The method Rhonheimer employs in virtually all of the essays is both philosophical *and* theological in that his reflections on political life include not only the deliverances of natural reason as he sees them but also an interpretation of the corpus of magisterial social teaching (which is itself theological in nature).

Unlike John Finnis—who in my view does not fully engage with John Rawls’s understanding of *political* liberalism deeply and seriously enough—Rhonheimer takes care to critically appraise Rawls’s later writings in chapters 7 and 8 of the work. Rhonheimer sees much in Rawls that is at least consistent with his own position on political life but seriously faults Rawls for allegedly failing to see the importance of the traditional (opposite sex) marital family as the key, essentially reproductive unit within a political society. These exegetically balanced chapters are a helpful corrective to those thinkers who read Rawls as a radical secularist or as a proponent of a reductive and impoverished brand of liberalism.

Some may be struck by the candor of Rhonheimer’s rejection, in some of the essays, of papal political absolutism in the medieval age and his partial appreciation for secular political thinkers such as Hobbes and Bodin who reacted against the Church’s earthly power at that time. Though Rhonheimer is careful to present a balanced picture of the rights and wrongs of the political and ecclesial situation in that era, he sees the advent of modern political theory, with its focus on state sovereignty and secular positive law, as a real advance on the (distorted) “political” Augustinianism of the early medieval period. Some traditionalist Catholics in two minds about the Church’s “catching up with modernity” in the Second Vatican Council may question Rhonheimer’s approach here, though I would hold that Rhonheimer’s position is generally well-argued and defensible.

As a Swiss German Catholic, Rhonheimer’s final essay on political economy (“The Role of the State in the Economy”) is unsurprisingly closer to the “social market” approach of the post-war Christian democratic tradition than the economic liberalism of Milton Friedman (or committed free-market Catholic thinkers such as George Wiegel for that matter). The approach taken in Benedict XVI’s social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* is sympathetically analyzed in this essay. Although Rhonheimer robustly defends capitalism against many unjust criticisms, he defends a substantial government role in the economy and redistributive principles that will not cheer “flat tax” supply-siders in the US fiscal debate.

In some respects, Rhonheimer’s political philosophy reminds me of the substance (rather than the style) of Jacques Maritain’s political writings, or of Charles Taylor’s approach in his Marianist Lecture, *A Catholic Modernity?* Although Rhonheimer avoids Maritain’s optimism regarding the application of human rights in the contemporary world (and perhaps the overly Aristotelian approach taken in *Man and the State*), his position seems in developed continuity with the approach taken by Maritain in *Integral Humanism*.

Those Thomistically inclined readers frustrated by the likes of Alasdair MacIntyre’s refusal to constructively engage with the political liberalism of Rawls and Charles Larmore will find much to stimulate them in Rhonheimer’s approach. In contrast to Radical Orthodox or Hauerwasian theorists—who have risen to prominence even within Catholic circles in the last twenty years—Rhonheimer sees political theory as clearly having its own scope

and logic apart from both ethics and theology. In doing so, Rhonheimer takes a different approach to politics than the (quasi-)Straussian position taken by James Schall, SJ, in his learned writings.

This reader would like to have seen a somewhat greater direct engagement by Rhonheimer with some prominent understandings of Aquinas's political and legal theory, in particular that of John Finnis or the Hittinger brothers (Russell and John). The former's monograph *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory* (Oxford, 1998) is a magisterial exploration of Aquinas's relevance to contemporary theoretical debates. It would have been fascinating if Rhonheimer had elaborated his fundamental interpretation of Saint Thomas's political and legal writings in a more systematic way, but perhaps this is a task for a future monograph rather than an essay in a diverse collection. I also missed any interaction with eminent Anglican political thinkers such as Oliver O'Donovan or Archbishop Rowan Williams, whose valuable writings and lectures on modern political life are not mentioned (although Rhonheimer does reference Otto Gierke and the English "pluralist" tradition in "Democratic State and Common Good").

These points aside, *The Common Good of a Constitutional Democracy* is a *tour de force* in Catholic practical philosophy. Rhonheimer aptly blends philosophy and theology in a way commended by Blessed John Paul II who argued in his 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio* that the best (Christian) theorizing takes place when theological insights are developed from sound philosophical orientations.

The book will be required reading for those researching political theology or Catholic social teaching relating to economics and politics. Rhonheimer's writing is dense but generally clear and the book, or its constituent chapters, can be recommended to both graduate and undergraduate students.

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How God Makes the World a Better Place: A Wesleyan Primer on Faith, Work, and Economic Transformation

David Wright

Foreword by Jo Anne Lyon

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian's Library Press, 2012 (160 pages)

In the introduction to this book, David Wright states that his aim is "to help you make your work and the work of your fellow employees a life-long source of well-being and fulfillment." He pursues that end by reviewing the basics of John Wesley's theologies of conversion, social transformation, and work.

Wright shares his rationale for focusing on work: the dominance of work in daily life, work as the source of material well-being, work as it provides the opportunity to bless others, and the sense of well-being, or personal fulfillment that can be gained through work. Wright also commends to the reader the pursuit of healthy balance in three critical areas of work life: spiritual well-being, social intervention, and compassionate action.