

Book reviews

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Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World and Time: Ethics as Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), pp. 151. \$25.00/£16.99 (pbk).

This first in a trilogy announces itself as an induction into ethics as theology – not an introduction, since one cannot be introduced to the condition in which one already lives. The character of moral agency is such that moral obligations are the perennial sea in which humanity swims, the seaweed in which we are entangled. Humanity must awake – or, rather, be awoken – to the debts of all-surrounding moral obligation. This metaphor of waking is, for O'Donovan, central for understanding the initiation of moral awareness. While waking to constant swimming (and later rowing a boat) is a combination of metaphors which stretches the moral imagination, the substance of the claims adds subtleties of subjectivity to O'Donovan's previously published work. In particular, O'Donovan announces a pneumatological cadence to this induction in a moment of intellectual autobiography whereby 'the forceful objectivism of [his] *Resurrection and Moral Order*' is complemented with its new partner, a 'Pentecost and Moral Agency' (p. xii).

The driving thesis of this fresh though not new attention to the Spirit's leading work in ethics is triangulated around self, world and time, the poles among which moral reasoning moves. The task of world-description is a matter of truth, of discerning the way things are. Such a complex task, though essential, is permanently controversial. The self is ethics' 'site of initiative' (p. 13) within the world, launching out in one direction or another. The open-ended task of world-description is juxtaposed with the pressing demand of moment-by-moment decision, tracking the distinction between the good and the right. Practical reason navigates by interpreting reality in terms of value and obligation, recasting Hume's 'is-ought' distinction more coherently than the commonplace of 'fact' and 'value'. While the engagement with philosophy as a discipline is considerable, readers expecting detailed interaction with moral philosophers may be disappointed. Kant and Aristotle, among others, make illuminating appearances. The description of the intellectual accident in which contemplation fell apart from affective attention is a particularly powerful moment of exegesis. However, it is not the philosophers but rather Donne's poetic hymnody which gives the text its character (e.g. p. 42).

With this in mind, there are remarks which might be pressed for greater clarity. On the one hand, 'Theology, avoiding philosophy's hazardous smash-and-grab tactics, insists on having its primary concepts issued and duly signed for out of the Scriptural inventory' (p. 6). On the other, 'Theological Ethics' is distinguished by 'its constant appropriation of categories that philosophy provides, an interest that philosophy does not reciprocate' (p. 76). Theology's canonical discipline, being answerable primarily to scripture, seems rightly framed with respect to the judicious handling of categories. But just how 'smash-and-grab' is distinguished from 'appropriation' is not entirely perspicuous.

This relatively brief and accessible work offers new turns on familiar themes including, first, an interweaving of moral and political notions of representation in the description of the common 'we' necessary for moral thought and, second, a recalibration of 'authority' from *Resurrection and Moral Order* such that freedom is said to have a wider ambit than authority. Authority emerges as less perspicuous than previously suggested, always coming in mediated form in practical reasoning: *somebody* mediates the reasons for obedient action which are given within the world. This 'bottle-neck' concept of authority is climactically fulfilled in the person of Jesus, the Word of wisdom for the world. The historical centre in time upon which the self's movement in the world may be stably founded remains the resurrection of Christ.

This book is a powerful and conceptually rich call for moral teaching, authorised by the scriptures which give moral theology its marching orders. It will prove an immensely valuable induction into ethics as theology. The book's closing pages supply a forceful criticism of Barth's confused departure from faith, hope and love and a milder rebuke for Thomas' neglect of hope in particular. The trilogy's second and third volumes, to be organised within the triad of faith, hope and love, will be eagerly anticipated.

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Stanley Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), pp. 188 + xvii. \$22.00

Stanley Hauerwas has always been a reader first, only then a writer. His favourite genre is the essay, and his essays are almost always commentaries