

suffering were emphasized during this period and how closely Christ was identified with his mother is described with considerable subtlety. In the laity's quest for reassurance that they could attain the spiritual worthiness necessary for acceptance into heaven, they made increasing demands upon the clergy. Fitch brings strong Scottish evidence, such as increasingly detailed instructions in foundation charters or careful monitoring of religious services by town councils, to support the view among scholars of the pre-Reformation period that the laity were seeking "more" and "better" religion. Her book ends, "The Reformation was merely the next stage in the laity's search for salvation" (189).

This study admirably fills the gap that has existed in Scottish medieval studies and provides for students and specialists alike an excellent view inside the religious world of the laity. The publishers are also to be congratulated in producing the volume at a reasonable price that makes it accessible to a range of readers.

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The Irish Contribution to European Scholastic Thought. Edited by
James McEvoy and Michael Dunne. Dublin: Four Courts, 2009.
320 pp. \$70.00 cloth.

I have read this collection of essays with three questions in mind: Who were the main Irish contributors, major and minor, to the European Scholastic tradition? What has been the lasting philosophical value of their contribution? Is there a form of (Irish) Scholasticism that can continue to make a contribution to European thought?

Many of the sixteen scholarly essays that constitute this substantial volume go a long way toward providing a thorough answer to the first question. Some of the essays deal in great detail with the work of the better known Irish thinkers—beginning, of course, with John Scottus Eriugena—while others provide generous introductions to more obscure figures. For this reader, the most informative essays are those on the more minor figures. I was pleased to read the two essays—one by James McEvoy, the other by Declan Lawell—on Thomas of Ireland, an early fourteenth-century interpreter of the Pseudo-Dionysius, who is better known for his anthology, the *Manipulus florum*. In a later essay, McEvoy provides a survey of contemporary sources of

information on other minor Irish scholastics. Having examined earlier lists compiled by Mary Hayes Somers, Richard Sharpe, and others, he extrapolates a working selection of all those who made a contribution “of a broadly Scholastic kind” (114). These essays on both major and minor figures exhibit impressive scholarly and hermeneutical expertise and constitute an important contribution to Irish (and European) intellectual historiography. It is difficult to imagine that any deserving individual Irish-born contributor to the history of Scholasticism has been omitted or given short shrift.

The second question—What has been the lasting philosophical value of the Irish contribution?—is not explicitly addressed by the majority of the contributors to this volume. It is addressed in a general way by James McEvoy in his essay “Values, Limits and Metaphysics,” in which he suggests that one of the dominant characteristics of the philosophy of the medieval period was “the need felt by its practitioners to relate philosophy to religious belief” (280). This is a generous and “liberal” conception of Scholasticism. Those on the outside of the tradition will be inclined to say that it is not to religion in any general sense that medieval philosophers sought to orient themselves but to Christianity in particular. And, moreover, to a form of Christianity that was structuring itself hierarchically around a central authority—an authority that sought to exercise a shaping influence on its intellectuals. Even where a pre-Christian philosophy was adopted in order to help resolve metaphysical issues that arose within Christian belief, it was destined to be adapted in ways that were demonstrably consistent with the developing body of magisterial doctrine. To non-Scholastics, this looks like philosophy playing second fiddle to religious doctrine and dogma, albeit in contexts that were often argumentative and disputatious. Much of the work under discussion in these essays would seem to have more in common with doctrinal theology than with philosophy in either a classical or modern sense. Even where the work under discussion seems impressively philosophical—as in the case of the epistemological reflections of Hugo Cavellus (Hugh MacCaghwell)—it gives the impression of being doctrinally philosophical, as if fearful of departing from the thought of Aristotle, as mediated through Duns Scotus.

The concluding essays in the collection discuss the work of twentieth-century Irish neo-Scholastics and address the question of the future of the Scholastic tradition. The impression made by these essays is that the strength of Irish neo-Scholasticism lies in scholarship, commentary, and transmission rather than in the development of new strands of thought. The main challenge faced by those who wish to make a strong case for the future of Scholasticism is that modern philosophy is predicated on the belief that philosophy should not be compromised by prior commitments to any privileged set of received ideas. Of course, modern philosophers are often

charged with having had more commitments than they acknowledged, but the point is that the *ideology* of self-grounding, presuppositionless thought has been a feature of our modern understanding of what philosophy should be. In his essay on the future of Scholastic thought, Philipp Rosemann challenges this ideology by insisting on the embeddedness of all human thought, philosophical or otherwise. He draws upon those trends in contemporary post-modernism that suggest that there is no realm of pure reason that is “separate from historical, social, political, even physical conditions.” In keeping with this post-modernist position, he argues that “the human being as a whole . . . always reasons from a particular incarnate standpoint.” He sees it as a strength of Scholasticism that it acknowledges its embeddedness in the Christian tradition, and argues that “Scholastic thought has a future only if it remains firmly attached to that tradition” (246). At the same time, he seeks to distance himself from the relativist streak in post-modernism by declaring that full-blown relativism is a deeply unsatisfactory position, and that Scholasticism possesses the intellectual tools that are necessary to put it in its place. He takes only a step or two back from the edge of paradox when he allows that there need be no diametrical opposition “between a certain kind of moderate relativism and the Scholastic commitment to absolute truth” (269).

There are, some of us would wish to say at this point, different kinds and degrees of embeddedness, not all of which are conducive to the best sorts of philosophizing, whatever the post-modernists may say. The question remains whether the kind and degree of embeddedness attributed by Rosemann to Scholasticism will prove conducive to the best philosophical thought of the future.

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Piety and Plague: From Byzantium to the Baroque. Edited by **Franco Mormando and Thomas Worcester.** Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies 78. Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2007. xii + 330 pp. \$55.00 cloth.

The editors point out that while the plague, Bubonic and other such epidemics, have attracted scholarly analysis for the political, economic, demographic, and medical impact it has made, relatively few studies have investigated the connection between the plague and either theological reflection or popular