

(72). This brings us to the heart of Cicero's guiding question concerning the moderation of religion, which is understood as avoiding these two extremes of superstition and impiety. The scepticism of the Academics avoids both of these pitfalls by simply accepting (without affirming or denying) the traditional view of the gods associated with Roman religion.

The central chapters of the book examine the Epicurean, Stoic, and Academic arguments in *De Natura Deorum*, and then Stoic and Academic arguments in *De Divinatione*. Wynne is a thorough and careful reader of these works, going through the fine details of the arguments in Cicero's Latin texts. While in places this can sometimes become laborious when Cicero has himself been clear enough, on the whole Wynne's meticulous approach is only to be applauded.

There are inevitably going to be a few minor points over which one might quibble. For instance, the statement that Stoic *lekta* can only be uttered by the rational (122) would seem to commit the Stoics to the view that children are unable to convey meaning in speech. There are also illuminating moments, such as the parallel between the Stoics' account of their architect god and Vitruvius' definition of the ideal architect (131). Other readers will no doubt come up with their own lists of quibbles and illuminations. But anyone interested in Hellenistic theology or Cicero the philosopher will want to read this book. The same should apply to people interested in Roman religion, for Wynne's central argument is that these works by Cicero are primarily about how Romans ought to think about their own religious practices and whether the Hellenistic schools of philosophy can help them out in this task. Appendices set out Stoic religious terminology in Greek and Latin sources, Epicurean arguments against the theological views of previous philosophers, and a Stoic classification of the gods, all adding to the thoroughness of Wynne's study.

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*Religious Studies* 58 (2022) doi:10.1017/S0034412520000281  
© The Author(s), 2020. Published by Cambridge University Press

David McPherson *Virtue and Meaning: A Neo-Aristotelian Approach*.  
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). Pp. x + 221. £75.00 (Hbk).  
ISBN 9781108477888.

David McPherson's *Virtue and Meaning: A Neo-Aristotelian Approach* (= *V&M*) invites Neo-Aristotelians to contemplate what their enquiries in ethics and philosophical anthropology have overlooked. He claims that the dominant

Neo-Aristotelian approach subscribes to a disenchanted outlook that fails to capture the quest for meaningfulness that is distinctive of the human form of life as the *meaning-seeking animal*. What disenchanted Neo-Aristotelianism misses is our need as meaning-seeking animals to find (a) meaning *in* life, (b) a meaningful *life*, and (c) *the* meaning *of* life. To redress this oversight McPherson draws on the work of Charles Taylor and others to articulate a *re-enchanted* Neo-Aristotelian perspective (3–4). To be clear, ‘seeking re-enchantment does not mean a return to a pre-modern worldview’ (3). It involves ‘*discovering* (or *recovering*) something that is already there to be discovered in the world: namely, non-arbitrary, non-projective normative demands’ (4). These three issues about meaning frame the five chapters of *M&V* and its aim to articulate a re-enchanted Neo-Aristotelian approach to the human form of life.

Chapter 1’s recovery project introduces ‘strong evaluative meanings’ (= *SEM*) as ‘desire-independent normative standard[s]’ (33) that are required to secure (a) meaning *in* life. A ‘strong evaluative meaning . . . involves a special sense of obligation containing a “peculiar” or “mesmeric” force, that is, it places demands upon us’ (40). Chapter 2 deploys *SEMs* to ‘re-enchant our conception of happiness’ (194). McPherson argues that happiness (*eudaimonia*) is to be ‘understood as a normatively higher, nobler, more meaningful mode of life’ (53). So not only do virtuous activities in pursuit of *SEMs* constitute happiness, but happiness itself is ‘understood as [having] a meaningful life’ (47). Virtue, happiness, and strong meanings hang together and all three are exigent for living (b) a meaningful *life*. Chapter 3 argues that the constitutive or strong goods comprising *SEMs* include both the strong goods concerning our own happiness and those concerning *others*: humans and other animals, the environment, and God (41–42). What *SEM* discloses is that ‘human beings are *intrinsically worthy* of concern *for their own sake*’ (80). There is something sacred about humans that endows them with dignity and justifies certain moral absolutes as well as the inherent meaningfulness of all human life – ethical claims McPherson contends the dominant disenchanted Neo-Aristotelians are unable to explain (80–81).

Chapter 4 argues that the *SEMs* constituting (a) meaning *in* life and (b) a meaningful *life* must be ontologically grounded within a cosmic outlook concerning (c) *the* meaning *of* life. Quietism about our moral moorings is unacceptable. McPherson responds to Bernard Williams’s challenge that Aristotle’s cosmic outlook was mistaken and it is a muddle to think our ethical stands require a ‘cosmic or ultimate source of meaning to which we must align our lives’ (115). McPherson argues that Hursthouse’s and McDowell’s responses to Williams are inadequate, then contends that science is not as uniformly pessimistic about teleology as Williams assumes. For some scientists ‘the universe (i.e., the laws of nature, the constants of physics, and the initial conditions of the universe) appears to be *fine-tuned* for the emergence of life and consciousness and ultimately for intelligible beings such as ourselves’ (137). There are theistic and non-theistic explanations for this ‘cosmic or ultimate source of meaning for human life by

which we can find our place in the cosmos' (142). However, theism alone can hold that the cosmos itself expresses the personal moral intentions of God (136–140).

Chapter 5 concludes with an account of the human being as *homo religiosus*, which is adumbrated within McPherson's percipient reflections on the place of spirituality within our lives and his marvellous account of the two forms of contemplation we ought to take leisure to engage in restfully if we are fruitfully to examine, admire, and live out the three facets of a meaningful life. There is much to ponder in this chapter's articulation of existential gratitude and theistic spirituality, and we should be grateful to McPherson for this pearl.

McPherson's *V&M* helps us Neo-Aristotelians understand better the urgent questions and substantive challenges we must address if our stands in ethics and philosophical anthropology are to be vindicated. As a fellow Neo-Aristotelian, I shall register some friendly but critical points concerning McPherson's Neo-Aristotelian approach by focusing on the *SEMs* central to *V&M*'s arguments for the superiority of its approach over rival Neo-Aristotelian approaches. I begin with a synopsis of McPherson's Neo-Aristotelian approaches and *SEMs*.

McPherson distinguishes three Neo-Aristotelian approaches to ethics: ethical naturalism (*n-A1*), naturalism of second nature (*n-A2*), and McPherson's ethics of strong evaluative meanings (*n-A3*). McPherson criticizes *n-A1* for its disenchanting and '*quasi-scientific approach to ethics*', which focuses on a 'third-personal, observational, or disengaged standpoint' (10–11). The point of departure for *n-A1s* (which includes Philippa Foot, Rosalind Hursthouse, and Alasdair MacIntyre) is Elizabeth Anscombe's clarion call in 'Modern Moral Philosophy' to jettison the ersatz 'moral ought' that is a survival from an earlier theistic world-view, and which cannot exist in the totally disenchanting world of non-theists. While McPherson introduces numerous caveats to Anscombe's own view – she is a theist, recognizes human dignity and ethical objectivity, and rejects the 'total disenchantment' canard that we cannot derive an *ought* from an *is* – he nevertheless claims 'that Anscombe is making a *disenchanting* move in suggesting that we should abandon – at least if we aren't theists – a special "moral" sense of "ought" that is supposed to contain some sort of "peculiar" or "mesmeric" force' (8). This *disenchanting* move leads *n-A1s* to overlook the *SEMs* McPherson claims we need to secure (a) meaning *in* life. A mediating re-enchancing step is supplied by John McDowell, the principal exponent of *n-A2*, i.e. the Neo-Aristotelian second-nature approach. Unlike *n-A1s*, 'McDowell does a better job of avoiding the scientism that is prevalent in modern intellectual life' (40; 25). This is because McDowell dons the 'first-personal, participative, or engaged standpoint'. For *n-A1s*, we just observe human moral life from the outside; *n-A1s* adopt an ethologist's perspective – not an ethnologist's – which only notices the ways humans flourish analogously to the flourishing or defective behaviours of other social animals. What this naturalistic approach entirely misses is precisely what *n-A2*'s 'naturalism of second nature' discloses, namely, the

human form of life from *within* the ‘space of reasons’ and the ways we are educated into and inherit a tradition of objective ethical norms. But *n-A2*’s re-enchantment doesn’t go far enough; what is required by McPherson’s lights is re-enchanting the space of reasons to be a ‘space of meanings’ comprised of *SEMs*.

McPherson identifies two features of *SEMs*. First, they are *categorical*: strong goods like the noble, dignity, and virtues are ‘normative for our desires’ whether or not we recognize them. Failure to respond to this normative force is a sign of ‘being ethically deficient’. Second, strong goods are *incommensurable* with weak goods which might be desired (e.g. ‘a particular flavor of ice cream’) but don’t make the normative demands of strong goods because they aren’t of ‘incomparably higher worth’. McPherson argues that *n-A1*s have failed to explain moral absolutes – e.g. prohibitions of murder and torture – because their disenchanting move ‘to do away with a special moral ought’ excludes the very *SEMs* required to explain moral absolutes (31–33). McPherson’s critique focuses on MacIntyre as providing ‘the strongest account of other-regarding virtues’ (80), which nevertheless fails without *SEMs*.

My first issue concerns McPherson’s frequent refrain that other Neo-Aristotelians have *overlooked* what orbits *SEMs*. What is not considered is that Neo-Aristotelians might contend that *SEMs* and other Taylorian theses are either idiomatically or substantively at odds with Neo-Aristotelian conceptions of human nature, virtues, *eudaimonia*, and common goods. I believe this is in fact the case. Indeed, McPherson doesn’t address the common good or natural law precepts, which for MacIntyre form the core of both his account of unconditional precepts and his rejection of arbitrary and frequently incompatible human rights/dignity claims (*Dependent Rational Animals* = *DRA* (1999), ‘Moral Dilemmas’, and Tanner Lectures on lying in Mill and Kant). So McPherson neither addresses MacIntyre’s Thomist-Aristotelianism nor his contention that an Aristotelian common good conception of justice is a rival (*DRA*, 159–160; 119) to the ‘other-regarding’ morality that McPherson misconstrues MacIntyre as defending (83).

Second, McPherson’s demarcation of Neo-Aristotelian approaches should raise eyebrows. The criteria provided for uniting *n-A1*’s ‘third-personal, observational, or disengaged standpoint’ contrasted with *n-A2*’s ‘first-personal, participative, or engaged standpoint’ (10) obfuscate rather than accurately characterize the similarities and dissimilarities among Anscombe, Foot, Hursthouse, MacIntyre, and McDowell. Additionally, as *M&V*’s footnotes and frequent caveats betray, even McPherson is forced to acknowledge that all members of *n-A1* hold some starkly contrasting views, some of which are exceptions to McPherson’s criteria. Consider MacIntyre, who, like Taylor, defends a narrative account of personal identity, one which stresses taking seriously both first and third person perspectives on our reasons for action (*Ethics and the Conflicts of Modernity* = *ECM* (2016): 33–34, 41–61, 72–76, 89, 157–165, 207–224, 231–244; *DRA*, chs 8–13). This is first a practical everyday concern before it becomes a theoretical one (*ECM*, 62–63). MacIntyre’s account is on display in his numerous detailed

engagements with Frankfurt, Sokolowski, McDowell, Williams, as well as his narrative reflections on the first personal desires, practical reasoning, and some conversions in the lives of Edith Stein, Georg Lukacs, Vasily Grossman, C. L. R. James, Sandra Day O'Connor, and Denis Faul.


What agents need, if they are not to be the victims of deception and self-deception is, as I argued earlier, to see and understand themselves as perceptive others see and understand them. What they need is to judge and to act from a first person standpoint informed by a kind of practical self-knowledge that can only be acquired from a third person standpoint. (*ECM*, 157)

So MacIntyre – no less than Taylor, McDowell, and McPherson – unequivocally endorses the criteria for *n-A2*, which McPherson contends *n-A1s* like MacIntyre overlook. This is why McPherson's classifications conflict with more plausible ones like Talbot Brewer's. Brewer unites MacIntyre and Anscombe insofar as they emphasize the practical life of virtue as distinct from and the source for theoretical enquiry and justification, in contrast to Hursthouse and others who conceive 'virtue ethics' as another theoretical position poised to solve an academic debate about 'morality'. McPherson's classifications also obscure how he'd classify the other Neo-Aristotelians he cites. Are Geach, Thompson, Lott, Vogler, Frey, and Brewer all naturalistic *n-A1s*? I fear McPherson's implausible classifications may unintentionally make adversaries out of Neo-Aristotelian allies otherwise amicable to his approach's insights.

Third, fundamental questions remain about *SEMs*. What criteria, if any, anchor *SEMs* in human nature and teleology? Are they normative ends which we value as goods *because* they actually perfect our nature? If not, then *SEMs* seem unhinged from nature and are open to Anscombe's criticisms of the 'moral ought'. Furthermore, if virtues make us conducive to *SEMs'* *categorical* normative demands, and, as McPherson claims, there is 'a plurality of strong goods . . . and . . . they can come into conflict' (67), then *SEMs* seem to entail an anti-Aristotelian rejection of the unity of the virtues, for conflicting virtues and strong goods make competing categorical demands upon us. This entailment, however, bucks against McPherson's response to Williams's challenge that human nature is a mixed bag (116–124).

Finally, I do think McPherson is correct that most Neo-Aristotelians rarely attend directly to those horizons of significance or existential world-views which Jonathan Lear and Charles Taylor have perspicaciously explored. But it's a misdiagnosis to say that *n-A1s* overlook them due to an *exclusively observational* approach, since some make neither error. A better diagnosis points to the limitations of Aristotle's distinction between practical and theoretical reasoning, which doesn't make clear what form of reasoning – especially needed in a secular age – constitutes the examination or disputation of one's basic existential outlook. Herein lies the importance of McPherson's treatment of 'Spirituality [which] is not just practical; it is a practical *life-orientation*' (152). Contemplative spirituality fills this Aristotelian lacuna, for it is, as McPherson details, 'a practical life-orientation

that is *shaped by what is taken to be a self-transcending source of meaning which involves strong normative demands*' (153). On this score in particular McPherson has made a fruitful contribution to our Neo-Aristotelian enquiries.

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*Religious Studies* 58 (2022) doi:10.1017/S003441252000030X  
© The Author(s), 2020. Published by Cambridge University Press

Mikel Burley *A Radical Pluralist Philosophy of Religion: Cross-Cultural, Multireligious, Interdisciplinary*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2020). Pp. 245. £17.99 (Pbk). ISBN 9781350098329.

Mikel Burley's book both unifies and extends his valuable work on diversification in philosophy of religion. Burley is particularly concerned with expanding the subject by drawing from other disciplines, including religious studies and anthropology, and by exploring a wider range of religious forms of life. This attempt to diversify philosophy of religion mirrors a similar trend in other areas of contemporary philosophy, and in Western culture at large. Burley observes that:

As knowledge of multiple religions and cultures becomes ever more readily accessible, and as the recognition grows that parochialism and cultural myopia in philosophy is no longer an option, exploration of alternative methods is urgently needed. (65)

For Burley, this parochialism manifests in two particular problems. First, an 'obsession with a homogenized theism [that] militates against consideration of the full diversity of religions' (2). In his view, philosophy of religion has been devoted almost entirely to issues relevant only to the 'Abrahamic' religions – particularly questions about God – at the expense of other religions. Moreover, he holds that even the Abrahamic religions are homogenized in philosophy of religion, with important differences between them ignored. The second issue is that there has been 'an exclusive preoccupation with matters of beliefs about God – narrowly construed in terms of "propositional attitudes"' (2), where questions concerning the justification of theistic belief are only one philosophically relevant issue for religion. Religious life also consists in active devotion, ritual experiences, ethical judgements, aesthetic appreciation, and community life, all of which create issues of philosophical interest. Burley's aim is to widen the scope of philosophy of religion and, in doing so, overcome these two problems.

The book opens with a three-chapter section largely devoted to methodology in philosophy of religion. The first chapter considers how to respond philosophically