Is the only way forward, then, ‘liberal’ indoctrination for all our children? Charlton’s unexpected and brilliant finale is to describe all those elements of worth in our own culture that are valued even by liberals - education, arts, history, public celebrations, sport, and so on - and show that liberalism only possesses these insofar as they are inherited from Christianity, while physicalism, psychological egoism and competition for honours are far from attractive compared to their Christian alternatives. Future generations, he concludes, might, to the surprise of the liberals, ‘prefer Christianity to secular liberalism not only as being more cheerful and providing more inspiring ideals, but as being more rational and even more liberal’ (p. 177).

A philosophically imaginative book inevitably raises questions. It was unclear to me, for example, whether the suggestion that ‘the bodies of the risen are the risen bodies of Christ himself’ (p. 120) denies the personal individuality of our risen bodies. The chapter on natural law focused on rather familiar points about the debate about *Humanae Vitae* and the theories of Grisez and Finnis and missed the opportunity to apply the implications of Charlton’s own understanding of human nature to personal ethical questions more widely. On multi-culturalism, it would have been fruitful to explore the possibility that ethical systems can be partly shared and partly divergent (an implication of some versions, at least, of natural law theory), which might give more room for circumscribed subsidiarity within cultures and educational systems. Finally, Charlton’s social reading of salvation might benefit from closer engagement with sympathetic readings by New Testament scholars such as N.T. Wright.

MARGARET ATKINS CRSA

VIRTUE AND MEANING: A NEO-ARISTOTELIAN PERSPECTIVE by David McPherson, *Cambridge University Press*, Cambridge, 2020, pp. 230, £75.00, hbk

David McPherson’s *Virtue and Meaning’s* primary contribution is to debates within *Neo-Aristotelian* ethics, but it will also appeal to those who more generally seek to overcome reductive accounts of human conduct. The book bears witness to the variety of contemporary approaches in virtue ethics, and highlights the different starting points and background assumptions of those who work in this tradition.

As the title suggests, the specific issue McPherson examines is the connection between the life of virtue and the manner in which meaning pervades human conduct. Although McPherson characterizes his own understanding of virtue as *Neo-Aristotelian*, his principal targets of criticism in the book are those fellow *Neo-Aristotelians* who follow Aristotle in understanding human agency through analogies with other natural agents.

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He quotes Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse as prime exponents of this naturalistic form of virtue ethics, together with the Alasdair MacIntyre of *Dependent Rational Animals*.

McPherson argues that these naturalistic theories are reductive because they fail to account for the basis of human behaviour in our ability to make sense of the world. Here he turns to Charles Taylor's account of strong evaluation, which Taylor developed to capture the manner in which our evaluation of the world is not a mere projection onto a world of value neutral facts, but goes to the deepest level of reality. Whereas naturalistic Aristotelians, according to McPherson, reduce virtue to its function within an understanding of human beings as social animals, by attending to our strong evaluations we can make sense of human virtue in the fuller context of what we hold most important in life.

McPherson juxtaposes this contrast between a naturalistic perspective and the perspective of strong evaluation onto the distinction between the third person objective perspective of the observer and the engaged first person perspective of the human agent. He argues that third person naturalistic perspective fails to give weight to the distinctive human goods which distinguish us from other animals. The first person perspective of the engaged evaluator provides us with resources, however, to understand why human beings act in ways which make little sense when we reduce human behaviour to the functional descriptions used to understand other animals. Such is the argument developed in Chapter One, and in Chapter Two he develops this argument by contrasting his position with another form of Aristotelian virtue ethics, John McDowell's Wittgenstein-inspired understanding of virtue as second nature. Anyone familiar with McDowell's work will be aware of his arguments against functionalist reductions of human behaviour and his distancing of Aristotelian second nature from first nature. McPherson follows McDowell with this distancing, but whereas McDowell argues against attempts to ground an account of second nature in a wider metaphysical picture, McPherson contends that our strong evaluations make little sense without an account of our place in the cosmos. He develops this argument in Chapter Four where he engages with Bernard William's argument that the world ultimately has no meaning, and in Chapter Five argues that theism is the most plausible candidate to explain why we find meaning in the world.

In Chapter Three McPherson discusses 'Other-Regarding Concerns', arguing that the third person perspective of naturalistic Aristotelianism reduces virtue to the self-interested actions of human beings functionally described. The first person perspective of the engaged evaluator again provides for McPherson the necessary corrective to this reductive view of ethics, as we encounter others as more than biological agents, and come to see that every human being is sacred with a dignity that cannot be reduced to a function within society.

The book is wide in its remit, and McPherson does not shy away from confronting some of the more difficult objections against a theistic

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Neo-Aristotelian account of virtue. It is also clearly structured and looks to balance exegesis with analytical argument. In a work of this size compromises often have to be made and at times the reader is left wishing for further background material on some of the key concepts, such as Taylor's account of strong evaluation and its role within his wider account of the self and its sources within modernity. It is not always clear in the book what is at stake in opting for Taylor's use of Aristotelianism (which seeks to locate a form of Aristotelianism within modernity), as opposed to accounts such as MacIntyre's, which see Aristotle as offering resources to overcome modernity. Borrowing the concept of strong evaluation from Taylor does not commit McPherson to Taylor's wider commitments, but coupled with the gap he places between Aristotelian first and second nature it is hard to see how the cosmic outlook he seeks can overcome the modern dichotomy between a determinate world of physical causality and the free world of human action.

Furthermore, the use of physical analogies in ethics does not necessarily entail the reduction of human conduct to given functions, and the approach MacIntyre develops in *Dependent Rational Animals* is not reductivist, but an attempt to show how human rationality is that of a rational *animal.* Critics can debate whether MacIntyre succeeds and point to tensions they perceive between his narrative and his biological approach to ethics, but his use of biology does not commit him to a reductive functionalist account of human agency. Similarly, although some uses of biology in ethics are open to McPherson's charge that other-regarding concern is reduced to the function the other has for me or society, other versions, such as that developed by Jean Porter, understand human desire in relation to God, self, and neighbour. An engagement with Porter's writings on nature and reason, and more widely with the medieval debate on the ordering of love, would be a valuable addition to McPherson's project. For the time being his work provides some valuable perspectives to the contemporary debate on virtue.

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