

earliest book, a commentary on the *Meno*, to his forthcoming book, a history of natural law, we are told. How does ethics relate to metaphysics? *What sort of wisdom can come from the world?* The book under review is very pleasant to read, written in a simple and elegant style. It is also, if not above all, remarkably broad and enlightening. Published in 1999, it would perhaps already be too old to review, were it not one of those works which should certainly be on the shelves of any decent library, and is bound to become a classic.

A historian of philosophy more than a philosopher, Brague does not defend a particular thesis. Or, more specifically, he seems to be attracted by three different (incompatible) theses and repelled by one. The one that repels him is positivism and, to some extent, the Enlightenment. Sketchy in places, Whitehead, for instance, is not mentioned, his treatment of 'modern' cosmologies (or critiques of) is shorter and slightly more laboured than his treatment of antiquity and the Middle Ages. Brague's allegiance is oddly divided between Leo Strauss, Heidegger and medieval Christianity. Very little is said about Straussians' interpretation of the *Timaeus* as an ironic text, but what is said suggests that a completely different book could have been written (pp.36–8,45). A translator of Strauss, Brague admires him unashamedly, though from some distance. Brague's professorial dissertation (*thèse d'Etat*), *Aristote et la question du monde. Essai sur le contexte cosmologique et anthropologique de l'ontologie* (1988) was a Heideggerian interpretation of Aristotle, and this perspective remains very clearly visible in the conclusion of the book, where Brague mentions the possibility of a Kantian-phenomenological-Heideggerian understanding of the cosmos through an analysis of man's 'worldliness'. Brague belongs to a French Heideggerian and Catholic school, influenced by Jean Beaufret and Pierre Aubenque.

A former editor of the French edition of *Communio*, Brague is a devout Roman Catholic. His ultimate sympathy seems to lie with medieval Christianity, but tinted with melancholy, as if the medieval way of being both a Christian and part of this world, of reconciling Christian humility with man's eminent place in creation, was no longer tenable.

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THE LIFE AND WORKS OF RICHARD FISHACRE OP: Prolegomena to the edition of his Commentary on the *Sentences*, edited by R. James Long and Maura O'Carroll SND *Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Munich, 1999. Pp. 235 + 31 ill., DM75 pbk.

The medieval English Dominican friar Richard Fishacre (d.1248) may have been insular in never leaving his native country, yet he contributed to a new way of studying theology. He was the first in Oxford to write a Commentary on the four books of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, arousing the suspicions of Grosseteste and the interest of Aquinas. Matthew Paris, not someone likely to flatter the friars, was full of praise for Fishacre's learning in theology and other sciences.

In 1998 a colloquium on Fishacre was held at Blackfriars, Oxford, leading to a special issue of commemorative essays on him in *New Blackfriars* 80 (1999), 317-380. Fishacre's thought and career were tentatively outlined, as part of an international project to publish a critical

edition of his Commentary over the coming decade. The text of Book II will be published first, later this year. Two of the scholars involved with the project have published a volume aptly entitled 'Prolegomena', presenting the current state of scholarship on Fishacre and the manuscript material being used for the edition in progress. In fact, most of the volume under review is a minutely detailed description of the 16 manuscripts which contain all or part of the Commentary. More manuscripts may be discovered of course.

In terms of biographical facts, despite painstaking research by Sr Maura O'Carroll, virtually everything about Fishacre remains unknown or uncertain. The editors are (rightly) even more reticent than the colloquium papers as to whether Fishacre ever lived in the second site of the Oxford priory. He was, perhaps, buried there. For now, we can say that Fishacre probably originated in the diocese of Exeter, and date the writing of his Commentary to 1241-5, when he was teaching at Oxford. He also wrote other works and there are surviving sermons. If reliable biographical evidence is almost non-existent, once made accessible his main work will be a quarry and no doubt throw light on the writer as well as the subject matter. Then, more will be clearer about Fishacre and English theology at the time. We need to relate Fishacre to Grosseteste and to Albert the Great, to assess how he obtained and used the texts of classical, Islamic and Jewish thinkers, and to gauge his appropriation of scientific material.

As a theologian, Fishacre seems innovative, wide-ranging, hesitant in tone, unusually receptive of Aristotle, aware of more recent non-Christian thinkers (e.g. Avicenna, Averroes, Maimonides), knowledgeable about canon law, involved in developing scholastic methods. In particular, he made strenuous efforts to relate speculative theology to science. He was also an effective, even imaginative preacher with a strong Marian piety. Chiefly, Fishacre's significance lies in being an important figure at the beginning of the study of theology in a university context. This proved to be a fateful location, especially when linked to the rise of scholasticism and the reliance in the schools on study of Lombard's *Sentences*.

Years ago, each editor of this volume published and studied a sermon by Fishacre, and the simplest way to approach Fishacre, an innovative Dominican friar at a critical juncture in the development of Western theology, is to consider one of his sermons. The sermon is on Mary as an olive tree, and it was edited by Long in *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* (1982), pp. 77-87. Fishacre asks why Mary is compared to a tree and to this kind of tree in particular. His use of a fairly standard image for Mary successfully interweaves reflection on Psalm 51 (52) and several other biblical passages with quotations from Augustine and Anselm, integrating a good deal of scientific knowledge with allusions to the *Salve Regina*. Fishacre was clearly able to preach the Scriptures in a markedly ecclesial context deploying a variety of sources. Once his Commentary on the *Sentences* is edited, we shall see how Fishacre conceived theology in its new academic setting and related it to Scripture and philosophy.

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