

Reviews

FAITHFUL REASON: ESSAYS CATHOLIC AND PHILOSOPHICAL by John Haldane, *Routledge*, London, 2004, Pp. xv+288, £19.99 pbk.

In the course of an essay on Chesterton's philosophy of education, John Haldane quotes Chesterton's argument in favour of explicit attention to one's philosophy: "But man has no alternative, except between being influenced by thought that has been thought out and being influenced by thought that has not been thought out." Well, here is a collection of extremely well thought-out pieces by a philosopher who must rank at or near the very top of his profession in the English-speaking world.

Sadly, so much Catholic thinking of recent years has broken loose of the perceived bonds of Thomist philosophy, only to shackle itself (sometimes unwittingly) to philosophies which distort or even mute important aspects of the Christian tradition. Worse still, theologians interested in a fashionable philosophy are nearly always a fashion or two behind the philosophy departments, so that it is not just prejudice that makes philosophers view the work of theologians with suspicion.

John Haldane is someone who is well placed to offer the Church something else, a philosophy which is at the service of the faith, with one careful eye on both theological and philosophical tradition, and the other on the latest currents in analytical philosophy. Haldane is broadly Thomist, but having been trained as an analytical philosopher, his methods are often those of that tradition. Indeed, Haldane coined the term 'Analytical Thomism' for the brand of philosophy which he favours. He reads Aquinas with understanding but also with a critical eye, neither slavishly following Thomas nor carelessly rejecting him.

Some may be immediately put off by Haldane's analytical method. It was argued by some at the time of *Fides et Ratio* that it was analytical philosophy which was in the firing line when John Paul II criticised some kinds of philosophy for being insufficiently sapiential. If that is so, Haldane is aware of this potential deficiency and rises well to the challenge of attempting to rectify matters.

This book has an astonishing range, with essays on everything from ethics to Marian dogma, from politics and aesthetics to education. It has to be said that the essays vary a little in quality. Haldane is at his best when he is being strictly philosophical. I was hooked from the start by a remark in the introduction that while many philosophers often just ridiculed the pre-Socratics for their weird and mistaken physical views, he had always thought they had got it exactly right in their recognition that nature must have an intelligible structure or we could not understand it. The essays are all riddled with this kind of sparkling insight, and there are many examples too of clear-headed, careful, rigorous thinking through of issues.

The historically-orientated sections, like the very first essay on Thomism and the future of Catholic philosophy, are clearly well-researched and accurate, but without the brilliance and originality of the more conceptual bits. I valued his presenting to the modern reader, often unaware of or even prejudiced against medieval thinking, the rich tradition of that period's ethical ideas, but the essays where he is drawing on his wonderfully broad reading in this field and others to deal with his own questions are better yet.

Some pieces, notably the one about the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, will no doubt strike theologians as odd. This is because this doctrine is normally given a thoroughly theological treatment, whereas Haldane is interested in the philosophical problems it raises. So he asks, for example: if Mary is alive in a bodily way, where is

her body? Bodies occupy space; which space is Mary's body occupying now? Could we travel there? That some theologians would think of the question as somewhat strange only shows their estrangement from a certain kind of philosophy. It is worth noting in this regard that Herbert McCabe's understanding of what our risen bodies will be like, that human bodies are not ultimately about being in place but our mode of presence to and communication with others, is quite clearly formulated with these kinds of concerns in mind.

I particularly enjoyed the section on education, dealing with Chesterton's philosophy of education, as well as giving reflections on Catholic identity and spirituality within schools. The question of whether we should have Catholic schools and what they should be like is a perfect example of what Chesterton is talking about in the quote given above. Everyone has his view on the issue, too often founded on unexamined and even unrecognised assumptions, thinking which has not been thought out. To be led through Haldane's thinking out of the knot of issues which relate to the question is to be presented with a model for our own resolution of it.

This collection, then, is very valuable, not just for the particular insights which Haldane offers, and they are brilliant, but for a wonderful example of a Catholic commitment to hard and clear thinking, an excellent example of the attempt to integrate faith and reason in a way which is respectful of both.

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HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE IMAGE OF GOD by Roger Ruston, *SCM*, London, 2004, pp. vii+312, £18.99 pbk.

This is a carefully researched and judiciously argued contribution to an important area of political theology and theological ethics. By taking an historical approach it grounds the discussion in particular situations and authors, and is therefore more interesting than a generalised treatment of the subject would be.

The two main areas dealt with are the contributions of some Spanish Dominicans – notably Vitoria and Las Casas – to the debate around the colonisation (to use a very mild word) of Central and Southern America; and the contribution of John Locke to the debate on natural rights in North America and late Stuart England a century later.

The Spanish Dominicans argued in an explicitly theological manner that the Indians who had been conquered and expropriated – and excoriated for their barbarism – by the Christian colonists were in God's image and therefore endowed with human rights even if they refused to turn from their gods and accept the Christian Gospel. Ruston plots painstakingly the discussion of issues of possession and self-determination, of just war and slavery, and of what counts as Christian civilization. The relevance of the whole debate to present concerns is made explicit in the brilliant introductory paragraph to the section on Salamanca and Francisco de Vitoria, where he writes of the world's one superpower which aggressively exports its culture to tropical countries which it ransacks for their raw materials, developing a doctrine of pre-emptive strike against the enemies of Christendom etc. etc.; and you suddenly realize that he is describing, not what you thought, but 16th century Spain.

The chapters on Locke are usefully revisionist, in the sense that they correct the picture of Locke as simply a founding father of possessive individualism, and indicate that he stood in a genuinely theological tradition which saw the earth as belonging in common to humanity, and government as being for the good of the people, not the wishes of a tyrant. What made him more of a capitalist hero is that he thought that once a person had started making profitable use of what had been common land, that person had a right to possession; this meant that the colonists of North America had the right to dispossess the Indians who roamed over the land hunting and therefore could not be said to put it to any profitable use. That clash of cultures is, again, hugely relevant to the contemporary world.