

the goal of fallen angels is human imitation of demonic pride, engagement in false religion and the promotion of false religion for the sake of entrapping people in pride.

Overall, this study is an excellent contribution to Augustine's demonology. Not only is Wiebe clear in his aims and limits, but he opens up a number of possible avenues for further work. He concludes by challenging contemporary readers not to dismiss Augustine's theology of the demonic but to consider the implications of exposing and defeating false gods today. While this is primarily historical study, Wiebe's deft engagement with contemporary thought positions this book as valuable reading not only for scholars of Augustine or early Christian demonology, but for anyone thinking through how personified forms of evil might fit into theological systems.

doi:10.1017/S003693062300011X

## Kate Jackson-Meyer, *Tragic Dilemmas in Christian Ethics*

(Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2022),  
pp. xi + 195. \$49.95

D. Stephen Long

Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX, USA ([sdlong@mail.smu.edu](mailto:sdlong@mail.smu.edu))

Kate Jackson-Meyer incorporates tragic dilemmas, a species of moral dilemmas in which overlapping obligations cannot all be fulfilled, into Christian ethics. She argues that if 'ought implies can', as much moral philosophy and theology suggests, then tragic dilemmas become invisible. While the 'unmet obligation' appears to dissolve, it remains generating tragedy in the world and marring the agent. This argument is not new and would find family resemblances in Niebuhrian realism, supreme emergencies and the dirty hands literature. What is new is her recognition that the consequences of the unmet obligations cannot simply be waved away by telling persons burdened by them, 'Do not worry. You were not culpable'. The brokenness brought about by the act requires healing. Her work makes a valuable contribution by showing what that healing looks like.

The work begins with a 'portraiture' of numerous tragic dilemmas such as resource allocation during the COVID-19 pandemic, choosing one's own life over their infant in a concentration camp or a famine, end-of-life decisions, and drone and combat warfare. Jackson-Meyer sketches these dilemmas inviting readers to see their complexity. She does not resolve them or offer normative prescriptions but focuses a 'theological ethical lens' to illumine the lack of easy resolutions. These portraitures frame the argument; she alludes to them throughout the work.

The first chapter lays out the central philosophical and theological issues with moral and tragic dilemmas. Jackson-Meyer demonstrates an admirable knowledge of the philosophical literature on moral dilemmas, tracing their origins from Sophocles and Plato into modern and contemporary moral philosophers. Her analysis is indebted to Lisa Tessman's account of 'burdened virtues', where the 'action guidance' for virtue

is untethered from 'action assessment'. The two are usually correlated in virtue ethics because guidance for virtue assesses its pursuit as contributing to a good life. Yet virtues at times bring burdens and 'mar' the agent rather than contributing to their flourishing. A tragic dilemma results. Unlike a moral dilemma where agents do something wrong, a tragic dilemma 'involves a moral transgression that causes great harms or mars an agent's life even when one acts in the best way possible' (p. 27). After discussing how moral philosophers resolve moral conflicts, Jackson-Meyer turns to the theological tradition and how it handles, or fails to, tragic dilemmas.

The Augustinian and Thomistic traditions she examines come close to recognising tragic dilemmas, but miss a full portrait of them. Augustine comes close in his discussion of a wise judge who must torture; such a judge, says Augustine, is 'guiltless' and 'unhappy'. Is this an example of a tragic dilemma? The answer depends on whether Augustine holds to a version of 'ought implies can'. If so, then the judge has no unfulfilled moral obligation. Jackson-Meyer finds Augustine ambiguous on this point, but Augustinian 'lament' points in the right direction. She also notes contradictions in Augustine's teaching on war and sex where war can be participated in without the 'lust of power', but sex seldom can. Incorporating an ethics of tragic dilemmas would have assisted him in his analysis. She cites Paul Ramsey's 'deferred repentance' as another example of 'tracking' tragic dilemmas within the Augustinian tradition.

Aquinas has a more sophisticated 'strategy' to avoid tragic dilemmas through 'the hierarchy of good, the principle of double effect, the principle of lesser evil, or the notion of intrinsic evil' (p. 82). Each of these is discussed and Jackson-Meyer concludes that they are inadequate to attend well to tragic dilemmas. She finds promise in Thomas' 'mixed action' coupled with the 'repugnance of the will'. A mixed action, one that is not sinful, can be either praised or blamed depending on its orientation to the good. Coupled with the 'repugnance of the will' towards a foreseen consequence of an intended action, Jackson-Meyer points to a way Thomism could incorporate tragic dilemmas.

The chapters on Augustine and Aquinas show how tragic dilemmas haunt the theological tradition and at the same time have not yet led to a sufficient proposal to address them. Chapter four offers Jackson-Meyer's own proposal, in which she draws upon Lisa Tessman's distinction between 'negotiable' and 'non-negotiable' obligations, but sets them within the context of Christian theology rather than moral constructivism. Non-negotiable moral obligations are grounded in others' 'sacred humanity'. To injure it, even by a good act, might diminish culpability but still 'mars' the agent, constituting a moral dilemma that is also tragic. Repugnance of the will diminishes culpability, but lament is still necessary. Jackson-Meyer's proposal is much richer than what I can outline here. It leads to her fruitful discussion of 'Christian approaches to healing' in her final chapter that includes ten concrete considerations that could be used to 'offer guidance' as to how congregations might respond to tragic dilemmas such as soldiers returning from war.

Jackson-Meyer's work accomplishes something difficult to do; it sheds new light on a much-discussed subject matter. Questions remain, of course. Not everyone will agree with her judgments as to what constitutes a tragic dilemma. The use of drone warfare, for instance, might require a context other than that of tragedy. Yet her work invites such further discussion while at the same time clarifying the difficulty of acting well in a broken world. It is a work well worth reading and pondering, by oneself and even more with others.