

winning souls, they failed, as “the conversion rates among patients in mission hospitals was extremely low,” perhaps because “the missionaries did not integrate their religious teachings into medical healing” (170).

The author sees diversity and constant change as the most consistent factors in the interplay between medicine and religion.

Medicine and religion have always interacted, and continue to do so, but always in a state of flux and under a wide variety of contending influences.

BRIAN WELTER

Brian Welter has degrees in history and theology, and teaches English in Taiwan.

***Living the Good Life:
A Beginner's Thomistic Ethics***

by Steven J. Jensen

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The interplay among reason, the will, and the emotions, including the emotions of desire and pleasure, forms the crux of Steven Jensen's *Living the Good Life*, as the author considers right conscience and happiness; deterministic behaviorism; the virtues; utilitarianism, justice, and the common good; and wisdom and knowledge. Jensen, an associate professor of philosophy at the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas, addresses current issues, such as the focus on values, and why values-talk falls so short of Thomistic ethics. By avoiding anecdotes and current political or social issues, the author ensures that the book will not date quickly. Nor does he fall into abstraction, as he illustrates his points with everyday examples such as the temptation not to return an extra twenty dollars that a bank clerk accidentally gives us.

Jensen dismisses any notions of ethics as a series of dos and don'ts, and develops the positive side that pushes us to be *for* something. This makes the author's application of ethics to psychology much more forceful and even inspirational, exemplified in the need to set the right targets in life: “Yet haven't we all experienced disappointment when we have achieved our dearest goals? Haven't we pursued some object as if it would make us happy, worked hard to achieve it, and yet when finally we attained it we were disillusioned?” (187). Trying to satisfy our appetite

leads to aiming for the wrong objectives: “Our desires are not magical; they do not confer upon the thing desired the ability to make us happy. Our desires are as fallible as anything else about us” (187). We must look for fulfillment in something higher than the gratification of pleasure.

Despite this positive, even inspirational side, Jensen never shies away from confronting contemporary society's major battles over good and evil, thereby showing the relevance and timeliness of St. Thomas Aquinas. The saint's reason-based ethics provide a genuine voice for liberty. Instead of contradicting or competing with our freedom, Thomistic ethics supports it, the author argues, as he contrasts liberty to libertinage. The absolute truth can set us free from enslavement to our passions and other emotions.

Jensen treads profitably into psychology, showing how contemporary talk of values amounts to the attempt to rationalize choices that fall short of the truly reasonable and virtuous moral life. Even when sinning, we need to convince ourselves we are acting well, because ultimately we know that good and bad are not relative or based on mere opinion. Thomistic ethics disregards that rationalization and hinges on the practice of right reason. Here again, though, the author must consider the contemporary understanding of reason, which greatly differs from the Thomistic one.

The author spends much of the book discussing reason's vocation. Ethics does not push us to follow a set of rules, but orients us towards human fulfillment. The unjust and the pleasure-seekers fail to find fulfillment. "An ethical life, then, will be a life of realizing our human capacities" (13), Jensen writes.

The reasonable life demands that we acknowledge a hierarchy of ethical goods and then choose accordingly. The author spends much time dispelling common assumptions about pleasure which, as a lower-level emotion, often misleads our will. Following reason ultimately fulfills us where pleasure frustrates us. Yet again, Jensen aims for something deeper and richer than simply a battle of the will. Limiting ethics to this struggle turns it into simple rule-following, repression, and restriction, reiterating the arguments of ethical relativists.

Jensen addresses this concern directly. By consciously following reason even when our emotions pull our will in a lower direction, we gradually change our desires and emotions as we develop virtue. At some point in the ethical life, our emotions, particularly our desires, begin to want the same higher, more fulfilling ethical good that our reason does. Aquinas shows how the virtuous no longer have an inner pull between temptation and doing good, so that opting for the good simply expresses an inner, virtue-based integration. Obviously, this view has much to offer psychology, as Jensen repeatedly notes. More than that, those open to a Catholic life will find inspiration in these words of moral excellence.

Clearly, then, readers are treated to a different perspective on ethics than the secular-values-centered one, with the author wondering "which of the following two questions best hits upon the topic of ethics: (1) 'Which actions are just and which actions are unjust?' or (2) 'Which actions are humanly fulfilling and which are not fulfilling?'" (10). The author notes that many people have separated these two issues, even though the Thomistic viewpoint regards them as one and the same.

Jensen relates wrong desires to the disordered imagination: "Aquinas says that we

can always imagine something satisfying us. This imagination gives rise to desire. When the reality is achieved, however, we can no longer rely upon imagination but are faced with the reality, which does not satisfy. As a result, we go searching for more in our imagination" (189). We must continually "puff up" our imagination; our pleasure-impulse never stops expanding. It is as if this treadmill feeds the pleasure instinct for more and more.

Unfortunately, the author spends only a minimal part of the discussion here. A deeper look at the imagination would have added to Jensen's interplay between ethics and psychology and would have been timely, given the onslaught of consumerism's frequently pornographic, violent, and otherwise anti-Christian images.

The overall logic of the book leads the author to state, "The very thing we want out of life is found in ethics" (183). This speaks to the modern culture's misunderstanding of ethics and the resulting values-oriented confusion. In a way, *Living the Good Life* echoes the late English Catholic Stratford Caldecott's writings on beauty, since Thomistic ethics promote a kind of beauty. Caldecott in *Beauty for Truth's Sake* also addresses common misunderstandings about reason in his discussion regarding faith and reason: "Freedom and knowledge go together. In order to be free, we must *know*. But religious believers know things *both* by reason *and* by faith. . . . Their relationship is one of reciprocal illumination." Like Jensen, Caldecott felt the need to rebuild the Catholic understanding of reason and freedom.

Ethics provides beauty by way of the harmony and integration it brings about, just as beautiful cathedrals or religious art express the harmony and beauty of faith. Jensen writes convincingly that Thomism can help contemporary society out of its ugliness and moral confusion.

Perhaps Protestants will consign much of this to a medieval dustbin, for the following seems to counter a strict reliance on grace: "Happiness is indeed found in God alone, but human happiness is found in possessing God, which we do through our activities, primarily through our activities of knowing

and loving. Only by living a fully human life, a life of reason and the virtues, do we truly reflect God's good and so share in it, for only then do we ourselves become good" (196). Jensen's Aquinas seems to offer limited room for grace: "By living out the life of reason we come to possess God in this life. As Aristotle says, we must develop that divine element within us" (196).

The lack of scriptural references, the focus on Aquinas the philosopher apart from Aquinas the theologian, and the multiple references to Aristotle might disappoint some readers. By focusing on Aristotle and on Plato's dialog in the *Republic* between Thrasymachus and Glaucon, the author seems to draw more on classics scholarship than on Christian ethics.

Yet for those who accept this approach, the reference to the Greeks has the heartening benefit of offering us the possibility of moral excellence. Excellence in all its forms is a forgotten virtue in our society, which so values the victim.

Like any good teacher, Jensen uses mistakes as his key teaching points. In this way, he strikes at the heart of the *Kulturkampf*—that

is, current attempts by the state to control the Church. He speaks to its liberal representatives in the manner of Pope St. John Paul II, urging us not to compromise with them while at the same time treating their concerns as legitimate, inviting them to see Christ and his Church as the answer and not the obstacle. Jensen thus addresses at length the false division between, on the one hand, doing what is morally right according to the natural law and to Christian tradition and, on the other, doing with what feels good. The morally correct ultimately feels good because it is more fulfilling. The life of pleasure sets us up for disappointment, and the author shows us why. He does not shy away from pointing to secular society's painful failures: "Why are suicides so prevalent; why is everyone running off to psychological treatment; and why do we always need more, more, more?" (198–199).

In addressing contemporary issues with Thomistic ethics, Jensen shows the timelessness of the saint's perspective.

BRIAN WELTER

Brian Welter has degrees in history and theology, and teaches English in Taiwan.

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