

George, Robert P. ed. *Natural Law and Moral Inquiry: Ethics, Metaphysics, and Politics in the Work of Germain Grisez.* Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press; 1998. 281 pp.

This book offers a critical assessment of the moral philosophy and theology of Germain Grisez. It contains eight original essays which discuss different aspects of his work, a brief response to the essays by Grisez and Joseph Boyle, Jr., and an afterword by Russell Shaw which provides an engaging overview of Grisez's life and thought. The book's contributors include critics as well as admirers of Grisez's ideas on practical reasoning and morality. The result is that the reader not only comes to a better understanding of what is distinctive about Grisez's moral theory, but also where the theory is vulnerable and in need of further development.

The essays are of consistently high quality. They fall into three main categories: ethics, metaphysics, and politics. The essays on ethics are by William E. May, Benedict M. Ashley, O.P., Ralph McInerny, and Edward C. Vacek, S.J. May presents a clear and sympathetic exposition of Grisez's recent moral thought, emphasizing in particular Grisez's work on deriving specific moral norms from the first principles of natural law. Ashley, by contrast, focuses on the extent to which Grisez has grounded his moral theory in Scripture. He argues that Grisez has not satisfactorily done this; and he offers a brief proposal of his own for working out a biblical foundation for a revised moral theology. McInerny takes issue with Grisez's discussion of the relationship between practical and theoretical reasoning. He defends the neoscholastic view that "we use the same faculty in theoretical and practical matters and that there is more of a continuum than an abrupt break between them." By far the most critical essay in the book is by Vacek. Taking Grisez's treatment of contraception as his topic, Vacek criticizes the action theory that lies at the

center of Grisez's moral theory. Vacek's criticism and Grisez and Boyle's response to it raise important questions that I shall return to shortly.

The essays on metaphysics are by Kevin L. Flannery, S.J., and Patrick Lee. Flannery's extremely ambitious essay sets out to provide a 'proof' of Aquinas's first principle of practical reason ("good is to be done and pursued and evil is to be avoided") that is modeled on Aristotle's demonstration of the principle of noncontradiction. He then discusses some of the implications of this proof and relates them to Grisez's important self-referential argument for metaphysical free choice. In a similar vein, Lee presents an argument designed to strengthen an important thesis held by Grisez. This is the thesis that bodily life is an essential component of the human person. As Lee makes clear, this thesis bears importantly on a number of ethical issues such as abortion and euthanasia.

The two essays which directly address political topics are by John Finnis and Gerard V. Bradley. Finnis presents a masterful and provocative interpretation of Aquinas's understanding of the common good. According to Finnis, Aquinas distinguishes between "an all-inclusive common good" and the "specifically political common good" of the state. The former includes the flourishing and all-around virtue of every member of the political community, whereas the latter concerns only goods that are intrinsically interpersonal, such as justice and peace. Importantly, Finnis argues, for Aquinas it is only this specifically political common good that is rightly the concern of government and law. In short, it is not the role of political authorities to inculcate the all-around virtue of their subjects. Their role is limited to safeguarding and promoting peace and justice. As Finnis observes, this brings Aquinas's position close to the classical liberal position on the proper ends of political authority. The classical liberal position not only defends principled limits on political authority, but

also views the political common good as instrumental to the well being of its members. By and large, Finnis believes this to be true of Aquinas's position as well. In his terminology, Aquinas's "specially political common good" is, for the most part, instrumental to the "all-inclusive common good" of the state.

Whether or not Finnis's interpretation ultimately succeeds, he develops an impressive case for it, and scholars interested in Aquinas's political thought will need to take his arguments seriously. As Finnis further points out, his interpretation of Aquinas brings Aquinas much closer to modern Church teachings, as well as to Grisez's own arguments, about the limits of political authority and the instrumental character of the political common good.

Bradley's topic is capital punishment. He criticizes Grisez's argument that capital punishment necessarily involves intentional killing. To defeat this argument, Bradley only needs to identify one instance in which capital punishment would not violate the norm against intentional killing. He suggests that developing societies might reasonably decide not to expend scarce resources on prisons. Without prisons or other alternative punishments they might reasonably choose to execute criminals without intending to kill them. In this kind of situation, in choosing to carry out a death sentence, the intention of those in authority could be to defend society against a criminal or to restore justice. This intention, or so Bradley suggests, need not include the choice to kill the criminal and so need not violate the norm against intentional killing.

In a different way, Bradley's paper raises the same worry that Vacek expresses about Grisez's theory of action. Whether one is analyzing the act of contraception or the act of imposing death on a criminal, how can one identify the *necessary* content of the intention of those who are acting? This question is different from the first-person question of whether it is ever morally permissible to intend to impede conception or to intend to kill. If one holds that

contraception or capital punishment is always morally wrong, then one needs to explain why it is not possible to do these acts without the intention that makes them morally impermissible.

In their response to Bradley and Vacek, Grisez and Boyle conspicuously fail to provide such an explanation. Instead, they concede that sometimes identifying the object of a deliberate action or omission "is not always easy." This is not helpful, for what is in question is not the ease or difficulty of identifying the intention of a deliberate choice, but rather the method of identifying the necessary intention of a deliberate choice when there seem to be different possibilities. The state officials who carry out a death sentence on a criminal may be said to be acting with the intention to kill the criminal as a means for restoring justice, or they may be said to be acting with the intention to restore justice by taking measures that result in the criminal's death. To hold that capital punishment is always morally impermissible, one needs to provide a method or a principled basis for selecting the former characterization over the latter. This is something that Grisez and Boyle fail to do.

This problem aside, this volume of papers admirably succeeds in revealing the subtlety, power, and depth of Grisez's moral theology. For this reason, *Natural Law and Moral Inquiry* will be a valuable resource both for those who wish to deepen their understanding of Grisez's philosophical achievement and for neoscholastic and proportionalist Catholic thinkers who wish to come to terms with his formidable challenge to their views.

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