What can contemporary political science, which is overwhelmingly secular in its assumptions and interests, learn from Catholicism? This is the question to which *Toward the Common Good* is addressed. This book, a collection of essays by Catholic scholars, offers a survey of contemporary political science as well as a critique of that discipline in light of Catholic principles, especially the Church’s social teaching. The volume is organized around the most important sub-disciplines in political science, and so it includes treatments of political theory (with separate chapters by Steven J. Brust and Robert P. Hunt), American politics (Ryan J. Barielleaux), public administration (John A. Corso), comparative politics (Anthony R. Brunello), and international relations (with separate chapters by Andrew Essig and volume editor Robert F. Gorman, who also contributes the work’s introduction).

The sprawling nature of the discipline—the great scope of its concerns and methods—is reflected even in this relatively brief treatment. Accordingly, it is impossible in a review to do full justice to all of the ideas developed by the various contributors. One can, however, give a sense of the most important recurring and unifying themes of the collection, which reveal the deficiencies of contemporary political science and how they might be remedied or ameliorated if political scientists would attend sympathetically to the Catholic understanding of man and society.

As a number of the contributors observe, contemporary political science is still greatly influenced by the “behavioral revolution” and its aspiration to model the study of politics on modern science. The most ambitious of the proponents of this approach have hoped that political science might achieve the precision and objectivity of, say, scientific physics. Such an approach to the study of politics, however, involves important costs. While scientific studies of politics yield important information and reveal noteworthy patterns of behavior, a commitment to this approach as the sole correct way to understand political phenomena creates serious problems. Modern science is value-neutral. It seeks a kind of objectivity linked to the claim that reason or science can make no moral judgments. Such an approach to the study of politics is deeply problematic because, as *Toward the Common Good* frequently reminds us, the most important political questions are inevitably moral questions. Citizens and political leaders are constantly preoccupied with figuring out what set of policies
are right, decent, or just. A political science that treats such concepts as sound and fury signifying nothing, or at best as mere expressions of emotions that are incapable of reasonable evaluation, has nothing to say about the issues that most concern the very people who are actually doing politics. Thus contemporary political science is dominated by studies that are frankly irrelevant to the real practice of politics.

The Catholic intellectual tradition tells us that human beings are by nature moral animals, and it is therefore not surprising that many political scientists are incapable of maintaining the discipline of moral neutrality that they are told their “science” demands. They end up incorporating moral judgments into their work. Because of the scientific positivism that has so deeply influenced the discipline, however, oftentimes these morally aware political scientists are unable to integrate morality into their scholarship in a way that is helpful or reasonable. As Ryan Barilleaux notes in his chapter on the study of American politics, too many political scientists simply “editorialize.” Since they do not think that reason can make moral judgments, but since they see that moral questions are inseparable from politics, they moralize in ways that are not rational but simply assertive: they assume certain (usually trendy) positions (like environmentalism or radical egalitarianism) without even trying to subject them to rational scrutiny. Here is where familiarity with the Catholic tradition would be especially helpful to political scientists. An important part of that tradition is “moral realism,” or the conviction that moral distinctions are inherent in the nature of things and knowable by reason. A return to this natural law perspective would permit political scientists to appreciate both the ends and means of political life, and to offer a reasonable and morally responsible account of political life.

Apart from moral obtuseness, the aspiration to be scientific also tends to obscure the very empirical phenomena in which contemporary political scientists are so interested. The desire for scientific precision and predictability often leads to an oversimplification of human nature. Men are presented, for example, only as self-interested individuals, or as members of selfishly motivated classes, or as organized into states that seek nothing but power, because the simplicity of such motivations makes human behavior more intelligible and predictable, more subject to elegant theoretical models. Again, however, the Catholic tradition would remind us that human nature is more complicated than such theories realize, that it includes moral, sociable, and religious components. If, for example, students of comparative politics would learn from the Church’s more expansive account of human nature, they might not be so insistent, contrary to
much evidence, that economic development will necessarily lead to secularization and the decline of religious belief and practice.

Again, such reflections are meant to illustrate some of the lines of argument present in this fine book, without claiming to exhaust the rich variety of themes and observations its contributors have to offer. Toward the Common Good will be useful to both Catholic and non-Catholic scholars. The former will find in it many useful suggestions for how they might integrate the Catholic intellectual tradition into their own professional studies. The latter will learn that there is nothing to be feared and much to be gained from returning once again to the moral realism of which the Church is still the most persistent and persuasive teacher. And for those teachers who wish not only to survey political science as it is currently practiced but also to invite students to critical reflection on its limitations, the book would make a useful addition to the reading list for an undergraduate introduction to political science course or a graduate scope and methods course.

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This two-volume work is a must-read collection. The first volume includes forty-five writings by Stephen Krason over the past twenty-five years. Some of the pieces were written specifically for this work. The second volume consists of twenty-three documents ranging from encyclicals, court opinions, ancient and American classics, and other writings cited in volume one.

Volume one includes a brief six-page preface that outlines the three parts to the book and previews the specific chapters. All of the topics could be described as “must-reading” (or rereading if one has had the good fortune of coming across them previously). My inclination is to recommend beginning with the last (forty-paged) chapter (“Thoughts on Basic Questions and Fundamental Change in American Culture and Political Life”) since it gives detailed integrative reference to many of the chapters, making the study of all chapters that much more compelling. Essential ele-