



Editorial preface

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Published online: 13 November 2019
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In the first essay in this issue, Matthew Walz claims that being religious is the highest human calling. His project is to explain what it means to be religious. He takes his cues from Thomas Aquinas and John Henry Newman. His argument is that this calling is addressed to the will and to the heart. It is Aquinas that helps us to see that the religious life calls our will into the service of justice. And for Walz, following Aquinas, justice is in large part a matter of getting and giving what is deserved. When applied to the religious life, the call to justice is met in performing actions that seek to repay God, however imperfectly, for the gift of creation. As Walz might say, the religious life sees that such a just repayment to God is meet, proper and our bounden duty.

But, for Walz, this is not the whole story. The high calling of the religious life is not only addressed to the will, but also to the heart. It is Newman who teaches us that to be religious, one must develop an ear attuned to hearing the inward whisperings of God. Here we meet with the importance of spiritual knowledge, what we might call a knowledge of the heart. It is this aspect of being religious that makes it into what Walz calls a personal disposition. This spiritual knowledge that establishes an intimacy with God is necessary in order to be religious.

Because we need both will and spiritual knowledge to answer the high calling of being religious, Walz thinks that we need to listen to both Aquinas and to Newman.

In an intriguing article, Hamid Vahid, discusses what Plantinga calls “the noetic (ill) effect of sin” in theistic belief formation. Following Calvin, Plantinga thinks that human beings are vested with a “sensus divinitatis” (SD), that is, a faculty for knowing God. This faculty is manifested as an inward stirring that recognizes signs (like beauty and order in nature) as evidence warranting theistic belief. Sin however can block this faculty by causing a person to ignore or dismiss the stirring of SD. The stirrings are there, fully and properly functioning, but just ignored. Sin can distract us, that is, keep us from attending to these inward stirring and thus keep us from seeing the “signs” that point to God’s existence; as such, sin can prevent the formation of theistic belief.

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Vahid thinks that Plantinga's view fails to specify a mechanism that accounts for how sin blocks theistic belief formation. He suggests such a mechanism and calls it a "dispositional framework." On this view, SD does not function as it should because it is interrupted by environmental antidotes and masks that interfere with its proper functioning. On the dispositional view, sin blocks SD from functioning properly; in Plantinga's view, sin blocks an otherwise properly functioning SD by causing us to ignore it. Although Vahid offers a view of sin that threatens to interrupt rather than merely ignore SD, it is possible that Plantinga might welcome this as a friendly amendment to his own view.

In the next essay, we return to Aquinas. Brandon Dahm offers a response to Mark Murphy's book *An Essay on Divine Authority*. In contrast to Murphy's contention that God does not have practical authority over rational agents, Dahm makes the argument that God does have such authority. Murphy objects to the idea that God has practical authority over his creatures by rejecting the conclusion of Aquinas' argument from justice. According to Aquinas, God is due honor for his excellence and justice requires that we bestow this honor. And it seems to follow that honoring God requires that we accept God's practical authority over us, that is, that we accept God's rules as commands. Murphy rejects this conclusion on the grounds that merely imposing rules is not the same as commanding them. As such, God does not have practical authority over the rational agents he created. Dahm thinks this is a mistake because it does not acknowledge God as a perfect rule-imposer. When this is clear, Aquinas is shown to be right in claiming that God has practical authority over his rational creatures; as a perfect rule-imposer, God's imposition of rules is tantamount to issuing commands.

Mark Murphy's work is again in play in the final article in this issue. Here the belief that Jesus was crucified for our sins, the doctrine of penal substitution, is investigated. Murphy has argued that the doctrine is incoherent. After discussing Murphy's argument, Gus Labooy and Maarten Wisse turn to reformed scholasticism and the work of Scotus to defend what they call an equivocal concept of penal substitution that is not incoherent.

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