

for all theologians and philosophers who want a thorough and comprehensive introduction to Heidegger and theology.

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SCHOLASTIC METAPHYSICS: A CONTEMPORARY INTRODUCTION by Edward Feser, *Heusenstamm, Germany [Editiones Scholasticae], 2014, pp. 302, \$24.95, pbk*

The grip of scientism, that is the belief that science and only science can give us objective knowledge, continues to exercise a decisive influence on both academics and non-academics. The limitations and inconsistencies of scientism are attested to in the works of philosophers as influential and varied as Wittgenstein, Pieper and Habermas. In the prolegomenon of his book *Scholastic Metaphysics* Edward Feser marshals arguments against scientism and asks why, in the face of so many difficulties, are: ‘so many intelligent people drawn to it?’ Feser paraphrases Wittgenstein’s famous remark when he writes: ‘a picture holds them captive’ (p. 21) and argues that the ‘unparalleled predictive and technological successes of modern science’ (p. 21) has led many to ‘infer that scientism must be true, and that anything that follows from scientism – however fantastic or even seemingly incoherent – must also be true’ (p. 21).

Wittgenstein’s actual saying is that: ‘a picture held us captive’ and refers to his own search for the general form of the proposition, which he came to see as an example of the philosopher’s illness in creating special metaphysical uses of words, an illness he sought to remedy by returning our words to their ordinary use. This is not the remedy which Feser seeks to apply to scientism. Rather, following David Oderberg, he argues that there is no such thing as: “ordinary language” hermetically sealed off from philosophical uses of language and to which the latter must answer’ (pp. 221–222). Here Feser refers to the Thomistic use of analogy in understanding the relationship between philosophical and other uses of language. It is to scholastic metaphysics, and to the writings of St Thomas Aquinas in particular, that Feser turns in setting forth a more adequate way of understanding the world than that provided by modern mathematical physical science.

In order to carry out this task Feser begins by outlining the limits of his enquiry. This is not a work on Scholastic theology, and although he will use insights from the Neoplatonic tradition these are to be seen as incorporated into the Aristotelianism he sees as dominant in the works of the scholastics (p. 6). It is not a historical study, and when Feser refers to philosophical differences between scholastics his purpose in doing so is in bringing Scholastic metaphysics into conversation with contemporary metaphysics. His arguments rest on the truths contained in St Thomas’s metaphysics as they have been developed by commentators, particularly the authors of ‘long-neglected twentieth century manuals of Scholastic philosophy’ (p. 7). The contemporary partners Feser chooses to converse with are analytical philosophers, more specifically (although not exclusively) those who have in recent years developed an analysis of traditional metaphysical topics on Aristotelian lines.

This engagement with contemporary philosophy ensures that the book is more than just an introduction which rehearses the arguments of others. Feser demonstrates a mastery of both the Scholastic tradition he draws upon and the writings of contemporary thinkers, which he uses to provide telling and insightful analyses of key metaphysical notions. All the same it is an introductory text and Feser

combines the rare ability to write in the organised and accessible manner of a teacher whilst accomplishing a work of interest not only (or even primarily) to the beginner.

There are four principal chapters covering the topics of ‘Act and Potency’, ‘Causation’, ‘Substance’ and ‘Essence and Existence.’ The order in each chapter is to begin by explaining the Scholastic understanding of the topic, before outlining the theories of contemporary philosophers and showing how various problems implied within these theories can be resolved by Scholastic metaphysics whilst their true insight are upheld. The differences between Scholastic thinkers are highlighted where they are of relevance in developing the argument between Scholasticism and contemporary theories. For example, in chapter one the distinction in Thomas between real and logical distinctions is explained by Feser (pp. 72–73), and he then goes on to describe how Scotus and Suarez differ from Thomas by adding a third type, that of formal distinctions (p. 77). His purpose in outlining this difference between Scholastic thinkers is his conviction that: ‘The dispute among Scholastic metaphysicians illuminates and is illuminated by the debate over the relationship between categorical and dispositional properties in recent analytical philosophy’ (p. 79). The resolution of this debate is in returning to ‘the traditional jargon of act and potency’ (p. 87).

I noted earlier that Feser rejects the Wittgenstein’s rejection of metaphysics and his return to the ordinary. Along with this he also argues that: ‘the Scholastics would not agree that it is to “grammar” that we must look to resolve (or dissolve) metaphysical problems’ (p. 221). Here Feser stands in opposition to those analytical philosophers who have drawn a line of continuity from Plato through the scholastics to Wittgenstein’s grammatical remarks. Most notably, G. E. M. Anscombe draws attention to the intimate relationship in Plato between the development of metaphysics and grammar, and argues that Frege and Wittgenstein stand within this tradition. More recently William Charlton has argued that grammar is central to metaphysics. An engagement with such views would be helpful in substantiating Feser’s claim that grammar did not figure when the scholastics sought to resolve metaphysical questions. Furthermore, although this is a work in metaphysics, some account of the relationship between metaphysics and logic in scholastic thought would both aid this dialogue and enable the reader to grasp something of the subtlety of the distinctions drawn by the scholastics. Perhaps this is a task for another work, or a revised edition. Inevitably with any work of such broad scope not every perspective can be included, nor can every debate be entered into. The value of Feser’s book is in its contribution to the debates it does enter into, and the analytical clarity with which he illuminates contemporary debate by using principles developed in scholastic thought.

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NONVIOLENT ACTION: WHAT CHRISTIAN ETHICS DEMANDS BUT MOST CHRISTIANS HAVE NEVER REALLY TRIED by Ronald J. Sider, *Brazos Press*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2015, pp. xvi +191, \$19.99, pbk

This book could be seen as a reply to Nigel Biggar’s huge book *In Defence of War* (OUP, 2013). For it is a systematic and well-informed account of ways of resolving conflicts without violence. And if what it says is true, then it is extremely important. But how far is it true?

Sider begins with brief accounts of non-violent actions in the ancient world, as related for example in *Exodus* (Chapters 1 and 2) and by Josephus. He also