

BOOK REVIEW & NOTICES

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John Haldane. *Reasonable Faith*. London: Routledge, 2010.

John Haldane is widely noted for the breadth of his knowledge of history, theology, and the many disciplines of philosophy. That can make it exceedingly difficult to summarize or assess his work. This is especially so in the present volume, because it collects 13 essays previously published in various journals and other collections. However, perhaps for this very reason, it is easy to see some themes that unite them. This book is a companion to a previous volume, *Faithful Reason*, which, very roughly, set out the consequences for various disciplines and activities of taking the Catholic intellectual tradition seriously. In the present volume, the move is in the opposite direction: It shows how various academic traditions and practices support the truth of two fundamental aspects of Catholic thought: the existence of God and the existence of the soul, God's image in humans. The two movements are not fully distinct, though, because the fact that certain deeply human practices are intelligible only on the supposition of God and the soul itself provides a transcendental argument for Christian theism.

The volume is divided roughly in half according to these two themes. Part I "Reason, faith, and God" has six essays. Part II "Reason, faith and the soul" has seven. Part I has—in addition to the Introduction—two chapters focusing on pretty cerebral metaphysics and then three chapters on matters of the heart. Part II has multiple essays pertaining to value considerations as well as the nature of rationality. The broad sweep and diversity of these essays defy summary in a short space, so I shall resort to the reviewer's trick of giving the reader a few samples from each section.

In "Metaphysics, common sense and the existence of God," the problematic of realism(s of various kinds) vs. anti-realism(s) is the starting

point for a journey to a spot from which Thomistic metaphysics vindicates and is vindicated by a commonsense take on the world (this mutual support arises out of explanatory coherence, not a vicious circularity). This move surely comes as no surprise. However, exemplifying a fairness to idealism uncharacteristic of those for whom Aquinas is a guiding star, he argues that anti-realist beginnings are just as liable to lead to God. He begins with an interesting and serious interaction with arguments from Berkeley before considering such contemporary thinkers as Dummett and McDowell. In fact, the connection between anti-realism and theism seems to be more substantive than the connection between realism and theism. I had expected the connection between realism and theism to go something like this: realism entails real natures and real natures only make sense in a creation account. There were some hints at this, but for the most part the connection discussed was simply that the premises for the cosmological and teleological arguments are taken from facts about mind-independent reality, which is pretty thin as far as conceptual connections go. In the discussion of idealism, I thought initially that common sense—prominently placed in the title—had been left behind. However, Haldane's fascinating narrative wove Aquinas and Berkeley together in a way that lessened the gap between them.

In "The restless heart: philosophy and the meaning of theism," Haldane considers a less cerebral route to God but one that is no less philosophically astute. In it Haldane discusses with his usual insight and verve an argument few academic philosophers are willing to discuss: the argument from desire. He defends the thesis that our inclination to believe in God and our desire for God count as evidence that there is in fact a God. Unsurprisingly, this chapter draws on Saint Augustine and C. S. Lewis, but also, somewhat to my astonishment, another "C. S.": Pierce. Gems like this are part of what makes reading Haldane a delight. He's simply read everything and has it to hand when called for. The Pierce we meet sees God and scientific inquiry knit together in a seamless garment of explanatory coherence.

After laying out the argument in deductive form, he evaluates the premises and general framework. I will only comment upon his defense of the most questionable premise: that every natural desire has a corresponding real object as its satisfier. This premise relies crucially on the distinction between a natural desire and a non-natural desire. It

is hard to think of non-natural desires other than acquired or artificial desires, but I think Haldane's case would have been strengthened by querying further the possibility of a non-natural desire that is not artificial in the way his examples are, something like the suggested idea of the meme (for which, it always bears repeating, there is no scientific evidence of any rigorous sort).

Haldane identifies a number of common traits of natural desires—spontaneity, prevalence, and a certain kind of linguistic trait which I don't fully understand, but which seems to amount to prevalence of identification across natural languages (this third is very interesting and warrants further, detailed study). He points out that it seems, *prima facie* at least, that the desire for supernatural transcendence has these traits, so he draws the very sane conclusion that there is at least a presumption that it has a satisfier. He ends this discussion by noting that this argument is left untouched by evolutionary explanations in terms of adaptiveness, since the two are completely compatible.

So those are but two examples, of two quite different kinds, from the first section, which focuses on God. The second section focuses on the soul, and I will again provide an example, though briefly.

The second part of the book, on the soul, contains some defense of the immateriality of the intellect based on such familiar premises as the ability of abstract thought. However, this is also woven together with considerations of other matters as dense as the philosophy of perception of John McDowell. This section also contains the expected philosophical musings on the nature of death and immortality which are nevertheless quite fresh. However, the chapter which I think shows Haldane near his best is "Human ensoulment and the value of life." Here we see not, primarily, Haldane the metaphysician or epistemologist or philosopher of mind (though these all come to bear on the issue) but Haldane the ethicist and polemicist. For this chapter does not come in a void but is in large part a response to Robert Pasnau's anti-Catholic diatribe in *Aquinas on Human Nature*. Haldane quotes Pasnau's noxious remarks in full, then, as the gentleman he is, responds not in kind but offers a protracted and detailed case to the contrary (though Pasnau is not fully spared the barb of Haldane's wit).

The case is too detailed to summarize, but Haldane is not writing as an ideologue. Rather, he draws on a multitude of diverse sources from

official Church documents to Medieval sources only a specialist could have known. One footnote documenting Pasnau's apparent ignorance of relevant literature goes on for over a page! Yet Haldane, ever taking the high road, leaves snarky comments for book reviewers. His knowledge of both ancient and contemporary embryology is astonishing, and he addresses Pasnau's argument point-by-point exhaustively.

Throughout the book, Haldane's characteristic virtues are on display. Anyone, working in almost any area of philosophy or theology, with any interest in the interaction of ancient, medieval, and contemporary thought from across the main sub-disciplines of philosophy, whether with a theoretical or practical cast of mind will find reading this collection very rewarding.