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Oliver O'Donovan's *Self, World, and Time*: Introduction to the Symposium

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The articles in this issue respond to *Self, World, and Time* (*SWT*), the first volume of Oliver O'Donovan's much anticipated trilogy of moral theology, *Ethics as Theology*.[1] They were first presented at a meeting of the Tyndale Fellowship 'Ethics and Social Theology Group' held in Cambridge in July 2014 (the gathering also doubling as a postgraduate research seminar of the Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics [KLICE], of which Oliver O'Donovan is Honorary Research Fellow). Subsequently, Ben Paulus, a participant, prepared a detailed précis of *SWT* to frame the pieces and aid readers unfamiliar with the book, and Oliver O'Donovan, who was present throughout, wrote a response.

In the preface to *SWT*, O'Donovan laments that the latest innovations in Christian ethics too often resemble 'the unveiling of the year's new cars at the annual auto show, though with less sense of familiarity'.[2] That students of O'Donovan's earlier work will, when reading *SWT*, quickly feel themselves to be on familiar territory in no way detracts from the freshness and originality of this latest of his profound and distinguished contributions to the field.[3] For *SWT* approaches the field from an intriguingly different vantage point to that of much of his earlier writings. Whereas his first systematic work, *Resurrection and Moral Order*,[4] was marked by what he describes as a 'forceful moral objectivism', rooted in a robust affirmation of given creation order and realist moral epistemology, *SWT*, he tells us, now explores moral theology with an eye cast primarily on the 'self', the moral subject responding (knowingly or not) freely and deliberatively to that objective order. The book, he says, addresses the relation between

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[1] Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time. Ethics as Theology 1: An Induction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013).

[2] Ibid, p. vii.

[3] See Robert Song and Brent Waters, eds., *The Authority of the Gospel: Explorations in Moral and Political Theology in Honor of Oliver O'Donovan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015).

[4] Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: Outline of an Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

'Pentecost and Moral Agency'.[5] He discloses that the inspiration for the book originally struck while, when reading *The Imitation of Christ* before the commencement of a Canterbury Cathedral service, he came upon a passage about how prophets sound forth words but cannot 'give the Spirit'.[6] *SWT* thus has a pneumatological focus, and opens up new theological vistas on human moral experience. We await with much interest to see how this 'subjective' angle of inquiry will be elaborated further in *SWT's* successor volumes: *Finding and Seeking* (which appeared in late 2014)[7] and *Entering Into Rest*. The contributors hope that this symposium will encourage readers of *SBET* themselves to read and critically engage with *SWT* and its two sequels. Our sincere thanks go to Oliver O'Donovan for his generous and stimulating participation in the Cambridge meeting and for writing such a thoughtful response, and also to editor David Reimer for making space in the pages of *SBET* for these pieces.

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[5]   *SWT*, p. xii. His two major works of systematic political theology, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the roots of political theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and *The Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005) might also be summed up as being marked by, respectively, a focus on the 'objectivity' of the triumph of Christ over political authorities, and a 'realist' account of how such authorities should construe their divinely given role.

[6]   Ibid., p. xi.

[7]   Oliver O'Donovan, *Finding and Seeking: Ethics as Theology Volume 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014).

Self, World, and Time: An Overview

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Oliver O'Donovan's *Self, World, and Time* is the first volume of a promised trilogy on 'Ethics as Theology'. The author explains in his Preface that this book is an *induction*, 'to pave the way for further "Explorations"'.[1] The book proposes, first, that moral awareness, which operates by moral thinking and is informed by moral teaching, needs to be disciplined by moral theory; and, second, that moral theory itself opens up towards theology. The book may be conveniently divided into three sections, treating, in turn, the phenomenon of moral awareness, the movement towards moral theology, and the task of moral theology.

THE PHENOMENON OF MORAL AWARENESS

In chapter 1, O'Donovan explains that practical reasoning actually needs no 'introduction' because it arises from conscious experience itself: it is 'our native element' (1). Instead of an introduction, there is an invitation to the reader to 'wake up'. Since all our experience impinges upon morality, we do not debate, theorise, and *then* act; rather, we 'find ourselves, active subjects caught up in the middle of things' (3). We 'swim in a sea of obligations, tangled in seaweed on every side…' (1). Waking, or being woken, involves recognising the moral element of our experience which has always been present to it, but it also implies the possibility of responsible agency—and this is where moral thinking begins.

Here O'Donovan makes an important distinction. Morality is not about '*what we do*, but [about] *how we think what we are to do*, which is to say, how we *act*' (3).[2] Action here is not simply about doing: it involves accepting our obligations and taking responsibility for some particular trajectory, thinking about it and weighing its merits. And if our obligations to act are not to crush us, we must, ultimately, understand our debts as being owed to God. He forgives our debts and bestows freedom for acting in the world he has made. Since such freedom is what it means to be

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[1] Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time. Ethics as Theology 1: An Induction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans., 2013), p. xi. Subsequent page references in the text are to this work.

[2] All italics in quotations are original.

awake, moral thinking must be deeply connected to theology. Free action that is not simply arbitrary action presupposes God both as a beginning and an end.

O'Donovan elaborates this central claim in terms of the organising triad, 'self, world, and time'. It is to these realities that we awake, and attention to each is crucial for moral reasoning. By *world*, O'Donovan refers to the 'order of things that stand behind and before' us (10). Sound moral thought depends on a right understanding of this ordered world. The world, however, does not interpret itself. Philosophy, the sciences, and traditions all have their place in interpreting it, but 'Practical reason looks for a word, a word that makes attention to the world intelligible, a word that will maintain the coherence and intelligence of the world as it finds its way through it, a word of God.' (12) Recognition of the world, the objective element which sound moral reasoning requires was robustly argued for in O'Donovan's first major work of systematic moral theology, *Resurrection and Moral Order*.[3] This theme is reiterated in *SWT* but is now complemented by fuller attention to the subjective element—to one-self. This means being aware of the limits of our knowledge as well as the particular responsibilities we have wherever we find ourselves. Paying attention to the self involves an understanding of ourselves as 'centers of initiative' (14).

The third element of the triad is *time*: 'World and self are co-present only in the moment of time which is open to us for action.' (15) The time for which moral deliberation prepares the agent is the immediately available future. Moral deliberation should not be thought of as utopian forecasting; rather, our acting takes place in *hope*, which means, in the moment immediately before us. Hopeful action then leaves the ends to God. By engaging self, world, and time in practical reasoning, the moral agent thus begins a journey: 'Ethics', O'Donovan says, 'opens up towards theology' (19).

THE MOVEMENT TOWARDS MORAL THEOLOGY

In the second chapter, 'Moral Thinking', O'Donovan elaborates his description of 'commonsense' morality (21). Such morality simply assumes that people should act reasonably—'that our actions must fit in with how things are… [and] that we must think about what we propose to do in an ordered way' (21). O'Donovan notes that there have, of course, been other understandings of moral thinking besides 'commonsense

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[3]   Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: Outline of an Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

morality'. Some of the persistent alternatives in the modern world have been forms of voluntarism (where moral thinking is reduced to the will's intention, divorced from an ordered description of reality) and of intuitionism (where the good or the right is thought to be self-evident).

O'Donovan rebuts these accounts of practical reasoning by proposing an account of moral thinking in which the good and the right—and, in parallel, value and obligation, and reflection and deliberation—are construed as the two poles between which a moral agent moves. O'Donovan thinks that both poles, 'thinking about' and 'thinking towards', are necessary to complete the journey of practical reason: 'One may act without thinking at all, but one cannot think-towards acting without thinking-about some truth of the world in which one will act.' (32) However, making the journey between these two poles of practical reason requires a moral agent who will take responsibility for his actions. This means becoming aware 'of ourselves as subjects of action, as those… who come to resolutions of which they know themselves to be the author and understand the weight and significance of what they do' (36).

However, the moral agent's responsibility can only be made true sense of in light of a divine call that comes from beyond the world (38). Moral thinking, then, presupposes God and culminates in 'calling on' him (38). Accordingly, O'Donovan concludes the chapter by exploring how moral thinking is related to prayer. Prayer, rightly done, trains the agent for the active life and focuses his actions on God. How does is it do so? O'Donovan points to the importance of the petition for forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer: 'Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.' In this petition, moral agency, which was constrained by sin, is renewed; but *moral thinking* is also renewed because it allows one to *think* what she is to do under the conditions of a new creation which is in continuity with the original order and justice of God's creation rather than the conditions of sin; thus, it opens practical reason to the new creation in accordance with which the agent is free to act.

In chapter 3 O'Donovan considers the phenomenon of 'Moral Communication'. He argues that moral communication arises because personal identity is not simply an individual property; humans can only be persons within communities (44). The 'I' which engages in moral thinking is situated within a 'we' whose shared language makes such thinking possible and towards whose good moral thinking aims. O'Donovan illustrates this thesis by exploring the phenomenon of 'discussion'. Discussion may begin in disagreement, but 'If we cannot envisage a community of agreement, our thought cannot have any end in view, either.' (46) Moral thought is an essentially communal exercise.

Three forms of moral communication are considered which free the individual agent for action: '*giving advice, obeying authority*, and *moral teaching*' (49). 'Advice' is a form of moral communication because it aids the moral agent who finds herself in moral peril. Hence good advice requires 'a well formed knowledge of good and evil' (51). In seeking advice, O'Donovan proposes, one seeks an authoritative disclosure. This leads him to consider the experience of obeying 'authority' as a form of moral communication. Authority, he claims, is an '*event in which a reality is communicated to practical reason by a social communication*' (53). By describing authority as an 'event', O'Donovan seeks to highlight its decisive character as something which shapes one's action. The communication of authority occurs on two spectra: first, the spectrum of 'practical immediacy', and second, the spectrum of 'cognitive plentitude' (55). 'Cognitive plentitude' in turn has two poles: intellectual authority occupies one end, political authority the other. Neither of these types of authority, 'can be wholly authoritative without the other, and yet we have no apparent ground to suppose them complementary' (59). On one hand, the descriptions of the world which intellectual authority offers seem to lack consideration of the communal dimension of human life; on the other, the exercise of political authority often does give reason for its exercise. O'Donovan thinks a 'word from beyond' is needed to solve this tension, and this leads him to consider the paradigmatic form of moral communication: 'moral teaching'.

'Teaching', he says, 'is an act of witness to the authority which authorizes it, yet at the same time an act of nurture…. It does not consist of isolated observations or insights, but is "a teaching," a doctrine that can put us in a position to live our lives in harmony with nature and events.' (60) The paradigm of moral teaching is the Sermon on the Mount. In the same way that the phenomenon of moral thinking opens towards God as its end and requires God to make it free, so also the phenomenon of moral communication moves towards God as revealed in Jesus and is fulfilled in the prayer which is at the heart of Jesus' teaching. It is this prayer which forms 'the "we," the community of moral practice' (64).

In the fourth chapter, 'Moral Theory', O'Donovan's argument moves from a description of moral experience to a description of intellectual reflection on that experience, namely, the discipline of moral theory, or ethics. He concludes the chapter by saying what it might mean to study Ethics as Theology.[4]

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[4]   O'Donovan capitalises the terms 'Ethics' and 'Theology' and 'Moral Theology' throughout the book. I retain his usage.

In the first part of the chapter he considers the origin of 'Ethics' as a discipline. On his account, Christian thinkers had always treated Ethics as a part of Theology until the late seventeenth century when universities began to include a Newtonian-style 'Moral Science' as part of their curriculum. The problem with defining the discipline of Ethics, O'Donovan thinks, is that it has no object of knowledge like the other sciences; instead, 'everything is grist for its mill…. Ethics is distinct by being a *practical* discipline. That is to say, it is concerned with good and bad reasons for acting' (70). This description of the discipline of Ethics distinguishes it from behavioural sciences which reduce human action to some form of causation without asking about the '*moral reason*' for one's actions (70). This does not mean that ethics abandons description, but simply that it 'describes *trains of thought which resolve upon action*' (71). Yet Ethics is also a reflective discipline: it does more than simply describe trains of practical reason, but also reflects on them, weighing their respective merits.

Ethics, then, is a *discipline* situated between description and action—between 'science and practice.' However, Ethics is neither moral thinking (which is also situated between description and action, but is not a discipline), nor moral teaching; rather, these three (Ethics, moral thinking, and moral teaching) 'form a triangle of points of view through which reflection on reality and ordered reason are brought to bear on immediate practical discernment' (74). O'Donovan further notes that while ethics itself does not need to appeal to authority in order to reflect on trains of practical reasoning, it nevertheless 'knows that *there must be* an authority for any moral teaching', and thus can be readily 'integrated into a confession of faith which is not itself a part of Ethics' (74). While in theory Ethics can remain separate from such a confession, in reality no practitioner of Ethics can remain aloof from the question of authority, of moral norms, and thus faith. Because of this, Ethics, moral thinking, and moral teaching move toward the discipline which O'Donovan thinks can alone fulfil their aspirations: Moral Theology. And Moral Theology, in turn, includes both Ethics and Theology: 'Ethics', he says, 'needs Theology if it is to pursue its questions to a conclusion, while Theology needs a considered purchase on practical reason if it is to give an account of the regeneration of mankind by the life of God.' (76)

Having established this point, O'Donovan then proposes that to study Ethics 'as Theology' requires the discipline to be (as the Second Vatican Council put it) 'nourished on the doctrine of the Scriptures' (77). This means that Moral Theology should pay attention to the whole of the scriptural witness, because the reality to which it witnesses is the life-giving spring for moral theology. O'Donovan further explains this proposal

by suggesting that obedience to Scripture cannot be achieved by jumping straight from the text to action; but rather, true obedience to Scripture is the result of trying 'to achieve a correspondence between the *whole train of thought* of the text from A to B and the *whole* train of our thought from X to Y' (79). This is the kind of attention to Scripture which nourishes Moral Theology.

O'Donovan concludes the chapter by underlining the importance of 'a proper *vis à vis* between Doctrine and Ethics' (81). He is aware that this dialogue between Doctrine and Ethics can easily mutate in two directions: modern Protestant Theological Ethics has sometimes equated Doctrine and Ethics, while Roman Catholicism has sometimes been guilty of divorcing them. Having identified these two traps, O'Donovan proposes a third way of construing the relationship between Doctrine and Ethics. In his mind, the particular task of Moral Theology is 'in the movement between its poles….' (89), a movement unpacked further in the concluding two chapters.

THE TASK OF MORAL THEOLOGY

Chapter 5 explores in more detail the specific task of Moral Theology. The first part seeks to establish what O'Donovan calls the 'Shape of Moral Theology'. Moral theology, he says, must be 'evangelical': it must announce good news to a broken world. But how does it do this? In continuity with *Resurrection and Moral Order*, O'Donovan asserts that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead forms moral theology's centre.[5] From that strategic vantage point, moral theology looks in two directions: toward the created world and its order, and toward the future. Thus, the shape of moral theology always contains christological and pneumatological dimensions: 'The dimensions of the resurrection are what is to become of the form of the world: creation restored on the one hand, the creature led forward into new creation on the other.' (94)

In what is perhaps his most original constructive theological move, O'Donovan proposes—reviving a proposal of William Tyndale—that moral theology be decisively shaped by the theological virtues of 'faith, love, and hope'. These correspond to the natural poles of moral reasoning—self, world, and time—and they redeem the moral life by directing it towards God. Here O'Donovan articulates a vision of moral theology that seeks to stand between, and correct the limitations of, Barth and Aquinas. Barth's Ethics, in the end, left no significant place for faith, love, and hope because of his aversion to 'general moral principles' (101). Yet Aqui-

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[5]   O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, p. 13.

nas's appropriation of the theological virtues separated them too far from the natural virtues. By contrast, O'Donovan proposes a Moral Theology which envisages self, world, and time as 'reflected and restored' by faith, love, and hope (xi).

In the final chapter, O'Donovan explores in greater depth the way faith, love, and hope should direct moral theology. The three stand in a certain order: 'faith *anticipates* hope and love, but hope and love *presuppose* faith' (105). Faith, then, is 'the "root" of morality' (106). O'Donovan here distinguishes his view of faith from the scholastic view which conceived of it primarily as an operation of the intellect. Rather, the Reformers were correct in seeing faith as something which first awakens the agent. God, who is the object of faith, is also the one who renews our moral agency: 'The root of agency lies not in self-perception, but in receiving God's address to us. That does not make it the slightest bit less practical…. It is the consciousness of being called to life by God, who tells us of our agency by telling us of his.' (112) It is such a passive-receptive faith, then, that is the root of moral agency.

O'Donovan then addresses love and its relation to the world. Just as faith is not simply an intellectual disposition, neither is love simply a disposition towards action. Rather, it includes knowledge of the world, and combines knowledge with affection. It is 'love wholly informed by knowledge….' (114). This Augustinian proposal stands in opposition to voluntarist conceptions in which love effectively posits its own ends. Strikingly, whereas in much popular Protestant ethics love is understood essentially as love between individual persons, for O'Donovan it is to be construed much more comprehensively as love for the *world*, for the entirety of God's ordered creation. It is also, of course, love for God, yet the two orientations of love are not in any kind of tension. Rather, 'Love of God is affirmed in and through our other loves, structuring them and ordering them….'(119). This orientation to the love of God ensures that Moral Theology does not lose its mooring in 'the Good', but also guarantees the moral theologian's focus on a rightly ordered engagement with the plurality of created goods, allowing her to value them correctly and pay attention to them in the right way.

Loving attention to the world, however, does not complete the work of moral theology. Such attention is incomplete without action. All moral agents find themselves situated in time, in *this moment* which faces the future. It is possible to face the future pulled to and fro by desire and by fear. Moral agency, however, requires hope: 'Hope differs from desire because it attends to a different future, the future of God's promise.' (122) Importantly, O'Donovan claims that we do not actually know the precise content of our hope, and that it is a mistake to act as if this content were

clear. For then responsibility for the future would lie in our own hands. Instead, the significance of hope for the agent is that it creates space for meaningful action because one's action is undergirded by the reality of God's promise: 'No act of ours can be a condition for the coming of God's Kingdom. God's Kingdom, on the contrary, is the condition for our acting; it underwrites the intelligibility of our purposes.' (124)

O'Donovan concludes with a final section which circles back to love, in order to consider its pre-eminence in Moral Theology. He does this by situating love in relation to the categories of 'work' and 'rest'. O'Donovan points out Paul's interest in the finality of love. 'Love is action's mode of participating in eternity.' (125) The actions one performs become objects of Moral Theology's reflection, which is to say that they becomes objects of love: 'As moral reason passes from faith to love and on through hope into action, so it must finally pass back into love again.' (125) Human action is intelligible and able to be an object of reflection because it is not action towards 'empty space' but action towards some end, towards *rest*. But this rest depends on and presupposes God's judgement, which will bring our works 'to their decisive appearance' (130). The problem with this, of course, is that our labours are always insufficient to what God demands. But it is at this point that we discover that our work has all along been the work of God and that God's final judgement means that, at last, this work finds rest. Moral Theology, O'Donovan concludes, has the task of working backwards from this promised judgement so that it can order our deliberation about what should be done here and now, in the hope that we will be ushered into that rest.

'Moral Awareness': Response to Chapter 1

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THE EXPERIENCE WE'RE GIVEN

'No introduction can be imagined for what we can never meet for the first time: conscious experience itself.'[1] The opening note in O'Donovan's work comes from Paul, in Romans 8:12, informing us that we are debtors. We encounter immediately one of the features of *Self, World, and Time* that sets it off against most other conventional treatments of Christian ethics. Whereas such treatments typically start either with a survey of the history of the field or with a discussion of methodology or some assumed biblical, theological or hermeneutical starting-points, O'Donovan begins with what might be called a phenomenology of human moral experience itself. For him, our status as 'debtors' is the first reality we must note.

Our experience of indebtedness lies already in our obligations: our signing of a rental contract, our accepting a job offer, our declaring of our love. The very narrative contours of our everyday lives oblige us. 'Obligations formed us, and we formed obligations, for as long as we ever knew ourselves.' (2) We awake into a moral world already in flow. We are caught up in the play of the moral world around us. Against various quests to find an objective and 'safe ground of knowledge of ourselves', O'Donovan declares 'there is one inevitable reply: they come too late' (2). We are already asking the questions, evaluating the decisions and acting in the moral universe to which we have awoken. When we wake, we engage in practical reason, 'the most commonplace of human rational exercises' (3). Yet mere description of our action is not yet morality. It will indeed always involve narrative, but that does not mean that narrative is itself moral thought. Morality 'arises at the tipping-point between narrative and self-awareness' (4).

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[1]   Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time: Ethics as Theology Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), p. 1. Subsequent page references in the text are to this work.

THE SPIRIT

To posit our experience as 'moral' presupposes a life 'of intelligence, responsibility, and freedom' (4). This, for O'Donovan, is 'the life of "Spirit"' (4), the specific way that Christian ethics explains the givenness of our moral experience. 'Even to pose a moral question is already to tread water, to trust our weight upon the element of Spirit.' (4) That we awake indebted, that 'we owe anyone anything', is another way of saying '*being led by* "Spirit"' (4).[2] We are led as creatures, by the Spirit. This is the action of being, in a small way, like the Creator: of 'living a life that is given by Spirit and corresponds to Sprit's life' (5).

WAKING

The metaphor that O'Donovan invokes in this chapter for coming to recognise our ordinary moral experience is that of 'waking'. He grants that this is a universal metaphor, yet as he deploys it, it is a 'definite proposal' and 'that proposal is of Christian provenance' (6). Cautioning that we must be careful of the metaphors we use because of how they harden and shape our thinking, O'Donovan nevertheless reminds us that the call to wakefulness is a common metaphor deployed in the Hebrew Scriptures. Yet, he remarks, 'Nowhere in the New Testament do the faithful call on God to awake.' (8) God is already awake. What waits to be seen is when we will awake. This is not yet a general call to action, but a specific call for 'continual alertness'. Wakefulness in the New Testament is a description of the stance taken by those undergoing radical transformation. Thus it is used in Romans 13:11 and Ephesians 5:14 to round off passages of moral instruction with reference to resurrection. O'Donovan demonstrates this by reference to how Jesus uses wakefulness. Jesus, both in Gethsemane and in parables (Mark 13:34; Luke 12:37), draws on this image, as well as in two instances in Revelation. Taken together, we can gather that the wakeful servant will encounter the Lord as a welcome master, while 'it is the *unwakeful* servant who will encounter the Lord as a thief….' (9)

WORLD

So we wake. But to what? To life, to its direction and to the truth that makes it all possible. 'To be awake is to be aware of *the truth of a world*.' (10) The 'world's *objective truth*' is found in the fact that it is a reality that is not encompassed by my self (10). The world places demands on my inner self which I do not get to choose or shape. We can, of course, in

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[2]   Italics in quotations are original.

various ways ignore, misread, or manipulate the world so that we become 'idle window-shoppers on the world's high street' (10). To transcend that possibility, we have to comprehend how the world holds together, and to what end. These questions evoke no definitive or self-evident answers. Whatever answer we do propose must be informed by thorough-going description of the world as it is. 'World-description belongs ... "on the ground-floor" of practical reason.' (11)

Description, then, is a critical component of moral reasoning. How do we go about describing our world? 'What our eyes have seen and what our ears have heard is insurmountable evidence' for the world around us but it is also 'insurmountably subjective' (11). We supplement this subjective experience with empirical knowledge, drawing on 'the capacity of cultural traditions ... to assemble and interpret many experiences of reality' (12). Yet even this does not make us secure. While we cannot do without them, the conclusions of empiricism of various kinds do not resolve the problem of knowledge of the world. It is not enough to just seek out the facts, since 'as the history of science continually shows, they can frequently be contested' (12). Practical reason has an urgent (and philosophical) need to find a 'critical measure' that can 'provide us with a direction for intelligent questioning' (12). The question of the objective truth of the world cannot be entertained without God. Practical reason needs 'a word of God' (12). This word is not the final destination but the starting point and the guide by which the world is revealed as coherent and meaningful. Practical reason, even equipped with such a guide as this, still demands a *reasoner*.

SELF

To this end, the self is brought to the fore in O'Donovan's account. Practical reasoning does not engage with the world's existence in the abstract. There are only persons using their practical reason. The world by which we are claimed is *our* world. Hence, 'to be wakeful is to attend to oneself' (12). Attentiveness means bringing the world *and* ourselves into view. There is no view from nowhere. The only view open *to* any person is the view *from* that person. So as we are summoned to wakefulness to world outside us, we must simultaneously attend to our own agency. Who am I? I am an agent, 'one among many' (13). What am I to do? I am to tend to my own responsibilities. This is the foundational obligation of one who has woken.

TIME

If it is true that the moral challenge involves simultaneous attentiveness to the world and to self, then that simultaneity also demands alertness to *time*. Wakefulness can only be experienced in the present. While there are different ways to conceive of the present moment in which we find ourselves, the common strand is that 'what the present cannot be is a *period of* time' (15). As such, the present is 'dimensionless'. The moral task is first and foremost concerned with the question of '*practical* immediacy' (16). O'Donovan forces us to confront the inescapable demand of this 'future-present moment': we are 'unquestionably responsible' for this moment right before us (16). We can let the medium term, the hypothetical future and even the eschatological end pass from our attention. They do not directly claim our responsibility. 'The *available* future', however, does (17). So, instead of imagining futures, utopian or dystopian, the task before us in the available future is to 'use this moment of time to do something, however modest, that is worthwhile and responsible' (17). O'Donovan, who cautions against grasping the Kingdom while never denying that it does in fact draw near, goes as far as to hope that these small acts might 'endure before the throne of judgment' (17).

THE COMPLEXITY OF DESCRIPTION

For O'Donovan, accurate description in ethical deliberation is of the utmost importance. Failure to attend to world, self and time leads to ethical mishaps. I want to draw on aspects of the discussion around 'self' to investigate further the complexity of description.

To illustrate his point about the difficulties of failing to attend to oneself, O'Donovan speculates that 'perhaps some pathologies like autism or gender-dysphoria can be understood as an unusual difficulty in grasping oneself' (14). He grants that these are 'liminal phenomena', and what concerns him directly is 'the more common *moral failure* to attend to oneself' (14), noting the phenomenon of depression, in which we 'withdraw from agency and gaze out on the world with emotionless eyes' (12). This, he suggests, 'may present us with the phenomenon of sloth in an acute and overwhelming form' (12).

Accurate description, we have seen, is a critical component of practical reasoning. Although O'Donovan's references to autism, gender dysphoria and depression are incidental (they are prefaced by the word 'perhaps' and categorised as areas in which he has 'no special competence to judge' [13-14]), it may be worth investigating how these descriptions compare with those offered by others. What can we learn about description in general (and ethics by extension) by reading O'Donovan's specific words

alongside the accounts of medical professionals, the personal accounts of those suffering from these conditions, or the work of disability theologians?

To inform our thinking on such matters it may be worthwhile to consider the texts commonly held as authoritative; for example the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5.[3] The discussion found therein of Autism Spectrum Disorder,[4] Depressive Disorders,[5] and Gender Dysphoria[6] may cast light on our theological understanding of the self who suffers from these conditions, or likewise expose to theology the questions or challenges that it may be compelled to bring to contemporary scientific discussion. Similarly, popular accounts of living with these conditions now proliferate. There are numerous articulate and profound reflections on what it means to be a self who is depressed,[7] autistic,[8] or gender dysphoric[9] written by selves so afflicted. To what extent does our description need to engage with the claims found in such works? Disability theologians advise us that one of the most complex problems faced in that field is 'to find a working definition of disability that does not too quickly foreclose a proper investigation of what it might mean'.[10] The question of how we weigh, evaluate, and engage with professionalised accounts of psychological states or literary descriptions of lived-realities or other non-theological accounts is itself a theological endeavour. To draw on a discussion that comes later in the book, if 'advice is the assistance offered to an agent in danger' (50), might theologians be recipients (as well as dispensers) of such 'advice' when describing the agency of other selves?

Composing an account of the subjective self of the moral life is charged and complex. World, self, and time are indeed not 'self-interpreting' (11). The truth about selves cannot be read off the surface of things.

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[3] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* 5th ed. (Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013).

[4] Ibid., pp. 50-59.

[5] Ibid., pp. 155-188.

[6] Ibid., pp. 451-459.

[7] For example, Allie Brosh, *Hyperbole and a Half* (London: Square Peg, 2013).

[8] As illustrated by Naoki Higashida, *The Reason I Jump* (London: Sceptre, 2014).

[9] Consider, e.g., Ivan E. Coyote and Rae Spoon, *Gender Failure* (Vancouver, B.C: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2014).

[10] Brian Brock, 'Introduction: Disability and the Quest for the Human', in *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, edited by Brian Brock and John Swinton (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), p. 8.

We approach this truth in community and must heed the voices of those around us as we interpret. The wisdom that guides this process is the wisdom of Christ who is 'the centre of the world, the bridegroom of the self, the turning-point of past and future' (19). In the pursuit of the truth we 'must always be revisiting familiar places and seeing them with new eyes' (19). To see them anew, it is essential that we engage imaginatively with the experience of others.

Elsewhere, Sam Wells has described this book as 'lonely'.[11] He notes that it 'seems to hold itself in significant ways in isolation from the debates of the Church at large'.[12] While the book does not propose an abstract self held at a distance from others, it does, as these references reveal, remind us of just how fraught the task of adequate moral description is.

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[11] Sam Wells, 'Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time: Ethics as Theology Volume 1*', Theology 117 (2014), p. 393.
[12] Ibid., pp. 393-394.

'Moral Thinking': Response to Chapter 2

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What does it mean to say that our moral actions are 'reasonable'? After unpacking the nature of 'moral awareness' in the first chapter of *Self, World, and Time*, O'Donovan takes up the nature of practical reason in the second. The chapter begins with David Hume; it ends with readers on their knees in prayer, and not only because O'Donovan carves out a difficult path between the two. On his account, self-conscious moral thinking (eventually) makes explicit the presupposition that gives it its urgent character, namely the relation of the self to God. But O'Donovan begins with the nature of practical reasoning, and it is about this that I have questions. While his treatment is both illuminating and provocative, I wonder whether by leaving the relationship between 'values' and other aspects of reality ambiguous, he leaves insufficient room for non-culpable mistakes in action and over-burdens moral reasoning by unnecessarily throwing the weight of the uniquely 'moral' on the self. I consider these questions in what follows, leaving aside O'Donovan's stimulating section on prayer.

O'Donovan begins his account of moral reasoning by reframing the familiar question of how 'is' and 'ought' relate—or whether 'values' can be derived from 'facts'. Hume is often credited with first raising the problem, which has become known as the 'naturalistic fallacy'. Yet on O'Donovan's reading, Hume is troubled instead by how we move not from facts to values, but from values to obligations, or what 'classical thinkers knew as the question of the good and the right' (24).[1] By integrating 'values' into the very structure of reality, O'Donovan is able to argue that moral responsibility has a stake not only in willing correctly, but in understanding properly as well. As he strikingly puts it, 'behind moral failure at every level lies… [some kind of] failure to keep our actions in tune with reality' (25).

O'Donovan is clear that 'World-description belongs…"on the ground floor" of practical reason.' (11) But he leaves the question of how 'values' relate to other aspects of reality under-specified and unclear; by sidestepping the popular formulation of Hume's 'naturalistic fallacy', O'Donovan's

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[1] Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time. Ethics as Theology 1: An Induction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), p. 24. Subsequent page references in the text are to this work.

account eliminates—or at least seriously threatens—the possibility that ignorance in moral actions might be benign. O'Donovan writes: 'Mistakes are not the high peaks of guilt, but neither do they lie on the plain of inno-cence.' (25) It may be true that every moral failure has some mistake about reality behind it, but it does not follow that every moral action that has a mistake about reality behind it is a failure. O'Donovan grants that 'we dif-ferentiate "mere" mistakes from bad intentions, vices of character, and so on, in an ascending scale of moral seriousness….' (25). But the quotation marks around 'mere' leave an open question about whether O'Donovan thinks non-culpable mistakes can exist at all. Yet it seems clear that they do. A soldier who kills an allied spy who is embedded within an opposing army during a battle commits a serious 'mistake', which upon learning about he may strongly regret. However, such a mistake is neither negli-gent nor blameworthy—even if the mistake depends upon the soldier's ignorance about certain aspects of reality. The possibility of blameless mistakes in action depends upon the agent's assessment of the *morally salient* aspects of a situation (whatever those are), which is not necessar-ily equivalent to all the possible descriptions or facts about a situation. Without further specification of how values relate to the other aspects of reality, it seems as though the momentum of O'Donovan's view leads to treating the soldier as culpable for the killing, even if not seriously so.

O'Donovan's concern to integrate description into the task of moral reasoning leads him then to consider the path between the good and the right, a path that 'practical reason' leads us down. On his view, neither our desires nor our duties are self-evidently or transparently correct. Moral thinking cannot ignore them, as they provide 'indications' (28) of what is to be done, but neither is it exhausted by them. Instead, moral thinking involves 'practical reasoning'. While goodness 'is an aspect of what *is*', and rightness 'is what *is to be done*', practical reasoning 'correlates the actions we immediately project with the way things are' (28).[2] That pro-cess of correlation is not unidirectional, however: it is 'not deductive, but inductive', as it 'moves to and fro between the world of realities and the moment of action' (30).

But O'Donovan's account of practical reasoning suffers from the same ambiguity about the 'way things are' mentioned above. O'Donovan seems to oscillate between what might be called a substance ontology (in which reality consists of 'things') and a 'states of affairs' ontology. As he puts it, 'The goodness of good things constitutes a reason why *certain* acts at *certain* times are right;...'. (29) It is because Bach's music has cer-tain intrinsic qualities, it seems, that we are right to listen to it under the

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2   All italics in quotations are original.

right circumstances. Yet O'Donovan will later suggest that 'The question "what am I to do?" means, "what am I to do *in this state of affairs*?"—and so always presumes an answer to the question "what state of affairs?".' (32) This is a much broader construal, which raises questions about how 'goodness' is an aspect of what 'is' and whether O'Donovan's association of it with 'things' is sufficient. The goodness (or lack thereof) of particular 'things' or substances like Bach's music or Shakespeare's plays may be part of our description of a particular 'state of affairs', but some goods that we grasp—like friendship or knowledge—are not attached to substances at all. Such goods are not necessarily grasped as aspects of 'what is'—or 'things', on O'Donovan's account—but as opportunities that can be enacted. One pursues friendship not because it is an aspect of what exists, but because it might yet come to be.[3]

This ambiguity comes to the fore when O'Donovan considers the possibility of 'things indifferent' (*adiaphora*) in moral reasoning, which he takes up in the context of identifying the locus for moral responsibility. Recognising that the term 'practical' frequently has non-moral connotations, O'Donovan suggests that moral thinking 'adds the question of how this action may determine the successful or unsuccessful living of a life' (33). That is, moral reasoning introduces 'the acting self' as a 'focus of attention' (33). The domain of the moral has an ineliminable self-referential dimension which happens in a 'moment of heightened moral sensibility' that we may 'perceive…immediately', in the sense that 'the fact affects us before we know how to express it' (33). In such a moment, the 'whole world (from the point of view of [our] own destiny) depends upon' our conduct (33). This 'moment of heightened moral sensibility' is akin to an intuition for O'Donovan, even though he thinks intuitionist or emotivist moral theories 'draw the wrong lesson from it' (34). But not everything impinges on the acting self this way. O'Donovan suggests that there are 'things and qualities within the world which…do not of themselves present a challenge to the human self and its living of a life'; these are 'things indifferent' (33). On his view, 'redness' or 'heaviness' only have moral relevance based on the 'practical conditions' in which they come before us. However, 'Moral qualities…are always and necessarily relevant to our agency.' (33)

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3   The language of goods as 'opportunities' is taken from John Finnis. To contrast his formulation of goods with O'Donovan's is illuminating. For Finnis, basic goods are concerned not only 'with what truly is, but also and essentially with what truly *is-to-be* in a sense that is not predictive but directive, normative, articulable from the outset in the language of normativity: should, ought, is-to-be-done'. John Finnis, 'Natural Law Theory: Its Past and Its Present', *The American Journal of Jurisprudence* 57 (1992), 84.

There is unquestionably no moral difference between white or blue hydrangeas *as* hydrangeas; but it is not clear how *things* can be an answer to a 'practical question', which is a question about what one should *do* within a particular state of affairs. Whether we choose to plant blue or white hydrangeas may not matter—but planting either might, if our neighbour is deathly allergic to them or we know they have a profound dislike of them. We put moral questions to possible actions: is it right to plant hydrangeas or do we have other obligations that we should be attending to instead? There may indeed be 'things indifferent', but perhaps the more pertinent question for distinguishing between practical and moral reasoning is whether there are any possible morally indifferent actions in the state of affairs under consideration.

O'Donovan's ambiguities on how 'things' and 'states of affairs' relate to each other in the domain of practical reason, and on how moral values relate to other aspects of reality, seem to allow him to shift the emphasis of the 'moral' to how it determines the self. More clarity about ontology—about how the 'world' that we describe is composed—may enable us to identify the uniqueness of 'moral reasoning' by its shape, rather than by how it impinges upon the self. I wonder whether identifying the uniqueness of the moral with the self imposes too heavy a burden on moral reasoning. As noted, O'Donovan rejects intuitionist or emotivist moral theories. In their place, he suggests that we must 'give a thoughtful account of ourselves as those who entertain and pursue [a] project' in order to properly account for a moral undertaking (34). While O'Donovan suggests that such a movement does not 'provide additional or more decisive reasons for doing something' (33), it is still a heavy burden to place on moral thinking. Books are written to answer moral questions: must we write our autobiographies as well to discern the 'heightened seriousness' of a moral action? (33).

Additionally, it seems that we encounter moral values as those which make demands on *anyone* similarly situated, in addition to demands on our own selves as 'those who entertain and pursue [a] project' (34). In undertaking these demands we do what anyone ought to do in such a situation. That moral values make a demand on us as particular agents is consequent upon the fact that they make a demand at all. But this makes one wonder whether the moment of 'heightened seriousness' that demarcates the moral is constituted by the kind of individualised self-awareness that O'Donovan indicates, or whether, instead, it is determined by the agent's perception of moral qualities *vis-à-vis* other aspects of reality. If we have encountered that which anyone in the world would be obligated to do, why must we 'give a thoughtful account of ourselves as those who entertain and pursue [a] project' in order to give a full account of the moral

undertaking before us? Why is it not enough to say that we have found the right thing to do, the thing which anyone in the world ought do if they were in our shoes?

I want to suggest that, finally, our selves and our conception of a 'successful' life are themselves opaque, and our introspective faculties may after all be too limited to hold before ourselves such depths. While O'Donovan considers desires and duties too unstable to be the grounds for moral reasoning, this perception of 'heightened seriousness' seems to be no more stable a ground upon which to rest the uniqueness of moral experience. The self may be *less* translucent than the goods that present themselves to us in particular situations. We encounter goods about particular situations as alien and independent from us. The distance between the good and our selves makes them easier to apprehend than the more familiar, intimate, and frequently confused motivations and histories that make up our biographies. Is there a more difficult task than a fully truthful autobiography? I suspect there is within O'Donovan's undertaking a subtle gap between the theorist who provides such a broader narrative of the self within the moral life and the agent situated within a definite moral horizon. If anything, our experience of moral realities seems to be less architectonic and more fragmentary than our theorising about it— but given our frailty as creatures, these limitations are as they should be.

'Moral Communication': Response to Chapter 3

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In this response I shall expound some of the notable features of chapter three of *Self, World, and Time* (*SWT*), point to an important emerging influence on O'Donovan's thought, and engage his account in two critical conversations: in the first place with Lutheran thought, and in the second with 'apocalyptic' theology. These final two exercises are intended to help draw out the theological presuppositions inherent in *SWT* as they are exhibited in this chapter.[1]

SOME NOTABLE FEATURES

First, the book's unfurling account of 'self' is deepened and contextualised in this chapter by careful acknowledgment of the self's social construction and a textured depiction of the communal basis of our personhood, following Robert Spaemann ('The "I" and the "We"', 43-48). Moral deliberation, O'Donovan argues, is fundamentally socially embedded in both origin and outcome. It does not arise *ex nihilo* or proceed in a vacuum. That it does not is partly because of the centrality of 'communication'. (Importantly, communication here signifies not just verbal intercourse but a much broader conception, encompassing the full range of human interaction.) Accordingly, O'Donovan traces the self's awakening to active and reasoned deliberation in terms of the communicative matrices and modes of moral thinking. Elucidations of 'discussion', 'advice', 'authority', and 'moral teaching' serve as focused explorations of the various ways this occurs.

One facet is particularly helpful. Although O'Donovan is sometimes portrayed as outspokenly critical of modernity's individualism, it is deeply instructive that when he proposes a positive, constructive articulation of selfhood and the subject he is able to make a nuanced affirmation. Here he makes good on the wager that careful attention to scriptural witness and tradition affords us finer-grained treatments of *both* the individual and the collective than the individualism of the Enlightenment or reac-

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[1] Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time. Ethics as Theology 1: An Induction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), pp. 43-65. Subsequent page references in the text are to this work.

tionary communitarianism. In this important regard the present chapter is especially welcome as a highly balanced guide: it gives us 'a secure sense of "I"' which 'arises precisely from its place within the "we"' (43). And intriguingly, the final comments of the chapter bring these insights to speech in an explicitly ecclesial register, where the 'liturgical constitution of the "we"' represents that 'within which each and every "I" can realize itself' (65).

Secondly, the *cantus firmus* of *SWT* is a familiar sense of the objective moral order and its importance for Christian ethics. It is of signal importance for this chapter because acceptance of this order leads to a recognition that the world is the 'covenanted sphere of communication between [God] himself and ourselves, evoking agency and practical reason amongst us' (57). The appeal to the givenness of creation that permeated *Resurrection and Moral Order* (*RMO*) is maintained here, since all forms of communication presuppose that there is some truth about the world to be communicated. (And that is why the acknowledgment that communities and their morals are the products of discourse is consciously qualified; it does not amount to sheer constructivism.)

AN INCREASINGLY PHENOMENOLOGICAL MORAL REALISM

O'Donovan's sustained reflection upon creation seems to have distilled, in *SWT*, into new densities of description. Moreover, these passages attain a heightened affective purchase, displaying remarkable skill in exploring the shape of our lived experience in the world. It may also be that the influence of *phenomenology* is partly responsible for this developing approach. O'Donovan's use of continental philosophy—especially Jean-Yves Lacoste and Spaemann—lends a different cast to the depiction of objective reality. It does so in terms of style but also in terms of content: *SWT*'s poetic presentation is inextricably accompanied by new epistemological emphases. The material gains of engaging phenomenology are displayed in these emphases: on the world's givenness; on our 'thrownness' into it and thus our position *in medias res*; and on the emergence of reality over time which directs and draws our attention.

Why is a phenomenological approach a welcome ally for O'Donovan? Not least because phenomenology is similarly interested in being realist without being merely empiricist. Nature, for both, is no flat, inert screen upon which to project ourselves or about which to talk with sheer creativity. Furthermore, can incorporating phenomenological insights aid Protestants in a particular way? On the one hand, many exhibit characteristic nervousness about appeals to nature and unencumbered reason. In this case adherence to a thoroughgoing doctrine of sin can lead us to

affirm simply the reality of our mental constructions. On the other hand, many are tempted by recent Reformed attempts to revive natural law reasoning.[2] Phenomenology is a mode of philosophical enquiry which can teach the subtle moral realism required to go beyond both extremes. And O'Donovan's increasingly phenomenological approach promises exactly that: a moral realism aware of human finitude and of reason's embeddedness in the world, concerned with the rich reality of the created order.

These observations might seem irrelevant to questions of communication, but this is far from the case. *SWT*'s depiction of moral communication is predicated on such an account and therefore itself contributes to a developing description of the epistemology involved in an account of the normativity of nature. Chapter 3, it might be said, is a phenomenology of the mediation of created reality by creatures, 'a conversation where reality takes the lead'.[3] Furthermore, in this communicative mediation, realist convictions based on *the unveiling of objective facticity over time*[4]—that is, the emergence of reality—might have additional purchase in moral reasoning when simple observation in a scientistic mode falls short. This has broader significance for the ways theological ethicists might make arguments. James Mumford, for example, has recently used this approach in a treatment of beginning of life issues.[5]

PLACING THIS ACCOUNT IN CONVERSATION WITH LUTHERAN THEOLOGY

On page 44, O'Donovan notes Hans Ulrich's use of Psalm 4 in the task of reframing Ethics 'away from the indeterminate object of study, "the good," to the possibility of a determinate disclosure of the good: *Who will show us?*' O'Donovan's citation encourages an exploration of convergence of his approach with, or its divergence from, Luther's thought, since Ulrich is a figure impressive not least for his fecund use of Luther for contemporary theological ethics, and this issue of determinacy and

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[2] For a forceful critique of this turn to natural law reasoning, away from an 'apocalyptic' perspective like that described below, see Philip Ziegler, 'The Fate of Natural Law at the Turning of the Ages', *Theology Today* 67 (January 2011), 419-29.

[3] As Charles Mathewes puts it in *The Republic of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), p. 161.

[4] O'Donovan suggested in conversation that Lacoste in particular has contributed to this sensibility.

[5] See James Mumford, *Ethics at the Beginning of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

indeterminacy—or, perhaps, particularity and universality—is central to his contribution.

Two potential gains are suggested by attending to Lutheran theology in a conversation with chapter 3: (i) the Lutheran theology of the Word/word promises specificity regarding both revelatory divine and creaturely communication; and (ii) the Lutheran theology of, variously, orders of creation, mandates, or the estates promises specificity in accounting for those particular spheres of created life opened up by communication to a creaturely discernment of their contours.

The first gain would allow us to gloss O'Donovan's account of moral realism in its concern with communication and thereby with revelation. O'Donovan shares Luther's regard for the meaning-unveiling and meaning-mediating functions of language, and for its maieutic (midwife-ing) role with regard to moral action in comportment with reality. Yet I suspect that the implicit relationship between human and divine words which is woven through chapter 3 could be made more explicit by Luther's treatment of these themes. Could O'Donovan be invited to a fuller investigation in this direction? For example, such an investigation could explore further both similarities and dissimilarities, analogies and disanologies, of speech 'from above to below' and on the horizontal plane. Or, with a sacramental logic in mind, perhaps something could be made of the paradigmatic character of the divine permission and human naming which is exemplified in the Adamic naming of the animals (Gen. 2:18-20)?[6]

Secondly, talk of estates could modulate O'Donovan's consistent claims (proposed in *RMO*) about the generic and teleological orders inherent in creation into a more anthropocentric register which could be the counterpart of his espousal of embedded (rather than sovereign, unencumbered) rationality. That is to say, estates represent a kind of phenomenology of the places where creatures can expect divine care. Thereby, estates also circumscribe the contexts of communication that generate creaturely moral action. O'Donovan's secondary distinction among the forms of communication named in chapter 3—'advice', 'authority', 'moral teaching'—shows a different instinct. In 'advice', O'Donovan argues, the disclosure of truth is particular and occasional. In a certain kind of 'authoritative communication', 'Reality is shown us, but instead of seeing it whole, entire, and in the round, we see it through *this* demonstration, *this* personality, theory, *this* command.' (54; italics added) However, in 'moral teaching' the one being instructed receives

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6   For clues that lead in this direction see Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 1-5. Luther's Works vol. 1.* Ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1958).

comprehensive, coherent instruction that does not stop at isolated observations but pulls everything together, liberating us to learn from them all and live in harmony with nature and events…authorised by the coherence of the world and its history (60).

Might the Lutheran vision conceive of the horizons of revealed reality more proximately than this—as concretely circumscribed by divine speech? The characteristic particularity of 'advice' would thereby be closest to the kind of revelation of God's care for the spheres of actual human lives we can expect; more accurate than the universalising scope of moral teaching, since the coherence of the world's history *is* the story of God's faithful acts rather than its own self-attesting constancy. If so, faithful reason's inquiry must be ordered to the former coherence: to that temporal narrative of specific divine provision.[7]

PLACING THIS ACCOUNT IN CONVERSATION WITH APOCALYPTIC THEOLOGY

1. Powers and principalities. Chapter 3 contains O'Donovan's most recent reading of the New Testament material on 'powers', 'principalities', 'thrones' and suchlike and so invites comparison with apocalyptic strands of theology. His treatment is presented in the context of a discussion of the claim (first introduced in *RMO*) that authority is the 'objective correlate of freedom'. This claim is fundamentally concerned with how divine authority can be worldly authority (57) and so related to realities of communication; moral thinking is made possible by moral communication correlative to authority. The authorities denote 'structuring forces that determine patterns of social existence, yet [are] doomed to be overwhelmed because all forms of authority must in the end be taken up into the original, but powerful for the moment in that they mediate the original to us' (59).

Karl Barth's explication of the Lord's Prayer from *The Christian Life* is taken up suggestively in chapter 2's coda and is of particular relevance here. Prayer is again the closing topic of this chapter, though Barth has been left behind. Nonetheless, since *The Christian Life* also treats the theme of *powers* under this rubric it is difficult not to mark the difference between Barth's and O'Donovan's understandings of this terrain. For Barth, *The Christian Life* concerns the 'Struggle for Human Righteousness', which involves 'Revolt against Disorder', and *so* far can he keep

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7   For a critical appraisal of O'Donovan's work along these lines see Brian Brock, 'The Form of the Matter: Heidegger, Ontology and Christian Ethics', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 3 (2001), 257-79.

company with O'Donovan's understanding. But Barth's speaks strikingly of a 'revolt against the Lordless powers' and so might heighten the critical impulse in O'Donovan. As such Barth is also more reluctant to speak about their role in the communicative mediation of reality. If the powers can be deceptive about their own reality they can generate social formations of unreality. Their self-aggrandizing propaganda mediates nothing but simulacra and simulation. Alongside this O'Donovan's recognition that 'The event [of authority] itself overwhelms and refashions the institutions' (59) is valuable, but it must not side-line the apocalyptic key of the New Testament witness that Barth stresses. That Barthian viewpoint also understands that the powers are doomed, but would likely demur from the idea that this is because of an immanent *Aufhebung* into God's rule, which is what O'Donovan seems to suggest. Instead, it insists that, viewed eschatologically, they are defeated and just so set under the one true Lord.

As well as perception of falsehood—or better, discernment of spirits—East of Eden, there exists also the possibility, as Luther reminds us with an eye on Genesis 3, that the communicative event illumines reality in its genuine brokenness (and not simply brokenness as exception which proves the rule of order, *pace* O'Donovan). Our attention is rightly drawn to the thorns and thistles, and we are allowed in *that* way to take heed of the world as an objective referent in our self's journey of moral deliberation: to repent! It is not simply that communication alerts us to the fact that our actions actualise an ignorance of the creation's pristine contours. The 'firmest grasp of the real'[8] made possible in our communication's mediation of the world to one another entails more than that. The gospel's apocalyptic cast also alerts us to the fact that heightened awareness of disruptive powers that are characteristic of the old aeon's entanglement with sin, keeps company with the salutary presence of the 'new'. Could we be so bold as to venture that Augustinians, in seeking to do better than apocalypticism, clip off the lower notes and highest hopes of the gospel?

2. Christology. Finally, O'Donovan notes that moral teaching presses 'beyond' as it moves towards divine authority. Here, in Matthean mood, the singularity of Jesus' teaching become apparent (64). Nonetheless an apocalyptic understanding would ask whether the communicative disclosure of reality ought also be more *explicitly* yoked to *Christ's presence* and work of making all things new. Colossians 3, for instance, predicates much on the risen Lord's present reality. There we find the new self, as in

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8   The phrase is borrowed from John Webster, '"The Firmest Grasp of the Real": Barth on Original Sin', in John Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 2004), pp. 65-76.

O'Donovan's description, renewed in knowledge, just as in Romans we find the mind renewed in accordance with God's will (12:2). The new self, though, is 'being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator'—the new mind is explicitly *not* to be conformed to the pattern of this world. Is there cause to wonder here about the possibility of revelatory communication opening the gaze not just to 'new perception of reality that is needed for effective action' (53) but also to the formal *and material* primacy of new perception of the *new* reality, Christ himself and his benefits?

The time of induction in moral communication, then, in which we are brought to thought, speech, and action, is never other than the *kairos* of Christ's ongoing *self*-disclosure.[9] In O'Donovan's account, P.T. Forsyth supplies this understanding (54) (though the lack of worldly contextualisation in Forsyth's account is criticised [58]).[10] Nonetheless, could it be that if O'Donovan's approach becomes too subtle on this point it will lose its Christological specificity? The richly pneumatological character of *SWT* must not effect a Christological deflation. When 'a free moment appears brand new and spacious'[11] it is only because Christ through the Spirit is recognised and obeyed as true Lord. To be clear, O'Donovan as moral theologian is above all about the task of building a conceptual framework to secure precisely this moment. Yet it is threatened by the understatement of divine action in the creaturely emergence of communication in chapter 3 and the heavy stress upon unchanging nature as objective referent for communication. Properly understood, apocalyptic reminds us that an account of communication and objective reality in theological ethics cannot afford to take for granted the singular priority of salvific orientation to an agent who is Lord of history *as well* as Creator of all.

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9   For an articulation of Christ's agency *as* reality *contra* O'Donovan, see Christopher Holmes, *Ethics in the Presence of Christ* (London: T & T Clark, 2012).

10   The relevance of this point to discussions in chapter 5 (see e.g. p. 93) is outside the purview of this response, but highly pertinent.

11   Patrick Kavanagh, *Collected Poems* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 200.

'Moral Theory': Response to Chapter Four

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Chapter four of *Self, World, and Time* (*SWT*) introduces the top level of moral thinking: Ethics, which can be pursued as Christian Ethics. In this review, I search for definiteness in distinguishing Ethics and Moral Teaching, and in relating Ethics and Doctrine. I conclude with a critique of O'Donovan's understanding of Christian Ethics, suggesting that the Christian element of the task makes it more unique than O'Donovan will necessarily allow.

O'Donovan takes Ethics (capitalised) as 'the whole range of intellectual attention that is given to moral thinking and moral teaching by philosophy and theology…'. [1] It is 'a discipline of study within the realm of organized knowledge' (67). Its Christian form traditionally grew from, or was something of a piece with, Theology more broadly; the separation of the two within Protestantism appeared most distinctly during the Enlightenment, and grew from (i) slackening ecclesial discipline, and tolerance of dissent in national churches; (ii) the rise of belles-lettristic ethical discourses; and (iii) the development of Philosophical Ethics. Of course, there was an eighteenth century devotional revival, as well, and a romantic reaction to Kantian aridity.

Ethics, among sciences, does not have a discrete object to subject to empirical investigation (69), but rather relates to action. Or, we should say, human act-*ing*, rather than human action; not 'behaviour', but moral reason. Indeed, its subject is moral reason, '*trains of thought which resolve upon action*' (71), 'thinking-to-act' (97). Ethics is not distinguished by being a non-normative discipline, *pace* some attempts of contemporary academia to pursue Ethics through neuroscience or social science alone. Ethics reflects on moral debate and introspects moral reasoning (the activity we pursue in considering our actions), distinguishing good and bad reasons; but in doing so '[t]he normativity of the primary moral deliberation exports itself into the reflective analysis' (71).

Ethics seeks to improve moral thinking—it is reflection upon this reflective practice or moment (viz., moral thinking)—but it is left unclear

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[1] Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time. Ethics as Theology 1: An Induction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), p. 67. Subsequent page references in the text are to this work. All italics in quotations are original.

in O'Donovan's account how Ethics is to be distinguished in this from moral teaching.2 Both eschew 'advice' and seek to allow for the freedom of the individual. It seems that Ethics is a second-order discipline, thinking about moral thinking, yet moral teaching is presented as similarly reflective on moral thinking (71); and Ethics, not simply moral teaching, 're-shapes our moral thinking up to the threshold of action' (75)—is there any sharp distinction to be made?

As it stands, there exists a discursive triangle (overlooked by those academics who propose a too-rigid 'Ethic of X', with 'X' as, for example, happiness or responsibility [73]) of moral thinking, moral teaching and Ethics. The ethical vertex aims not to give a resolution to moral inquiry, but to lend to it a reasonable structure; it 'equips' the inquirer 'to reach a resolution of his or her own' (74). Ethics as a discipline makes no appeal to authority,[3] but is inevitably bound up with the authority that attaches to moral teaching.

When this connection to authority is outright and explicit, Ethics is part of Moral Theology.[4] Amongst theoretical disciplines, the contribution of Moral Theology is its reference and direction to the reality of God. Ethics, Philosophy and Theology each relate to reality, each in its own way. Philosophy yields categories, Ethics provides impetus and opens the field to necessary questions of action, and Doctrinal Theology—what does Doctrine do?

Having placed Ethics between science on the one hand and ethical practice on the other, O'Donovan proceeds in the second part of the chapter ('Moral Theology and the Narrative of Salvation') to situate Ethics with regard to scripture and theology. We enter by considering scripture's

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2   Moral teaching is defined in Chapter three as instruction of moral agents in what is morally authoritative; it is not the giving of commands, but instruction in how to perceive what is ethically meaningful, liberating the 'disciple to understand and live well' (p. 60).

3   However, O'Donovan consistently claims that it is 'normative'. O'Donovan suggests that Ethics might be non-authoritative because Ethics as a discipline can be integrated into varying confessions (p. 74). Yet isn't it the case that ethics (small 'e', as well as capital 'E' ethical theorising) will vary precisely according to the confessions to which they are attached? It seems that the distinction might rather be that (Christian) Ethics as a university discipline refrains from presenting itself as authoritative, and works subjunctively; it offers the normative reasons that another (non-academic) actor would use were they to be in a position to speak authoritatively.

4   '[A] self-conscious positioning of Ethics within the wider convictions of Christian existence is undertaken within the discipline of Christian Ethics, or Moral Theology' (p. 75).

role, and find that it is a divine resource for and aide to moral thinking, but does not preclude thinking. As deliberation is to obedience, so thinking is to text; scripture calls us to specifically 'thoughtful obedience' (78). Further, Ethics is not itself biblical interpretation, but it assumes that an interpretation can be had, and one that explains a train of ethical thought. Obedience requires that we follow this train, accounting along the way for the historical place and complexities of our own situation and of that within the text.

Scripture's ethical importance is not only in paradigmatic or exemplary moral situations, nor in the explicit commands it contains, but also in its depiction of reality. Here we meet the issue of Doctrine's relation to Ethics, as Doctrine is sometimes presented as providing a scriptural worldview for Ethics' use. O'Donovan rejects this and presents Doctrine and Ethics as two 'systematic and ordered disciplines' (81). Certainly they are. But how to relate them, other than to insist that they be related, and to insist that they do so having first been distinguished? O'Donovan marks them as 'sister-disciplines' (81) both sharing the task of reading Scripture, which includes the synthetic task sometimes (wrongly) arrogated to Doctrine. But beyond the importance of maintaining their distinction (marked by the use of '*vis à vis*' as a noun), O'Donovan fails to establish a *parallel* relationship of the two. For example, in establishing the disciplines' respective discoveries, Peter's Pentecost sermon is doctrinal (concerned with 'God's being and works'), which leaves its hearers asking for 'a *next thing*' (82), that is, for Moral Theology. In this case, Doctrine and Moral Theology are related as *preceding* and *following*. Similarly, 'From statements about God as the ground of our action it must be possible to make the transition to how we are to live.' (86) Again, it seems that Doctrine *grounds* Ethics (even if we allow that Ethics can include the reading of Scripture without Doctrine as its mediator), for what would it mean to mark such 'statements about God' as part of Ethics rather than Doctrine?

Other than being separate disciplines, that is, modes of thinking with different ordering canons and intellectual impulses or habits, I propose we also think of Doctrine and Ethics as two moments of Christian thought, and that their relation, from the point of view of the ethics O'Donovan here elaborates, might be simply that of reflection and deliberation. Moral Theology's movement between the doctrinal and the practical (89)—might this be moral thinking's movement between reality and right act?[5]

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5   We might find an example earlier in the text: 'The proposition that God loves the world is in itself a work of reflection, a determination of the truth of things, not a decision to do something, yet we have not grasped its full significance unless our minds are led on to how we may conduct ourselves in a

In any case, woe betide she who would collapse Doctrine and Ethics. Doctrine and Ethics each have their own 'discoveries' (82). Ethics' discoveries include the necessity of human action—that there is something to be done—and the subjectivity of human action. Apart from the rarefying we might suspect of Doctrine (the potential of 'swallowing up the "what are we to do?"'), it more appropriately discovers objective realities. Doctrine and Ethics give us 'a third-person and a first-person point of view' (82). Schleiermacher's ethics is an example of the collapse. Here, Ethics is the description of the Christian community, which is necessarily spiritual, with no normative deliberation on what do; that is, simply describing the church shows us what Christians do; we don't have to figure out any hard moral problems. Schleiermacher is further problematic in that his is only a '*religious* description' (86); it leaves out any description of God's world and man's life therein.

What lies behind this reference to Schleiermacher, making this example a relevant one for O'Donovan's audience? O'Donovan's distinguishes between two possibilities open to putatively Christian Ethics. Moral Theology's 'theme', we read, 'is not…a special *kind* of moral thinking, that of Christian believers, nor a special *kind* of moral teaching, that of Christian teachers…but…moral thinking *in general* and moral teaching *in general*' (75). This judgment illustrates two separate issues to be decided by those undertaking Moral Theory.

I read in these lines, first, a caution against a communitarian temptation to pursue Ethics merely through describing the practices of the Christian community. O'Donovan denies this: Christian Ethics ought to offer structure and rationality to the moral reflection of Christian believers, but it seeks a more universal scope, speaking to more than believers only. One line of justifying Divinity's place in the university would make this affirmation; the reason O'Donovan's gives is, in part, the apologetic force of Christian Ethics' demonstration of the moral agent's relation to God. Christian Ethics includes amongst its discoveries, its data of reality on which we may reflect, that humans must act and that in some relation to God (75).

Second, addressing Moral Theology's theme broaches the issue of warrants: to which community may I as a moral theologian authoritatively speak? (Alternately, whom do I believe can speak authoritatively of Moral Theology? Or, while anyone may venture claims, even hold institutional roles, in a pluralist society, to whom will I as a Christian actually listen?) To what extent do I want to say I am a human moral agent, prac-

world that God loves' (p. 32). O'Donovan countenanced this construal at the KLICE Research Seminar, Cambridge, July 2014.

ticing morality 'in general', apart from my existence as a Christian one? This distinction makes autobiographical, chronological sense (I came to faith at a certain historical point), but is it perfectly accurate theologically? Here O'Donovan addresses the longstanding question of the relation of nature and grace:

> Moral thinking is the vocation of Adam, an aspect of human nature. But Adam's vocation is never "pure" nature, conceivable in isolation and on its own, but is conceived only in the light of the Second Adam, who is Christ (75).

However, does this claim cohere with the later one, that faith 'is either present or absent' and that faith is an 'operation of God himself' allowing one to 'see the secret of the world and time' (106). Yes, the Christian pursuing Moral Theory is not more-than-human (that is, she is pursuing something recognisable to 'moral thinking *in general*'), but what does it mean to characterise this God-given insight as part of Adamic ethics? Does it make sense to claim that seeing the 'secret of the world and time' is part of Ethics 'in general'? Might this gift of faith make a difference not only in the content, but even in the task of Ethics?

Adopting the phenomenological stance shown in the metaphor of 'waking' in chapter one, we might also ask whether it is possible for the moral theorist to pursue his task with worldly insight, only to find the necessity of divine insight and the gracious receipt of faith from God, as is said to happen. Surely this is possible. Yet it seems worth reflecting on our preference for the language of 'conversion' in such instances, of a change from faith's absence to its presence; it seems that an examination of Christians' experience would show something that coming to faith is often (usually?) more radical than ethical reflection coming to its logical conclusion (the latter being O'Donovan's suggestion or hope [75]). Indeed, why does the phenomenological approach fall away after the first chapter, replaced by a rationalised schema of practical-to-abstract levels of moral reflection?[6] It might be that moral agents rarely if ever experience morality in such a way, that for every Bonhoeffer who is first a theologian, and then a Christian,[7] there are a million lay believers who experience Chris-

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[6] This is demonstrated by the second chapter's discussion of Hume on the good and the right; introducing this theme makes sense in an Ethics textbook, less so in a phenomenological 'induction' into the ethical life of 'active believers' (p. xi).

[7] Perhaps O'Donovan's case for conversion as the logical end of Ethics (and his concurrent nature-grace opinion) would be bolstered by such examples— would phenomenology bear out this idea of Ethics having God latent within it?

tian moral understanding as something unique and discontinuous with their former way of thinking, rather than its internally summoned consummation. This may be wrong, of course; perhaps for each one of these lay believers, there is another who experiences no particular transformation of their moral thinking when 'awakened' or 'inducted'.

At root, this is another aspect of the question of apocalyptic reality brought up in Samuel Tranter's piece—how does new creation relate to the world as publicly visible? Is new creation continuous with the world that everyone, Christian and non-Christian, encounters? If we say 'yes', we logically expect the Christian difference to express itself in ethical reflection. If we do not expect Ethics inevitably to encounter God, we might say that humans and the rest of creation await a revelation from outwith; that Ethics will not ascend to God or to his antechamber, but that faith, which sees past '*first* appearances', 'is not an immanent human power but an operation of God himself' (106).

We may ask Christian Ethics to be more than simple description of Christian life or church practices, but do we ennoble Christian Moral Theory by asking it to be a universal guide to moral experience, having previously categorised it a species of human ethical thinking? Are the realities to which it refers helpful outside of evangelism,[8] or even intelligible to those not converted? Indeed, why is it that Philosophy does not return the favour (76) of adopting Moral Theological categories? Christian Ethics is not simply Ethics done very, very well, because of Christians' superior, faith-enabled insight.[9] Rather, Christians respond in their Ethics to new realities seen only in faith; for example, the celibate man doesn't just see past the '*first* appearance' of marriage; he responds to a different appearance altogether—that of the new heavens and the new earth. This latter, Philosophy cannot do, nor can Ethics anticipate this.

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[8] A task to which O'Donovan seems to commit Moral Theology, in its summoning of moral thinking and teaching to be converted to God (p. 75).

[9] O'Donovan agrees: 'Moral Theology offers to complete [Ethics], not by giving final answers to unanswered questions or concrete directions in place of general principles, but by pointing beyond formalities of thought and language to realities that determine what answers are worth reaching.' (76) Although 'pointing beyond formalities…to realities' seems similar to offering 'concrete directions in place of general principles' (though there may be a distinction between 'directions' and 'answers'), the basic point remains. However, are the realities that Moral Theology indicates 'already implicit in moral thought' (75)?

'The Task of Moral Theology': Response to Chapter Five

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In 1 Corinthians 3, the Apostle Paul warns that some of the work we venture in the *saeculum*, or in the 'age of Ethics', as *Self, World, and Time* (*SWT*) calls it,[1] may not outlast this era. We are like workmen, our faltering steps, stuttering speech, and earnest gestures our building materials. Some of our works will survive the refiner's fire, but some will not. In Dante's image, some works will be forgotten in the amnesial waters of Lethe, and some will be recalled in the mnemonic waters of Eunoe. The moral agent's practical reason, fully aware that even its most confident decisions may be found wanting, attempts to discern the difference. To fail to act, from the paralysing fear that some works may end up like burnt straw, is, to jump parables, like burying the talent in the ground. So *SWT* rightly counsels that we must 'use this moment of time to do something, however modest, that is worthwhile and responsible, something to endure'—*we hope*—'before the throne of judgment' (17). This counsel stands behind the explorations of faith, love, and hope in chapter five.

O'Donovan introduces the triad of faith, love, and hope as an example—in Thomistic parlance—of grace perfecting nature (102), the natural children of human moral experience christened by the eschatological Spirit with new names at their baptism: the awareness of self, now renamed 'faith'; awareness of world, now 'love'; and awareness of time, now 'hope'. In the following, I will focus in particular on the last pair, time and hope. I do so not only because hope plays a leading role, arriving after faith has taken the stage and prepared the scene, but also because, by playing a supporting role to love, at least ethically, hope's character is also the least developed.

MORAL THEOLOGY, FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE

Despite pietistic or neo-Orthodox attempts to collapse Ethics into faith or conversion (93), few would argue against recognising the leading

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[1] Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time. Ethics as Theology 1: An Induction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), p. 91. Subsequent page references in the text are to this work.

roles faith, love, and hope should play in Christian moral reasoning, and O'Donovan invokes Augustine, Aquinas, Tyndale, and the early Barth to prove as much. However, unique to O'Donovan is the attempt to correlate these theological virtues with the triad that structures natural moral reasoning, namely, self, world, and time. Though love as the form of a renewed awareness of the world, and hope as the form of a renewed awareness of time may be more immediately convincing, O'Donovan also argues persuasively that faith is the proper description of a self's awareness of Christ's resurrection, the 'absolute center of history' (92)—a linear version of T.S. Eliot's reference to the 'still point of a turning world'.[2]

Whereas *Resurrection and Moral Order* attends primarily, though not exclusively, to elucidating and loving the created moral order 'behind us', so to speak,[3] *SWT* attends primarily, though not exclusively, to the pneumatic renewal of creaturely agency, and its hopeful movement into the undetermined penultimate future 'ahead of us'. Thus faith frees the moral agent's practical reason to move from the empty tomb in either of two directions, toward the beautifully ordered world or toward 'a new moment of participation in God's work and being' in time (92-3). Thus the natural moral awareness of self, world, and time become the Christian performances of faith, love, and hope.

Here we move from the faithful self that loves the world to reflect on the hope-filled 'new moment', which tutors us, O'Donovan writes, 'to look for new activity, new deeds', and 'new possibilities that *prepare the way for* new heaven and a new earth' (93, italics added). This idea echoes 2 Corinthians 5 and Romans 8, where Paul explains that the same Spirit who will one day redeem all creation has already begun to redeem one part of creation in the meantime, namely, the hearts and minds of Christians in order that, together with Christ, they may be the first fruits, or advance realisation, of the new creation. Christian moral agents are oriented toward the eschatological end, and called to act improvisationally in harmony with what has come and will come, and so to *be*come, in N.T. Wright's description, not only 'a sign and foretaste of what God wants to do for the entire cosmos', but also '*agents* of the transformation of this earth'.[4]

SWT's assertion that our deeds 'prepare the way' for the new heaven and earth invites further scrutiny, but not because it evokes a worry

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[2] See his poem, 'Burnt Norton' in *The Four Quartets*: 'At the still point of the turning world …. Except for the point, the still point, There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.'

[3] Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

[4] Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007), pp. 213–4.

about O'Donovan 'immanentizing the eschaton' (to adapt Eric Voegelin's phrase) like some zealous postmillennialist or nineteenth-century progressivist. On the one hand, 'prepare the way' echoes the confident vocation of the Baptizer calling out in the wilderness, but on the other, *SWT* leaves rather obscure what counts as such a potent preparatory action, and how we recognise it as such. What kinds of deeds would a train of hope-directed practical reasoning arrive at that might proleptically participate in or 'prepare the way for' the new creation? My questions are, first, whether hope does moral work, or pulls its moral weight in the book alongside love; and, second, whether *SWT*'s reservation about specifying our eschatological knowledge unnecessarily inhibits it from offering sufficient direction to our moral reasoning.

Chapter five recognises the question. It asks, 'how are we to speak of an *eschatological elevation* without being left gesturing, contentless, pointing towards indefinable and indescribable empty space?' (95; italics added). Considered, but rejected, points of eschatological disclosure include fraternal poverty and monasticism, revolution, Schleitheim ecclesiology and martyrdom, because these, we are told, 'do not provide direction for the life we are called to live in obedience to what God has said and done for us'; that is, they cannot be converted into recommendation, counsel, or reproof (95). It is, however, not entirely clear why these historical moments could not serve at least as models, or why there might not be a train of thinking stimulated by them that could tutor our practical moral reasoning in hope, so that we are not left gesturing impotently toward an unknown good beyond our imagining.

FORWARD IN HOPE

O'Donovan promises that as our gaze follows the Risen One forward, our 'forms of moral thinking' are 'given back to us incomparably more disciplined, more informed, more comprehensive, more inviting, than they could have been before' (95-6). However, when we begin to look for content that could tutor our eschatological practical reason toward the future, both this chapter and the next leave us wanting. Whereas Christian existence is built on faith and embodied in love, *SWT*'s account of hope lacks the strong cognitive content O'Donovan identifies in love (113-14), and seems to offer not guidance for life during the 'age of Ethics', but encouragement to endure it (99) and 'a space of freedom' in which whatever we do may be done. We read that whereas faith certifies the conscience and love leads to compassionate neighbourliness, hope comforts and consoles in adversity (100). Absent is the possibility that eschatological hope might direct us to the aforementioned new opportunities, new

deeds, and new possibilities. Instead, hope represents 'the severest purgation of our knowledge' (123). Chapter six will state that hope 'opens the way to agency', but not, we note, through the lesser mode of 'anticipation' (which grounds future action on the basis of present realities), because that for which we hope remains shrouded in the unknown and unseen future. It is not clear, however, how an unknown end can animate or open the way to agency, or why the anticipated redemption of the good creation is not a sufficient grounding for hope, or why hope is necessarily tethered to an unknowable 'eschatological elevation'.

The most promising role assigned to hope is the unexpected statement that hope can discern opportune times to resist adversity and to serve God and the neighbour (100). This still seems under-described and hard to reconcile with the unknowable content of hope. I want to propose that hope, informed by what we can know of the eschatological kingdom and new heavens and earth, might alert us to those anti-creation forces and structures that should be resisted in order to 'prepare the way for' and to offer anticipatory and proleptic witness to the new heaven and a new earth. Bonhoeffer gestures in this direction in *Creation and Fall*: 'The church of Christ witnesses to the end of all things. It lives from the end, it thinks from the end, it acts from the end, it proclaims its message from the end.… The church speaks within the old world about the new world.'[5] Likewise, Barth reminds us, 'Seen in the New Testament context, the future, the world to come…has already encountered those who call upon God in it here in the present, in this world.… They have to do with the future in the present, the world to come in this world, the last thing in the first.'[6]

Here, let me offer five examples of movement from eschatology to hopeful discernment that bend activities back and return them to us, in *SWT*'s words about moral thinking, 'incomparably more disciplined, more informed, more comprehensive, more inviting, than they could have been before' (96). We 'wake' to their intelligibility and their dignity as actions that will ultimately be received and remembered because they help us in small and penultimate ways resist the chaos and disorder of the world and nurture wholeness and human flourishing. They possess

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[5] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*. Tr. Douglas Stephen Bax; ed. John W. De Gruchy (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), p. 21.

[6] Karl Barth, *The Christian Life. Church Dogmatics IV/4, Lecture Fragments*. Tr. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 247.

a kind of proleptic sacramentality that, to borrow a phrase from the poet Scott Cairns, enables them to 'lean into' the divine future.[7]

I recognise that what follows diverges from *SWT* because these are examples of 'anticipation', which the book distinguishes from hope's apophatic eschatological elevation, but these better demonstrate how the work of temporal agency could be informed by the eschatological new creation. Dante's *Commedia* operates like this, sending trajectories 'back', so to speak, to the world of the not-yet-dead in order to provoke readers to work for the intellectual and social harmony of *Paradiso*, to practice the reforming virtues of *Purgatorio*, and to avoid the fractious perversions of *Inferno*. We are not given the fullness of Dante's *Commedia* in scripture, but we might be given enough to approximate his method. The following examples not only orient the moral imagination and the moral agent teleologically; they also offer practical reason a critical question: would this action, thought, sentiment, or practice be welcomed into the new creation or resisted by it?—is it gold or hay?

Consider, first, Paul's conclusion in 1 Corinthians 6 that because Christians will eschatologically judge angels and the world, they should avoid taking each other to court because, in Gordon Fee's words, Christians

> are eschatological people, who will themselves be involved in God's final judgments on the world. ….The future realities, which for Paul are as certain as the present itself, condition everything the church is and does in the present.[8]

Consider, second, health care and the resurrection of the dead. The background texts include the *sōmata epourania* (heavenly bodies) of 1 Corinthians 15:40, the resurrection of the body in the Apostle's Creed, the absence of death, crying, or pain in Revelation 21:4, the tree and the water of life in Revelation 22:1–3, and Jesus' healing of broken human bodies ahead of their final restoration. From these slight pictures of flourishing eschatological life we might move to the practices of restorative healthcare or hospice ministries during life in the world. Caring for the physical well-being of others, restoring the healthy functioning of their bodies, or

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[7]   In his prose and poetry Cairns refers to leaning into God, prayer, 'the Holy Presence,' 'the apophatic,' 'the mystery,' and 'the eternal divine life'. See, for instance, *Short Trip to the Edge* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), pp. 89–90; *The End of Suffering: Finding Purpose in Pain* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2009), pp. 8, 73.

[8]   Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 232–3.

accompanying them towards death might thus be described as practices that resist the disorder and deleterious effects of the fall and anticipate the life and health of the world to come. Furthermore, recognising the patient to be an eternal being may be a disincentive to neglect or harm him, but instead, with compassion and reverence, to provide him the fullest care that time and resources allow.[9]

A further tether may be tied between the absence of grief and distress in the eschatological kingdom, every tear having been wiped away by God, and the work of mental health professionals, whose work both responds to the ways the broken creation injures people, but also anticipates, as a foretaste, the coming eschatological relief and joy. Fourth, Nicholas Wolterstorff argues that art and beauty enable humans now to experience a foretaste of the 'refreshing delight' that will be afforded them in the eschatological *shalom* of the coming Kingdom.[10] As Etienne Gilson asserts, 'Thanks to the fine arts, matter enters by anticipation into something like the state of glory promised to it by theologians at the end of time'[11]—the material glory glimpsed in Revelation's beautiful new Jerusalem. Finally, consider how the absence of marriage in heaven, but not intimate community, gave birth to the Christian reconception of family and the practices of celibacy, adoption, and godparenthood. We could continue with the ways eschatological hope might deepen our understanding and practice of friendship, peace-making, theological investigation, patriotism, hospitality, justice, and so forth.

Though hope *is* 'hidden in the heavens', it might be that the Spirit who moves between the new and the old creation, and who causes us faithfully to hope for the one and love the other, also rouses us to discern and pursue, in the immediacy of our spatial and temporal existence, some of the 'dearest, freshness, deep down things' that we will meet with glad recognition and full wakefulness when that eschatological morning, 'at the brown brink eastward, springs'.[12]

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[9] See C. S. Lewis, 'The Weight of Glory', in *Transposition and Other Addresses* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1949), pp. 32–33.

[10] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 78-84.

[11] Etienne Gilson, *Arts of the Beautiful* (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2009), p. 33.

[12] From Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'God's Grandeur'.

'The Trajectory of Faith, Love, and Hope': Response to Chapter 6

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At its core, Oliver O'Donovan's *Self, World, and Time* (*SWT*) is a reflection on God's life as faith, love, and hope intended to illuminate the shape and direction of our life together.[1] O'Donovan provides us with an occasion to see how moral and doctrinal claims interlock, for theology cannot properly be theology if it does not attend to doctrine's inclination to stretch its legs into the actual life of the Christian believer. As a historian of Christian thought and practice, my response will resist a certain inclination to press immediately towards action and will delay for the moment the question 'what's at stake?' In this response, I will, instead, attend to the theological architecture of the book from the angle of the triad of faith, love, and hope that offers a doctrinal structure to O'Donovan's argument and, as we shall see, undergirds the coordination of 'self', 'world', and 'time'.

In chapter six, O'Donovan examines the character of the *relation* between faith, love, and hope. How are they held together as a unity? In the first line of chapter six, O'Donovan cuts off an obvious strategy of finding the unity in just one of the theological virtues (e.g., love as a kind of 'essence' of the triad itself). Instead of this 'essentialist' rendition, O'Donovan prefers a model based on a 'dynamic interplay' between faith, love, and hope. In the words of Tyndale, a fitting mouthpiece for this symposium, 'Because the one is known by the other, it is impossible to know any of them truly, and not be deceived, but *in respect and comparison* of the other.'[2] Elsewhere, O'Donovan has suggested that the relationship is 'a kind of *communicatio idiomatum*'.[3] This seems to reiterate what he left us with at the end of chapter five of *SWT*:

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[1]   I am in debt to Rachel Teubner, Joseph Lenow, Matthew Puffer, and Charles Mathewes for their thoughtful comments and suggestions.

[2]   Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time. Ethics as Theology 1: An Induction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), p. 105 (my emphasis). Subsequent page references in the text are to this work.

[3]   'Faith before Hope and Love', *New Blackfriars* 95.1056 (March 2014), pp. 177-89, quote on p. 181.

> Their unity can be expressed by saying that the gift of the *self*, perfected in faith, provides a point of view from which we may understand the *world* as affording us *time* to *act*; the gift of the *world*, perfected in love, provides a point of view from which we may understand the *self* as laying claim to *its own time*; the gift of *time*, perfected in hope, provides us a point of view from which we may understand the *self* as active *within the world* (103).

As presupposed in this passage, faith, love, and hope map onto self, world, and time respectively. The theological triad should, then, be held together in a manner analogous to that of self, world, and time. Further, we might also expect the epistemic access to be reciprocal as well: to capture the relationship between faith, love, and hope is thus to understand the relation between self, world, and time; and to capture the relationship between self, world, and time is to understand the relation between faith, love, and hope.

While I have some concerns about this way of relating the two triads, which I will return to below, I would like to focus first on the relations within the triads by drawing upon the last section in chapter two ('Ethics and Prayer'). In the tradition of two of his most prized interlocutors, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas,[4] O'Donovan expounds the Lord's Prayer as a *moral* document, drawing out the references to self, world, and time. The petition, 'Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven', indicates the *world* as the 'scene of God's self-disclosure'; 'Give us this day our daily bread' designates those claims for the care of the *self*; and the petition, 'And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil' calls to a future *time* (39). In saying the Prayer, we as a community are drawn through the very logic of world, self, and time.

Notice, however, that O'Donovan's ordering has changed. The Lord's Prayer unfolds as world-self-time. Mapping this onto the theological triad, we would have the order love-faith-hope. O'Donovan has argued that the classic order, faith-hope-love, is not the only order attested in Scripture, plumping instead for the order reflected in the title of the book, faith-love-hope (self-world-time).[5] He exerts considerable energy in Chapter 5 establishing this seemingly minor point because it relates to the structure of Christian action.[6] The disparate orderings suggest that

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[4]   Augustine, *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount*, trans. John J. Jepson, Ancient Christian Writers, no. 5 (New York: Paulist Press, 1948), pp. 100-27. Thomas Aquinas, *The Catechetical Instructions*, trans. Joseph B. Collins (New York: Veritas Splendor Publications, 1939), pp. 247-307.

[5]   *SWT*, pp. 97-103.

[6]   'We conclude this induction into Ethics as Theology, then, with a journey through the trajectory of this sequence, tracing how the active self expands

O'Donovan is not entirely sure-footed with respect to whether the self or the world, whether faith or love, is the first step for human action. We return to this below.

Crucially, the prayer concludes with a movement toward personal action ('lead us not'). Whereas the preceding petitions evoke action outside of us—your *kingdom* come, your *will* be done, give us this *day*, forgive our *debts*—the final petition draws those who give it voice—the 'we' or 'us' of the prayer—into the action of God. While the prayer begins with the vocative 'Father!'—the cry of dependence that we utter as we are 'pressing forward upon the knees'—it concludes with the promise of a complicated agency—God's *and* our's—that is, upon reflection, already present within the action of genuflection. Indeed, 'Prayer is the form thought takes when we understand that agency implies a relation to the government of the universe, at once cooperative and dependent.' (38-9)

But what kind of unity does the Lord's Prayer have? Two possible loci of this unity come to mind. The first has already been intimated (and is further clarified in chapter three): the community, the 'we' that is found in the prayer (64). The prayer's unity is in the community, the congregation that gives it voice. In a similar vein to how Augustine reads and preaches the Psalms, speaking the prayer in unison effects a kind of unity of the praying community.7 The second is derived from the form of the prayer: action or the possibility of agency that proceeds out of the prayer and draws all of its words behind it as a single unifying impulse of the Christian life. As the tip of a spear collects all of the force at one critical point, so too does the concluding petition draw together into action all the other petitions. It appears that O'Donovan is more engaged here with what is at stake in the second, that is, the possibility of agency. Action as the point of unity is emphasized in his discussion of the three 'offices' of faith, love, and hope (100). The unity of faith, love, and hope seems, then, to be of action. The centrality of action comes as no surprise, but how exactly does this square with the 'dynamic interplay' that replaces an essentialist account? For this we must return to chapter six.

For O'Donovan, faith and love are openness, receptivity (112, 119). But they are also related to knowledge. Faith is, on the one hand, a kind of 'knowledge-minus', as O'Donovan puts it, 'a cognitive orientation towards realities that are still uncertain and unclear' (110). This could, perhaps, have been termed 'trust', an epistemic virtue whose value we

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into loving knowledge, is narrowed down to action, and finally attains rest in its accomplishment' (*SWT*, 103).

7   For an influential account along these lines, see Rowan Williams, 'Augustine and the Psalms', *Interpretation* 58 (2004), 17-27.

have recently been reminded of by current trends in epistemology.[8] Love's knowledge, on the other hand, is captured, for O'Donovan, by the term 'admiration': 'the knowledge of what can only be known in love, and the love of what can only be loved in knowledge' (113). This seems to be a kind of 'knowledge-plus'. Between 'knowledge-minus' and 'knowledge-plus' somehow emerges the promise on which hope is grounded. In O'Donovan's words, 'promise allows hope to be born, and through hope opens the way to agency' (122-3).

So what we have here is, I think, yet another triad in trust, admiration, and promise, but one that is a bit closer than the other triads to the stuff of action. But when set within this new triad, I am less convinced by the claim that hope (via its connection with promise) brings agency to effect (122). Whereas O'Donovan finds openness necessary for action in faith and love, it is trust and promise that seem to provide the conditions for *admiration* to draw me forward, pull me to the beautiful, the good, the true. Promises do not propel or effect, they guarantee; they are the substance of a trusting relation, what one party passes to another. But yet when I turn back to the Lord's Prayer, particularly the final petition—'And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil'—I can see the possibility of agency's ground in hope. This petition has been handed down to us as a petition of hope, and that description is acceptable, but it also points toward action. Thus, I think O'Donovan is right when he says, 'The moment of action is the moment of temptation, when our settled perceptions of the world and ourselves may fail us.' (123) To speak of temptation is to speak of possible courses of action. But is it 'only hope', as he suggests, that 'suffices to address [temptation]' (123)? If the unity of faith, love, and hope are somehow bound up with the 'logic' or form of the Lord's Prayer, we can, perhaps, catch a glimpse of the unity of the triad. But it is ambiguous whether the salutary response is in hope in particular or in the relation between faith, love, and hope. In other words, does hope as the goal—that is, the substance of that for which we hope—simply provide the orientation and thus that which collects faith and love into a unity? Or does hope play a more robust role in the animation of the movement toward action, working in tandem with faith and

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8   See, e.g., John Greco, 'Testimonial Knowledge and the Flow of Information', in *Epistemic Evaluation*, ed. by John Greco and David Henderson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); Linda Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy of Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Paul Faulkner, *Knowledge on Trust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

love? A clear answer to this is not offered in *SWT*, so we may have to wait until O'Donovan spells this out more clearly in the forthcoming volumes.

In the meantime, one might want to pose two specific questions. First, I am perplexed by O'Donovan's rejection of essentialism. If action is the unity that draws together the three theological virtues, and it is (nearly) identified with hope, how is this not in effect essentialising hope? Perhaps we should not, after all, give up on the essentialist strategy, provided that it is not one of the theological virtues that becomes the essence (and thereby the true substance) of the others. Rather, could not *desire* provide this golden thread? Desire is not exactly love, but a certain species of love, and neither is it faith nor is it hope, but that without which both faith and love would not even be able to begin the process of discovering a self and a world that are 'co-present' in time. This does not undercut O'Donovan's insight regarding the importance of hope to deliberation, for deliberation must still unfold in time with the promise and expectation of completed action. Rather, it gives us a hook into that which intrinsically motivates humans to look at themselves as persons living in this world. While hope might provide the structure for temporally-extended existence, it does not provide the motivation for action.

Second, O'Donovan suggests that faith, love, and hope also map onto the classical virtues: 'courage with faith, judgment with love, prudence and temperance with hope' (102). Is he thereby implicitly offering us an account of the unity of the virtues that differs both from the classical ('pagan') philosophical varieties *and* Augustine's and Luther's 'essentialist' strategies, which argue for the centrality of one of the theological virtues to the triad as a whole? O'Donovan's cryptic account leaves unclear what he makes of the classical virtues. In light of his insistence on foregrounding action—action that necessarily takes place in the world, in space and in time that Christians share with non-Christians—O'Donovan would strengthen his proposal if he were to indicate with greater care and precision, and in relation to other proposals throughout the history of Christian thought, how his account might reconfigure the classical virtues. Are non-Christians implicitly relying on the structural unity of the theological virtues when they successfully bring about a life lived according to the classical virtues? Or are the theological virtues necessary to live according to the classical virtues? A great deal has been written about this in recent years by those familiar to O'Donovan, and one wonders what he makes of these other proposals in light of his own innovations in this short volume.[9] I suspect that O'Donovan wants to reserve a place for the

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9   See, e.g., Jennifer Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) and Eric Gregory, *Politics of the*

theological that is more than simply one way of talking about the unity of virtues shared with non-Christians. *SWT* is, of course, an incomplete book, as it points to the later promised volumes; my queries are thus tentative. To these questions, I shall be grateful to find answers in O'Donovan's forthcoming volumes.

Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

Nature, Time and Moral Thought: A Response

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With few words to dispose of, I must make my thanks for these essays on *Self, World, and Time*, and for Ben Paulus' sensitive summary, more abruptly than they deserve. Dialogue is the heartbeat of thought, and my respondents have done me the inestimable service of keeping my thought circulating.

A cluster of questions arise around the nature-grace issue, which makes a good starting-point since I have been told since *Resurrection and Moral Order*[1] that I lay too much stress on their continuity. When **James King** asserts that 'new realities seen only in faith' are the ground of a Christian moral response to God, I have no difficulty in agreeing. But the 'new' arises within the economy of redemption, and One God is both Creator and Redeemer. We wonder at the new thing he has done, but we come to recognise it as the work of the Ancient of Days. *Creation* is redeemed in Christ, and for this reason *created* moral reason is the theme of Theological Ethics—yet restored and redeemed—never 'apart from evangelism'!

That the world is created, indeed, is itself a 'new reality seen only in faith'. What I find lacking in the Lutheran accounts of creation **Samuel Tranter** commends to me (though I have been glad to learn many other things from those who present them) is the discovery that 'the world', the whole of the ambiguous horizon of nature, inviting exploration with its apparently independent rationality, is in fact owned and ruled by the one who raised Jesus from the dead. Too narrowly anthropological a creation, too institutional a mankind—where is the overture to discovery, to practical experience and natural science? In *The Ways of Judgment* I complained of the doctrine of the estates that in 'ranging the church among a number of elementary social forms' it undermined ecclesiology.[2] I might equally well have seen it as operating the other way round, dragging aspects of creation into ecclesiology. **ST** himself glides seamlessly from 'mandates of creation' to 'estates' to a 'sacramental logic'. Where does that 'sacramental logic' leave the sacraments of the Gospel?

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[1] Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: Outline of an Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

[2] Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), p.254.

And where does it connect with **ST**'s anxieties about the 'lordless powers'? Yes there are lordless powers, but in the wake of Christ's triumph powers are not merely lordless. I go back to what I wrote in *Desire of the Nations* about 'reauthorisation'.[3] At the heart of New Testament apocalyptic there are authorities belonging to the time of human patience, *ho katechôn* for example. And what of the church itself, with its authority in preaching, counsel and denunciation? Barth's *CD* IV/4, which has inspired **ST**, can well be read alongside the equivalent section of *Ethics*, where provisional mediations of Christ's lordship receive full treatment. If we must revolt against lordless powers, we need to know where they lurk—an important question when the very language of protest has been co-opted by political power (as in Paris recently the crowds poured onto the streets when summoned by their government to do so). But this requires a 'thick' political description, with full and differentiated accounts of authority.

Both **Brian Williams** and **Jonathan Teubner** have given careful consideration to my treatment of the future. They had not very much to go on in *SWT*, and I trust they may find *Finding and Seeking* more helpful.[4] The important thing is that hope grasps promise. But to treat God's promise *as* promise is to wait upon God. Hope and anticipation (as I use the words, but the words are not the essential thing) are different: hope draws fulfilment back to the present from the promised future, anticipation projects a possible future from the present. Projecting the future is by far the most natural way to think about it; hope in the promise, then, demands an imaginative ascesis, which they both fear is something of a starvation diet.

BW offers five examples of how a more nourished eschatological imagination could supply a moral argument to a concrete conclusion. His examples interest me for the contrasting logics at work within them. The case for not litigating says, 'since it will be then, it should not be now'; the case for health care says, 'since it will be then, it should be so now'. In each case non-eschatological underpinnings—Jesus's words about judgment, his practice of healing the sick—play a larger part than might appear. Which is not meant to instil scepticism. But the beginning and end of eschatological imagery is the promise of God's decisive action, a promise which must be filled out in terms of God's *actual* self-disclosure in Christ (as, in the imagery of the Apocalypse, the slain and conquering Lamb takes centre-stage).

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[3]   Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[4]   Oliver O'Donovan, *Finding and Seeking: Ethics as Theology 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014).

It is right that the larger part of the discussion turns on the primary aim of the volume, which was a general description of moral experience and thought. And here a preliminary word is required about the new philosophical influences **ST** detects in *SWT*. We use our later intellectual influences very differently from the early ones that shaped us as students. Preparing for the voyage, we stuff whatever we can get into the hold, but what we encounter on the high seas we plunder selectively as we feel the need. Spaemann's account of the person gave me a great deal I needed to know about reflection (though I had settled on a use of the term long before), while to Jean-Yves Lacoste I owe a way of thinking about time, and especially the future, as a horizon of existence. Lacoste, who commended *SWT* as a *non-philosophical* ethics, once suggested to me that phenomenology was close to Augustinianism. But like Mark Twain's death, my phenomenological turn may be greatly exaggerated. I have no need to thank phenomenology for the concept of 'waking', I believe; the Bible has more than enough to say about it.

A good point of entry is **JK**'s uncertainty about the scholastic distinctions I make among the practices of moral thought: moral reason, moral teaching, and Ethics. Let us be clear about the status of these: they are tradition, and, indeed, modern tradition, unknown to the Christian world before Abelard wrote his *Ethica*. A different middle-ages in which the university never institutionalised the fragmentation of knowledge could possibly have left theology in possession of a unitary *sacra doctrina*. But we are where we are now, picking up pieces. To conceive Christian wisdom as a unity is a proper ambition for each of us, since we must be more than a specialised discipline on legs. But our scientific context is fragmented, and that affects congregations and pastors as well as faculties and professors. One reason for re-emphasising moral teaching is that we see all around us what transpires when we forget it, and the pastors leave Christian morality to be negotiated somehow between the faithful and the professors.

JT suggests that a unifying role in moral thought should be played by desire, on which, again, I say more in *Finding and Seeking*. My reservation about this is precisely parallel to my critique of anticipation. Desire I take to be a form of love, formed negatively in relation to unrealised possibility, but still formed by projection from present experience. As I read it, **Matthew Anderson**'s puzzle about the *reality* I insist on as a condition of moral thinking is not far removed from this. He wonders what happens to values and possibilities. Do I not pursue friendship, he wonders, simply because it *might yet come to be*, or, **JT** might say, because I desire it? Could I desire or pursue friendship, I wonder in return, if I had never seen it? But *if* I could, it would be by analogy from what I *had* seen. Possibility is

the excess of a thing's perfected form over its actual appearance. Thinking about possibilities can be 'realistic', since 'reality' is more than what is actually the case. I can see a bulb and look forward (realistically) to a spring flower. Yet the actual is the only *basis* for projecting possibility. **MA**'s anxiety that possibility is hostage to actual experience is reinforced by my insistence on awareness of the self. 'Must we write our autobiographies' he asks, 'to discern the heightened seriousness of a moral action?' We need not, for autobiography objectifies experience of the self in world and time, while responsible agency rests on an immediate and atemporal self-awareness. The amnesiac patient, who has lost the capacity for autobiography, may have a perfectly vital sense of self-responsibility, well aware of the peril of her situation, conscious of an urgent need to act.

Which brings me to **Kevin Hargarden**'s worries about analogies. The Pope recently described his Vatican officials as suffering from 'spiritual Alzheimers'.[5] My analogies were fairly mild by comparison, with depression, gender dysphoria and, just now, amnesia. But how can pathological conditions of this sort be mentioned in one breath with moral failures? **KH**'s anxiety over this point exactly shadows **MA**'s anxiety about non-culpable mistakes.

It is possible to think that the first responsibility of a description of moral experience is to distinguish voluntary from involuntary. It was the first ambition of voluntarist theorists from Abelard to Hume, and subsequently the casuists of modern Catholic and Reformed divinity. In rejecting it I quarrel with its assumptions about moral reason. I take moral reason to be prospective, thinking-towards-acting; retrospective applications to judgment are secondary. Before we make a judgment of any behaviour, we must consider causal explanations that would remove it from the sphere of praise and blame—actual ignorance, physically caused emotional and cognitive disorder, etc. etc. Such explanations must be dealt with on the threshold. But in thinking forward to my own next action, the question of my fitness to receive praise or blame does not arise. What matters is what a successful action will look like: what I need to know about the situation, what control I need to exercise, what technical calculations I need to make, etc. Avoiding failure and occasions for failure is my task as an agent, and in thinking what failure looks like I may draw instruction from analogies with radical failures caused by disruptions of agency. I suppose the Pope hoped it might concentrate the minds of Vatican officials (who can help themselves) to see how their conduct resembled that of Alzheimer patients (who cannot).

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[5] 22 December 2014; report at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-30577368>.

KH's point that whatever we say or think about pathological conditions should be informed by expert observation and first-hand testimony is well taken. But if he thinks that since a discourse about these conditions concerns suffering and not action, and so must be purely descriptive, detached from a discourse of practical reason, my own supposition, on the contrary, is that the two discourses inform one another. The patient who *thinks* as an agent is not only a sufferer. Imagine an Alzheimer patient at a moderate stage visited by an old and valued friend whom he fails to recognise. When his visitor helps him out—'Bill, I'm Lizzie! I have come from London, to see how you are'—he replies, 'Oh, Lizzie! From London! I'm so sorry! It is so stupid of me to forget!' Now Lizzie must make a decision: she can remember all she has read about the condition, and insist, 'But there's nothing to be sorry about! You can't help forgetting, it's just a condition of your brain!' Or she can accept the apology at its face value, and proceed, as she would with another person, to pardon it by making light of it: 'Never mind! You remembered as soon as I reminded you!' I am no expert on caring for Alzheimer patients, but I would think the latter response more helpful, precisely because it does not refuse the apology, but keeps Bill within the person-to-person framework of mutually responsible agents, so helping him to go on functioning even at a reduced level. Lizzie may perfectly well believe a medical report which describes Bill as quite incapable of remembering anyone. But since that account is irrelevant to how *he* is to deal with *her*, it must be suspended in *her* dealings with *him*, as well. Bill's attempt to occupy the place of moral responsibility is appropriate to the person he is still capable of being; to insist that he stop apologising would be, as we say, to 'put him in a box', and make him less than he is. And no testimony of suffering that he might offer would be complete if it did not include the constant frustration of knowing that he can envisage tasks as an agent, but not perform them.