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Interpretations of Conflict: Ethics, Pacifism, and the Just War Tradition (Book Review)

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cepts of religion and metaphysics had relied upon a syndrome of validity that dissolved with the emergence of expert cultures in science, morality, and law on the one hand, and with the autonomization of art on the other" (p. 17).

Habermas rightly recognizes, I think, that the cognitive content of religion is tied to metaphysics. For if religion claims, as David Tracy says, "to speak validly of the 'whole' of reality" ("Theology, Critical Social Theory, and the Public Realm," in Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology, ed. Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza [New York, 1992], p. 36), then religion necessarily raises or attempts to raise a fourth validity claim, which is metaphysical. Because Habermas denies the possibility of metaphysics, he discards the cognitive content of religion altogether while retaining merely its consoling power in the face of life's existential crises. As he puts it, "Religion, which has largely been deprived of its worldview functions, is still indispensable in ordinary life for normalizing intercourse with the extraordinary. . . . Philosophy, even in its postmetaphysical form, will be able neither to replace nor to repress religion as long as religious language is the bearer of a semantic content that is inspiring and even indispensable" (p. 51).

My primary criticism of Habermas is that he does not really offer an argument against metaphysics but, rather, seems simply to accept the modern eclipse of metaphysics as sufficient proof or justification of its impossibility. To employ his own terms, he appears to accept the "currency" of postmetaphysical thinking as sufficient justification of its "validity."

In conclusion, this book is important for scholars of religion not only because it sheds further light on the views of one of today's most significant thinkers but, even more importantly, because it properly focuses the conversation between religion and philosophy on the question of metaphysics. For if Habermas is correct in denying the possibility of metaphysics, then religious claims cannot, I judge, be true or valid in any meaningful sense but, at most, may function as a useful or inspiring "illusion." It is on this crucial point that theologians and philosophers of religion must be prepared to engage in the debate.

WILLIAM J. MEYER, Indiana University.

MILLER, RICHARD B. Interpretations of Conflict: Ethics, Pacifism, and the Just War Tradition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991. 294 pp. $48.00 (cloth); $17.00 (paper).

Richard Miller opts for the "low road of ethical inquiry" (p. 6), engaging diverse voices in their practical wrestling with conflict and violence, hoping thereby to isolate those areas where pacifist and just war traditions converge. This road leads through fascinating country, from John Bennett, Roland Bainton, and the brothers Niebuhr to Pius XII, Dorothy Day, and Martin Luther King. His superb account of William O'Brien and "American Exceptionalism," the recurrent notion that our place in history exempts us from ordinary moral constraints, forcefully displays how contemporary rhetoric about democracy, leadership, and a new world order is the legacy of puritanism, colonialism, and nineteenth-century imperialism.

Miller's hope throughout is to demonstrate how the fundamental duty of "nonmaleficence as nonpreferential compassion and respect for others" (p. 241), works with phronesis to overcome the limits of competing positions. It is not clear, however, that the principals in the debate between pacifism and the just war tradi-
tion would be able to recognize themselves in Miller’s reconstruction. “Nonmaleficence” is not the issue, for example, between John Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas, on the one hand, and Paul Ramsey, on the other. Theirs is a concrete theological dispute about the meaning of agape and the challenge it poses to this-worldly justice. Miller’s quest for “a nonconfessional idiom to resist the ideology of memory” (p. 234) may appear moderate and unexceptionable on the surface, but it registers a judgment against those like Yoder, Hauerwas, and Ramsey who, in their different ways, think theology and religious belief not only can, but must, be decisive in understanding the meaning of political force and armed conflict.

Nor would Thomists like Francisco de Vitoria, or their secular Aristotelian counterparts, be eager to see themselves represented in Miller’s terms. For that tradition it is justice, ultimately, that makes duties intelligible and explains why failing to perform results in injustice. It is a fact of our political experience that individuals and communities differ over the substance of justice, but this is part of being human, situated in history and struggling to secure individual flourishing and the common good. For the Aristotelian, secular or religious, the language of duties divorced from justice masks the key issues of intention, malice, and what each is due in virtue of his or her membership and role in the life of the community. This, at least, would be Saint Thomas’s response to Miller’s discussion of “the trade-off between the moral values of justice and order” (p. 58). Order in the abstract is not a moral value. It is necessary for the social commerce that secures our common good but is ultimately incommensurate with our unswerving commitment to justice as a fundamental constituent of the common good. For this tradition, phronesis, practical reasoning about what is and what ought to be done, cannot get started without a substantive understanding of justice, and the absence of such vitiates Miller’s account in chapter 9. To put it another way, the phronimos, the person of practical wisdom, rejects “exceptionalism” and “political realism” not as ideologies but because they are forms of injustice. To lose sight of this is to disengage from what matters most to those committed to virtue and community, just as losing sight of the example of Jesus is a failure of faithfulness for Christians committed to God’s active presence in history. Just war thinkers and pacifists of these sorts will likely resist Miller’s efforts at convergence.

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This most recent volume of Lewis Henry Morgan lectures presents a provocative, challenging, yet highly speculative theory of ritual. In it, Maurice Bloch elicits and explains what he considers an “irreducible structure ... common to many ritual and other religious phenomena” (p. 3). This structure Bloch titles “rebouding violence,” for it involves two phases each punctuated by moments of symbolic or actual violence. The first phase is an expulsion of some “native vital element” (e.g., animality or domesticity) and an effective, though temporary, transportation of ritual participants from a worldly existence of process and change to a permanent transcendental realm. The second phase is a return to the mundane without abandoning the transcendental, an aggressive return in which some external vitality replaces (via conquest or consumption, for example) the original native vitality. Political consequences issue from the requirement that this renewed vitality comes from the outside, from some “other” or external