

view of the contentious life issues. This can be most clearly illustrated when considering personhood. People operating at a level one or two perspective view others (and even themselves) as having "functional value." That is to say, the importance of others is not intrinsic, but instrumental. So a person on level one might value others only insofar as these persons help him get bodily pleasure. If the other person does not, or even goes so far as to interfere with pleasure, then that person must be dispatched — through abortion or euthanasia or malignant neglect. At level two, we value persons (including ourselves) insofar as they are sufficiently intelligent, independent, or useful. Of course, a developing human being *in utero* and often the elderly are unintelligent, dependent, and burdensome. These human beings, therefore, are considered as lacking "personhood." At levels three and four, all persons have intrinsic

value, for one's value arises from what one is, one's "nature" as Aristotle called it, rather than from how one performs at any given moment. Human beings have, not functional but *ontological* value.

The legalization and widespread use of abortion in our society biases the culture in favor of a level one/two perspective on life. In turn, the level one/two perspective creates and reinforces a "pro-choice" view on both abortion and euthanasia. Our philosophy leads to action and our action changes our philosophy, either for good or ill. One of the great merits of Spitzer's book (among many) is that it shows the practical importance of one's philosophy and the philosophical importance of various practices.

I hope that in future editions Spitzer beefs up the section treating happiness in level one. He would also do well to engage more directly the arguments given by various advocates of abortion, including Judith Jarvis Thomson,

who do not deny the personhood of the unborn but defend abortion nevertheless. Likewise, it would be good to offer some defense of the important difference between "active" and "passive" euthanasia.

However, these ways in which the project could be developed do not overshadow the great importance of this book. Last semester I used *Healing the Culture* in a course called "Matters of Life and Death," treating abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, cloning, just war, and the use of nuclear weapons. The response from the students to Spitzer's work was tremendously favorable. It was, for many of them, a truly life-changing experience, with several students returning to the sacraments for the first time in years. *Healing the Culture* has already begun to heal the culture. ■

briefly reviewed

UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS

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Religion and Public Life: The Legacy of Monsignor John A. Ryan. Edited by Robert G. Kennedy, et al. *University Press of America*. 384 pages. \$48.

Most Catholics have never heard of Msgr. John Ryan (1869-1945), long-time professor at Catholic University, Director of the Social Action Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, prolific writer, informal advisor to President Franklin Roosevelt, member of the Industrial Appeals Board of the National Recovery Administration (one of

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the New Deal agencies), foremost Catholic spokesman for social justice during the first half of the 20th century, and one of the most outstanding Catholic thinkers the U.S. has produced. Msgr. Ryan wrote the text of the 1919 Bishops Program of Social Reconstruction, the first pronouncement by the American bishops on the subject of social reform. Seeing these activities, many would probably want to place him on the so-called Left, but to do so would be to not only read the conflicts of the present day backwards into history, but more importantly to misunderstand Catholic teaching on social justice. For Ryan was also a determined opponent of and frequent writer against contraception; he wrote against socialism and supported traditional Catholic teaching on the duty of the state to protect and safeguard the Catholic religion as the one true religion. In short, despite the unfortunate ideologies of our time, which would have difficulty placing him on their dim one-dimensional political spectrum, Ryan was an orthodox Catholic who championed *all* of the teachings of the Church. This is not to say that one must agree with each one of his prudential judgments, but his overall approach to socio-political issues is one that ought to commend itself to every Catholic.

The volume under review here results from a conference held at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. Some of the authors explore aspects of Ryan's work and thought, others seek to apply, not always successfully, his ideas to present-day questions. (The work also includes a valuable bibliography of all of Ryan's publi-

cations.) Their papers range over a wide variety of subjects, from Ryan's role in the presidential election of 1936 to current debates about health care reform. Several contributors make the point that Ryan was working within the framework of natural law teaching on social questions as laid down first by Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum* (1891), later supplemented by Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). Ryan sought to apply papal teaching to concrete situations and did not shy away from carrying the popes' radical analysis to its logical conclusions. But he did not attempt or desire to go beyond the standards and doctrines enunciated by the popes. Nonetheless, he could be very critical of the complacent attitude of many Catholics of his day who simply accepted the economy as it was and seemed immune to anything that even the popes might say in criticism.

The article by John Berkman on Ryan's thought on contraception, the family, and just wages is one of the best in this collection and illustrates very well why Ryan, and indeed all authentic Catholic thinkers, cannot be placed on the witless Left/Right spectrum. Ryan opposed contraception and promoted large families. He vigorously opposed efforts to limit the right of poor parents to decide for themselves how many children they wished to have. At the same time, he pointed out that if the poor are to have large families, then the fathers of poor families must receive a living wage. Today, many who laudably oppose contraception and champion a family's right to have more than the politically correct number of

children seem to have forgotten that this liberty must apply to the poor as well as the rich, but that without just wages this is a hollow liberty indeed. On the other hand, many outside the Church, who correctly see the need for a living wage, would be horrified by Ryan's condemnation of contraception. But then, as now, a true Catholic takes positions that confound the wisdom of this world, whether "liberal" or "conservative."

While this collection contains some useful and interesting articles, if one is not well acquainted with this area of Catholic thought, he would do better to read Ryan himself. There, and in papal teaching, will he find genuine Catholic social doctrine, always relevant but seldom in fashion.

Thomas Storck

Moral Darwinism. By Benjamin Wiker. *InterVarsity*. 321 pages. \$20.

Moral Darwinism takes us on an intriguing jaunt through the history of Western thought to expose the roots of modern materialism — and deep roots they are.

Wiker's thesis is that the Greek philosopher Epicurus was the first to articulate what is now the fundamental belief of modern secularism: that the universe has no meaning or Creator, and that we have no souls and no life after death. Today we associate Epicurus with hedonism, although he was an ascetic whose goal was to rid life of all anxiety. The best way to do that, he taught, was to rid oneself of the notion of a Creator and an after-