

Review of Christoph Schneider (ed.), *Theology and Philosophy in Eastern Orthodoxy: Essays on Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Thought* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2019).

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The exchange of ideas between Eastern Orthodox theology and modern Western philosophy was for a long time prohibited by the political circumstances which dominated the 20th century. Today, however, this exchange is rapidly accelerating, and the current publication is a case in point. *Theology and Philosophy in Eastern Orthodoxy* is a collection of essays edited by Christoph Schneider, who is currently Academic Director at the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, Cambridge. This collection of eight essays discusses Orthodox Christian approaches to a range of philosophical issues. The publication's initiative is that 'Orthodox theology (...) will gain intellectual credibility if it engages with the intellectual debates of its time' (4). The essays, therefore, aim 'to give an overview of how scholars working on the intersection between Orthodox theology and philosophy understand the interrelationship between these two academic disciplines' (4). These scholars represent a variety of methods, including historical, philosophical, phenomenological and theological.

However, what clearly unites the various contributions is a common emphasis on 'the religious life'. The distinctions of an Orthodox religious life are variously portrayed here, with three approaches standing out: phenomenology, philosophy of the self, and virtue ethics. Christina M. Gschwandtner takes the first approach, dealing with self-humiliation as central to Orthodox spirituality and demonstrating the antinomy of the 'higher' and the 'lower' in Orthodox religious life (68). The second approach is most evident in Sergei Horujy's essay. For Horujy, the religious self is shaped by the practice of Hesychasm. Horujy interprets Hesychasm as 'a process of man's self-transformation, having the structure of a ladder with steps ascending from the *metanoia* to the meta-anthropological *telos* of *theosis*' (112). The third approach to religious life is that of virtue ethics and is taken up by Rico Vitz, who shows how key aspects of Orthodox religious life originate in Greek ethics (155).



Harry Moore, 'Review of Christoph Schneider (ed.), *Theology and Philosophy in Eastern Orthodoxy: Essays on Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Thought*', *JOGTS* 1.1 (2020), pp. 103-106.

Christina M. Gschwandtner's chapter, 'Religious Experience in the Eastern Christian Tradition', provides a phenomenological analysis of 'Orthodox consciousness'. Gschwandtner focuses on texts by Evagrius of Pontus (345-399), Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022) and the anonymous work *The Way of a Pilgrim* (first published in 1884). Gschwandtner begins her analyses with Max Scheler's (1874-1928) essay on the differences between Eastern and Western Christianity, 'Über östliches und westliches Christentum' (1916). Scheler argued that Eastern Orthodox consciousness is defined by a 'grovelling humility' and a 'quasi-masochistic quiescence to suffering' (54). Scheler went so far as to claim that 'Orthodoxy (...) kills the Christian thought of love and values *passive* virtues, like humility and patience, above *active* ones' (55). Gschwandtner aims to put these claims to the test. Humility is incredibly important in Orthodox asceticism, but is only one side of an *antinomy* between 'the low' and 'the high' (Matthew 23:12)—as Symeon writes: 'The higher they ascend the more they abase themselves; the more they humble themselves the higher they are lifted up' (68). Likewise, in *The Way of the Pilgrim*, 'joy and delight' (not despair and self-abasement) are just as central to the ascetic's path as self-abasement. In the author's words, 'I was moved to tears of joy and felt such gladness in my heart at times that I do not have the words to describe it' (67). Gschwandtner argues that Orthodoxy is not preoccupied with passive virtues, and points again to Symeon, who once remarked that 'not feeding the poor if one is able to do so is tantamount to murder' (71). However, Gschwandtner goes far beyond a mere defence of these texts and even suggests that they can be archetypal for understanding consciousness itself. This is thanks to the detailed account given by these authors of how 'emotive states are linked to patterns of thought', and how these in turn lead to 'patterns of behaviour' (72). The texts uniquely demonstrate an escape from undesired habits through 'the cultivation of predispositions that involve a struggle with certain aspects of the self, rather than simple self-affirmation' (73). A partial self-overcoming is vital in understanding our destructive habits and how to avoid them.

The contemporary Russian philosopher Sergei Horujy presents his complex 'Synergic Anthropology' in his essay 'Orthodox Theology and Philosophy of the Self'. Before presenting his own philosophy of the self, Horujy summarises both the patristic 'Theocentric Personalistic Paradigm' (98) and the secular 'Anthropological Personalistic Paradigm' (107). Horujy's genealogy of the 'theocentric' paradigm runs from the Church Fathers to Vladimir Lossky (1903-1958), then to John Zizioulas and Christos Yannaras. Horujy unfortunately ignores the decisive influence of secular German 'personalists' such as Gustav Teichmüller (1832-1888). The 'Anthropological Personalistic Paradigm' receives a similar analysis, now focusing on Heidegger: 'The main organizing principle of this system is being-toward-death, a mode of being constituted by the fundamental predicate of the finitude/mortality of Dasein' (108).

Horujy's own original system starts with 'an analysis of a particular domain of anthropological experience (Hesychasm)' in order to gain the 'source of notions and principles' for a 'general anthropological theory' (112). For Horujy 'there are three and only three ontologically different

kinds of reality' (113): the 'Ontological Human', the 'Ontic Human' and the 'Virtual Human', each with its own separate 'personalist structure' (114). Each of these are deduced from the 'principle of unlocking' – 'the act by which man becomes open or *unlocked* towards contact with the other' (112). The first kind of reality is characterised by 'the unlocking towards God as personal being-communion, which is separated by the ontological difference from man's mode of being. It is thus called the *ontological unlocking*' (112). This unlocking is realised by hesychast practice 'with steps ascending from the metanoia to the meta-anthropological *telos* of the *theosis*' (112).

The second kind of reality is made possible by the Other of the unconscious to which we are 'unlocked'. 'The unconscious is ontologically not different from empirical being whence it follows that this paradigm is not the same as the constitution in the ontological unlocking' (113). The third kind is constituted in 'the going out into anthropological virtual reality' (113). Virtual reality is unfinished or under-actualized reality: 'Due to its piecewise nature, any virtual constitution excludes the wholeness and integrity of the human being', leading to 'deanthropologization' (116). Horujy, in this way, gives more consideration to broader 'notions of the self' (in dialogue with Levinas and Foucault) than did previous Orthodox thinkers (namely Zizioulas), who reject the 'self' entirely and see the person as only that constituted by communion and relation with God.

Rico Vitz's essay, 'Orthodoxy, Philosophy, and Ethics', highlights key affinities between Orthodox spirituality and 'the ancient virtue traditions of Greece' (149). One affinity is an objectively purposeful and teleologically-oriented human nature. The *telos* itself, of course, is markedly different in Orthodox ethics. The latter is not 'contingent upon certain privileges of upbringing', as in Aristotle's conception of *eudaimonia* (149). In contrast to Aristotelian 'elitism', Orthodoxy provides a 'super-naturalistic conception of human flourishing that is available to everyone – namely, *theosis*, or *deification*, i.e., union with God' (149). Another key affinity is found in 'a distinction among three parts of the soul: the intellective, the incensive, and the appetitive' (150). Platonic virtues depend on the proper function and order of these faculties. For Plato 'the principle virtue of the intellectual part is wisdom, the principle virtue of the incensive part is courage, the principle virtue of the appetitive part is temperance' (153). Orthodoxy cultivates the acquisition of such virtues 'not only in the Church's ascetic but in its sacramental way of life' (153).

Vitz also explores the importance of ritual and liturgy, and looks to both Aristotle and Confucius, for whom 'characters are shaped, for better or for worse, from the steady accumulation of seemingly minor events' (159). The Church Fathers similarly cultivated character by: '(1) actions, (2) involving the mind and the body, (3) that people repeat regularly, (4) within specific contexts, (5) under specific conditions, (6) for the purpose not merely of cultivating character, but of cultivating a Christ-like heart' (160). This liturgical ethics, in Vitz's account, 'constitutes a distinctively Christian way of life' (160). This concept of the 'way of life' poses a challenge to contemporary 'situationist ethics' which suggests that behaviour originates not in character traits but in specific empirical situations. In Orthodox ethics this cannot be the case because of the extent to which

humans are socially (and liturgically) embedded: 'Behaviours rely on interdependent communal support' (161). Vitz thus concludes that Orthodoxy's 'stronger conception of the sustaining social contribution to character' has much to offer contemporary virtue ethics in its case against the situationist challenge (162).

All eight contributions to *Theology and Philosophy in Eastern Orthodoxy* consider a wide range of topics, showcasing the organic relationship between philosophical reflection and Eastern Orthodoxy. All of these contributions in some way relate to the 'religious life'. However, the three essays addressed here shed the most powerful light on this issue and exemplify the volume's three prevailing approaches: phenomenology, philosophy of the self, and virtue ethics. Despite this array of methodologies, *Philosophy and Theology in Eastern Orthodoxy* will provide a clear and accessible introduction to Orthodox religious life and the intersection between philosophy and Orthodox theology.