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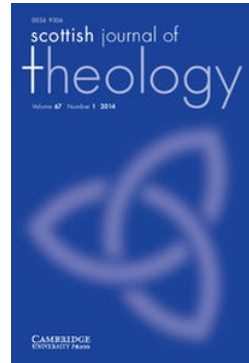
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Ellen Charry, *God and the Art of Happiness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 312. \ $35.00/£23.99 (hbk).

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on Barth's work which deserves the attention of Barth scholars and scholars in the field of theology of religions.

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Ellen Charry, *God and the Art of Happiness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 312. $35.00/£23.99 (hbk).

In the first question of the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas asks whether sacred doctrine is a speculative or practical science. He initially says it's speculative and not practical, but then, true to his style, he qualifies this. Looking at it another way, he says, it could be practical after all – but mostly not, mostly it's speculative. Ellen Charry's 1997 book, *By the Renewing of your Minds*, was the beginning of a project aimed at tilting the balance of Aquinas' answer. Whereas Aquinas sees theology as mostly speculative, Charry puts the weight on the other end of the scales: 'classical doctrinal theology is pastorally motivated and . . . its end is human flourishing' (p. ix). She continues this project in *God and the Art of Happiness*, which is something of a sequel.

The book is divided into two halves. The first presents 'The State of the Question of a Christian Doctrine of Happiness' and surveys the pre-Christian philosophical heritage, Augustine, Boethius, Aquinas and Butler. The second half presents a constructive proposal she calls asherism. If, as she claims, 'Christian theology lacks a substantial doctrine of human flourishing' then asherism is her attempt to fill the void (p. 157). It is presented chiefly through the Bible: asherism in the Pentateuch, the Psalter, Proverbs and John. Despite this biblical grounding, it is Augustine who provides asherism's clearest inspiration: 'Salvation is the healing of love that one may rest in God' (p. xi).

Charry's treatment of this tradition is always clear, competent and fair, and the topic is vitally important. This is true not only for what Charry calls doctrinal theology but for other areas more or less closely related to theology, including moral philosophy, psychology and law. Despite this importance, and Charry's obvious skill in navigating a very broad range of sources, it's not easy to identify what the upshot of her study really is. I think this is because she engages ongoing theological conversations about happiness only obliquely. Charry begins with the assumption that most Christian readers will have been inclined by their tradition to a suspicion of happiness, as if self-love opposes love of neighbour. Indeed, that is a common view, but then we might have supposed her to join the conversation about agape's relation to eros (i.e. Nygren with his various Kantian-Lutheran antecedents). But

that's not her approach. Alternatively, she might have joined the conversation within theological ethics about eudaimonism and deontology, and the early modern emergence of pluralism (which cast doubt on objective accounts of human flourishing). Given the material she is working with, the second of these two conversations would probably have proved the more fruitful. Augustine is aware of the problem this pluralism poses for the Christian account (he asks whether happiness is found in pleasure or virtue or wealth), and Aquinas follows him on this. This is clearly at issue in Butler's debate with Hobbes as well: are we directed to what is right by a coincidence of self-love and benevolence, or merely by the fear of violent death?

But she doesn't pursue this second conversation either. Instead she seems almost to aim for a devotional or spiritual meditation on how obedience reinforces pleasure, rather than competing with it. The book's structure might be a red flag, warning that her target was too broad from the outset, for her 'state of the question' fills over half its pages. That is too much exposition and not enough analysis. Of course, having a reference guide to this tradition will prove invaluable for scholars with a particular interest in the question. It's just that within the book itself, one wants to know what Charry thinks of those she's engaging.

On the positive side of the ledger, I found her brief chapter on divine command fascinating. In it, she acknowledges the existence of voluntarist divine commands in a way that fits together with the eudaimonist commands which are the basis of the asherism she is proposing. Thus she concludes decisively that, despite the (rare) occurrence of voluntarist commands in the Bible, 'voluntarism fails as a general theory of divine command' (p. 174). In sum, *God and the Art of Happiness* is a serious treatment of an important topic, and one which will hopefully encourage further reflection from systematic theologians and church historians on the relation between doctrine, ethics and flourishing.

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Todd A. Wilson, *The Curse of the Law and the Crisis in Galatia: Reassessing the Purpose of Galatians*, WUNT 225 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), pp. xi + 174. £39.27.

One vexing issue in the study of Galatians is how the 'ethical section' (Gal 5:13–6:10) corresponds with the rest of the letter. Specifically, it is often wondered why Paul would include references to 'fulfilling the Law' (cf. Gal