

Book Reviews

for human life': the God-given ability to answer the summons to flourish as an embodied creature of this particular, human kind" (p. 155). "Our flourishing, as creatures of a particular kind, consists in the fulfillment of the ends proper to that kind of creature" (p. 167). Within this framework that views each human life lived "as creatures of a particular kind," health and human flourishing (physical and mental) are viewed as proximate ends embedded in and given proper context and meaning within the ultimate ends provided in God the Father's revelation in Christ. Thus, the insights of various branches of human learning "can be critically assimilated to this theological understanding" (p. 170).

I believe that Messer's text can be extremely helpful in providing Christians with a lens through which to view analytically much of contemporary culture's focus on health and longevity as ultimate—rather than proximate or penultimate—goals. A focus on health for its own sake may actually keep people from engaging in activities that could contribute more fruitfully and fully to "being human" and relating to others through valued action and compassion.

A recurring element in the second half of Messer's book is Barth's notion of health as the "strength for human life." As someone with professional interests in psychology and neuroscience, my mind immediately went to possible conditions which could be considered threats to such creaturely flourishing from a mental health perspective, notably those conditions that impair our ability to see the good in day-to-day existence and impair our ability to take joy from our relationships with others and from our work.

I recommend Messer's book and hope that it is widely read by ethicists, clergy, and medical and mental health professionals. In addition to helping Christian bioethicists and philosophers to dialogue more constructively with the broader bioethics community, I believe that Messer's text will be very helpful in assisting those in the church (clergy and laity) to understand more profitably the concepts of health and disease from a distinctively Christian point of view.

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AN IMAGE OF GOD: The Catholic Struggle with Eugenics by Sharon M. Leon. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2013. 226 pages. Hardcover; \$45.00. ISBN: 9780226038988.

This book offers a detailed account of how American Catholics emerged as the fiercest opponents of sexual sterilization over the course of the first half of the twentieth century. Sharon Leon offers a close reading of texts produced by high-ranking American Catholics in concert with the texts of leading local eugenicists to trace a complicated relationship that at moments overlapped, but over time evolved into a contentious and deeply divided set of views over the sanctity of human life and its reproduction. It provides historians of medicine, eugenics, and Catholicism with a rich study of these high-level debates.

Leon concentrates on some of the leading figures in these discussions and covers nearly four decades of its discourse. In doing so, her study focuses on the period in American history when eugenics and sterilization have been presumed to be in their ascendancy. Many scholars suggest that after the Second World War, the discussions changed dramatically, with the concurrent international attention to Nazi eugenics and human experiments, and a contemporary shift in discourse surrounding voluntary birth control, which dramatically altered the course of eugenics. Although historians of medicine such as Rebecca Kluchin, Wendy Kline, and Johanna Schoen have begun to problematize this chronological framing by demonstrating that eugenics programs had a much longer reach and maintained a more complicated relationship with both medical experimentation and birth control, Leon adheres to this periodization. The result is an in-depth look at how Catholic thinkers positioned themselves against eugenicists, and how Catholicism wrestled with eugenic science for the upper hand in moral authority over the modern family.

At its core, this book is an exploration of the battleground between eugenic reformers who harnessed science (however pseudo or incomplete it was) in their efforts to shape American society, and Catholics, who expressed religious and theological explanations for human behavior, and later politically reinserted the church into the domain of welfare and charity. Leon points out, however, that both Catholics and eugenicists borrowed interpretations and strategies from one another as they attempted to shore up support for their positions. At times, this jockeying meant that eugenicists shared or even borrowed perspectives from Catholics, namely support for pronatalism and positive eugenics. Conversely, while Catholics agreed on elements of pronatalism, in practice (whether or not this was consistent with papal doctrine), some even agreed in principle with the need to intervene on issues of mental deficiency

and later on anti-miscegenation laws. While the differences are evident, Leon is careful to draw attention to more subtle points of convergence that complicate our understanding of this contested past, and remind us of the overarching issues that brought these groups into the same arena.

The subtext behind this contest is less explicit. It appears that while the eugenicists and Catholics squared off over the subjects of eugenics and sterilization, the state loomed large in this wrestling match. Eugenicists often appeared to have the upper hand in working with the state to design eugenic laws, while Catholics, in Leon's account, resented what appeared to be an encroaching state that increasingly intervened in American lives, whether on points of secular marriages, welfare, or moral guidance regarding family life. The underlying wave of secularization brought Catholics together in defense of their place in American society. The state, which is more often an implicit player in this account, created another rallying point for Catholics, who appealed to a particular feature of Americanism that decried the paternalism of a secular state.

By paying close attention to the high-level discussions, the voices and actions of lay people—whether patients or parishioners—are largely absent. The nuances in discourse are very well established, but the local interpretations of that advice as it made its way into civil society are less clear. Did families, for instance, adopt one interpretation universally, or did they select pieces from the eugenicists and Catholics as it suited their individual circumstances?

This book addresses a considerable gap in the literature on eugenics, and provides compelling evidence to support the oft-made claim that Catholics were the primary opponents to eugenics; Leon explains why. She delves into the murky science of heredity that shifted under the weight of religion and failed to prove that disability and feeble-mindedness were indeed threatening, subhuman categories. Catholics, she shows, did not combat this view with religion alone, but engaged in the science of eugenics and joined intellectuals in their pursuit of understanding degeneracy. Only after reasoned consideration did Catholics emerge firmly against the popular wave of support for more interventionist approaches to designing families. This is not, therefore, a simple story of religion triumphing over science, but rather one of reason over unreason, and in this case, conservatism over change.

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HISTORY OF SCIENCE

A CHOSEN CALLING: Jews in Science in the Twentieth Century by Noah J. Efron. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. 149 pages. Hardcover; \$26.95. ISBN: 9781421413815.

Does a religious community's attitude toward science really matter? By illuminating the importance of science and technology for disparate Jewish communities throughout the twentieth century, Noah Efron's *A Chosen Calling: Jews in Science in the Twentieth Century* raises a number of questions that are important for anyone engaged in the science and religion conversation to consider. Why do religious communities adopt certain attitudes toward science? What might those attitudes say about the communities who hold them? How might they influence whether their members pursue scientific professions?

Efron is a historian and philosopher of science at Israel's Bar-Ilan University, a familiar commentator on Israeli politics, and an established science and religion scholar, being particularly known for writing *Judaism and Science: A Historical Introduction* in the Greenwood Guides to Science and Religion and a 2011 *Huffington Post* blog essay on the everyday meeting of science and religion. In short, although Efron is not writing about Christianity and science, he writes from a knowledgeable, unique, and valuable perspective. Those *PSCF* readers who are willing to consider how his approach and ideas might apply to the relationship between Christianity and science both globally and in particular church communities should find much to value in Efron's work.

Published as part of the Medicine, Science and Religion in Historical Context series, edited by Ronald Numbers, *A Chosen Calling* grew out of Efron's 2007 Gustave A. and Mamie W. Efroymson Memorial lectures at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, Ohio. In this rather slim but well-produced volume, Efron seeks to address the disparate representation of Jews in the sciences in the twentieth century—a topic that has been debated both by ordinary Jews and intellectual luminaries as diverse as Thorstein Veblen, C. P. Snow, Norbert Wiener, Nathaniel Weyl, and George Steiner. Efron largely rejects the hypotheses of these thinkers who variously attributed Jewish success in science to such factors as outsider "skepticism towards received pieties," social structures that genetically favored breeding for scholars, and habits of thought derived from Talmudic disputation that emphasize creative