PUTTING RELIGION BACK INTO RELIGIOUS ETHICS

Eric Gregory

ABSTRACT

This essay on Richard Miller's *Friends and Other Strangers* (2016) locates its arguments in the context of how the practice of religious ethics bears upon debates about normativity in the study of religion and the cultural turn in the humanities. After reviewing its main claims about identity and otherness, I focus on three areas. First, while commending Miller's effort to analogize virtuous empathy with Augustine's ethics of rightly ordered love, I raise questions about his use of Augustine and his distinctive formulation of Augustinian "iconic realism." Second, I suggest his discussion of public reason is at odds with the dialogical spirit of the book and may distract from the democratic solidarity required by our political moment. Third, more briefly, I highlight the practical implications of Miller's vision for higher education at both the graduate and undergraduate level.

KEYWORDS: *Richard Miller, religious ethics, culture, empathy, identity, alterity, Augustine, realism, war, love, responsibility, Black Lives Matter, structural injustice, public reason, higher education*

Friends and Other Strangers (2016) is a timely intervention in the uncertain field of religious ethics. The book deserves a wide audience given persistent yet evolving debates about normativity in the study of religion and the distinctive character of ethical inquiry that takes diverse religious beliefs, institutions, and practices seriously. Its themes range from accountability to utopia. Its topics include the ethics of ethnography, childrearing, friendship, war, and memory. Extending previous work, Richard Miller elegantly joins rigor, learnedness, and imagination in showing the fruits of a cultural turn in religious ethics that highlights dynamic relations of identity and otherness in the social practices of everyday life. He also offers several examples of related work in comparative religious ethics and democratic social criticism that suggest future research directions and greater clarity about the subject matter of religious ethics. The book's epilogue, for example, critically surveys work by Saba Mahmood, Farhat Moazam, Charles Hirschkind, Jeffrey Stout, Elizabeth Bucar, and Sherine Hamdy in light of Miller's own methodological claims and his desire to eschew moral relativism and radical historicism. Yet this work is neither manifesto nor orthodoxy. It does not propose a single method for the complicated

Eric Gregory is Professor of Religion and Chair of the Council of the Humanities at Princeton University. Eric Gregory, gregory@princeton.edu.

work of interpretation and evaluation. By my lights, it should be read as a salutary invitation for ethicists who toil in religious studies to expand our repertoire by tending more directly to the "religion" side of "religious ethics." Such tending, on Miller's terms, is both liberating and transgressive.

Religious ethicists may be threatened by an apparent insularity, but they are no strangers to disciplinary boundary crossing. Miller's example suggests the turn to culture as "the constitutive medium of human existence" is well underway (2016, 37). Indeed, suspicion about the field often reveals anxiety about the sort of thing that Miller recommends in claiming that "we do well to trespass established disciplinary territories and break down the intellectual silos along with the cultural barriers that they may covertly and overtly protect" (2016, 7). Whatever else religious ethicists might do by way of engaging broader streams in the humanities and social sciences, an important feature of Miller's argument is that they should actually be scholars of *religion*. This means, in part, engaging theoretical and definitional debates within religious studies as themselves internal to the concerns of religious ethics. Some of this trespassing means catching up with the broader discipline. Still another approach might involve re-reading familiar "ethics" and even "theology" texts with questions about "religion" more front and center. Appropriate to his normative commitments, Miller's immanent criticism does not romanticize other fields or condemn previous contributions of religious ethics. He also does not divide the disciplines as if they were natural kinds each with their own essence. His Wittgensteinian account of religion seeks a more complex and pluralistic approach.[1] Miller puts religion back into religious ethics in order to diversify the field without giving up on the casuistry, theology, and analytic philosophy that have been a formative part of its practice (albeit, properly historicized and embodied).

A cultural turn does require religious ethicists to broaden their horizons beyond norms and principles. Miller draws upon scholarship in anthropology, psychology, cultural theory, history of religions, and aesthetics to advance his interdisciplinary claims and inform his moral judgments. But he does not leave his training in philosophical and religious ethics behind. He cites Immanuel Kant, Paul Ricoeur, and John Rawls without apology. In fact, one compelling aspect of the book is the way he marshals these traditions in order to criticize certain figures and trends heralded all too uncritically in the new canon of religious studies. His discussion of Mahmood's conflation of Aristotle and Michel Foucault on virtue and political liberalism with secularism is but one revealing example (2016, 310-20). The book as a whole—especially the chapters on "Moral Authority

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[1] Miller's book would profitably be read alongside the work of Stephen Bush, who shares his interest in Wittgenstein as well as bridging theories of religion, religious thought, and religious ethics. For Bush's social practical account of religion that identifies the insights and shortcomings of major approaches in religious studies, see Bush 2016.

and Moral Critique in an Age of Ethnocentric Anxiety" and "The Ethics of Empathy"—offers that rare work by an ethicist that might actually find its way into a seminar on theory and methods in the study of religion. So Miller helps narrowly trained ethicists see the normative dimensions of culture even as he exposes the often-undefended moral claims at work in theorizing religion and subject formation. At the same time, without explicitly saying so, Miller transcends an occasional rivalry between religious ethics and Christian ethics, both relatively new fields and creatures of the modern university that are frequently separated from religious studies and from one another. Like other efforts to expand what counts for objects of study, he does so by opening up a wider range of genres and sources for thinking about alterity and intimacy.

Discourses of alterity and intimacy figure prominently in academic and public life. We are awash in calls to narrate them. But they do not always disrupt or deepen our understanding. Miller's relational account does this for me, perhaps because he treats them dialectically, freeing us to see the goods of another "on their own life-giving terms" (2016, 192). Reading his book challenged me as a scholar, teacher, and, I might add, as a parent. The challenge is perhaps more acute given the scholarly intimacies I share with my fellow other-regarding egalitarian democrat and Augustinian virtue thinker who wants us to become more Greek and Hegelian without thinking we live "after virtue." I bracket whether or not those qualifiers constitute religious intimacies as well, and will simply note that the work performed what it analyzed. Beyond merely scratching an anthropological itch, it helped this reader discover what Miller terms "our own hidden alterities" by encountering genuine others as those "to whom I am responsible" (2016, 10 and 3). The remainder of this brief review focuses on three particular dimensions of the book.

1. Augustine, Augustinianisms, and Religious Ethics

Miller's critical appropriation of Augustine as a conversation partner is fitting given his interests in selfhood, otherness, and the "plasticity of human desires" (2016, 37). These are familiar themes in Augustine studies, especially among interpreters of the *Confessions*. They also play an important role in competing narratives told about Augustine and modernity this side of the many efforts to read him and his influence on Western culture outside the specific context of Roman Catholic dogma. But Miller's interests are not primarily genealogical. Curiously, as with most Augustine scholars, he does not emphasize what Augustine has to say about *religion*. It would be interesting to discover how many courses that introduce students to various approaches to religion include figures like Augustine or Karl Barth, both theologians who wrote about religion distinct from Christian problematics of faith seeking understanding. What Miller does find in Augustine is a generative resource

for moral psychology and the larger themes of his book, including empathy, friendship, grief, God, and virtue.

The Augustine that attracts Miller is the one who enables "a manner of being in the world according to which we may love on terms that are attuned to the neighbor in his or her alterity" (2016, 197). In dialogue with Stanley Cavell and Iris Murdoch, he reconstructs Augustine's famous distinction between *cupiditas* and *caritas* in order to fund an ethic that respects difference and habits of interpretation that put limits on narcissistic and anthropocentric tendencies. These tendencies are rife with idolatrous possibilities. Augustine's connection between *what* to love and *how* to love is a key theme that Miller helpfully elevates without denying the plurality of virtues or the demanding work of practical reasoning. Miller defines his "iconic realism" in contrast to the more familiar political realism associated with Reinhold Niebuhr. Realism of the latter variety can be unduly preoccupied with the frustrating conditions of finitude. Miller does not deny finitude. But his description of an iconic realism moves in a different direction. It is a way of naming "graced dispositions of mind and will" (2016, 190) that encounter reality "as it is rather than as one wishes" (2016, 178). Seeing reality for what it is disrupts the self, decentering its distorted perceptions by disclosing otherness as a gift and relationships "on terms other than those we concoct for our own advantage" (2016, 193).

Augustine's efforts to transcend self-absorption in his relations with others were not always successful. Indeed, I am not sure he qualifies as a legitimate moral authority on the terms outlined by Miller. He did not always give reasons, exercise due diligence, take another's perspective, or express himself with a grasp of his social location.[2] Some of Augustine's fiercest critics rightly take him to task on precisely these points. But Miller's recognition of non-innocence is a helpful Augustinian reminder. Purity of heart, for both Miller and Augustine, could not be the necessary condition for moral inquiry. Augustine certainly was a cultural authority who aspired to the traits of moral authority thus described, or at least had reasons to do so. He was a great ethnographer of Christian religion and Roman culture. Miller offers close readings of particular passages and engages relevant secondary literature. But his broader goal is to analogize his own ethics of virtuous empathy with Augustine's ethics of rightly ordered love. I have little quarrel with his account and his reading of Augustine's theocentric imaginary, desire, and heterology. It is an attractive Augustinian vision, able to domesticate worries about proximity bias and egotistical drift, even while opening to empirical research

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[2] Miller identifies these conditions as "terms for justifiably assigning moral authority to critics . . . enabling us to accept the asymmetry that obtains between moral critics and their audiences" (2016, 91; see also 105).

possibilities.[3] I also find compelling Miller's translation of Augustine's theological idiom into respect for persons, wholeheartedness, and an extensive ethics of care. Part of me still wonders what is lost in such translations. But unlike some fellow Augustinians, I cheer his efforts to find "more general, workable ideas about friendship and love" even if it means stepping back from Christological and sacramental particulars (2016, 192). From a theological angle, it could be seen as leaning into them so much that they no longer demand to be named.[4]

Miller's Augustine is also a resource for "empathic indignation" and "building affiliations with those who suffer injustice" (2016, 147). Augustine's account of love's response to the challenge of injustice sponsors a diverse array of Augustinianisms. These bear upon Miller's important question of whether or not Augustine—like Ambrose, Aquinas, Suarez, Vitoria, Grotius, and Luther, not to mention Paul Ramsey and his heirs—allows war to be an expression of the love of neighbor to "protect innocent neighbors at risk" (2016, 206). Indeed, this view is sometimes taken to be Augustine's signal contribution to the development of the just war tradition.[5] Miller rejects the association on historical and exegetical grounds. He is right to do so, and here joins scholars like James Turner Johnson in distinguishing what Augustine actually held from his latter day interpreters.[6] Miller's judgment, however, goes beyond the potentially misleading claim made by some historians that Augustine makes "no mention of the need to fight with love in one's heart" (Wynn 2013, 328). Rather, with more precision, Miller thinks that we "distort Augustinian thinking by confusing the virtue of love with acts of beneficence or by importing deontic

[3] Like Miller, Jennifer Herdt has also sought to bring Augustine into contemporary conversations about human empathy (Herdt 2015). In particular, she turns to his practices as a "potential source of practical tools for cultivating a wider empathy" (2015, 64). She suggests empirically testing "the salience of the liturgical context for fostering empathetic concern" alongside Augustine's "various rhetorical strategies for increasing attention, decreasing avoidance, relativizing the significance of wealth as an in-group/out-group marker" (2015, 82).

[4] Unlike religious ethics or philosophy of religion, Christian ethics has focused more on questions of moral and political pluralism than religious diversity as such. For an effort to join discussions of Christian love to this form of otherness, see Gregory 2016.

[5] Recent discussions offer various ways of describing the relevance of Augustine's theology of love for an ethics of war and peace. See, for example, Biggar 2013 and Cahill 2014. In these works, neither author takes up the historical question of the Augustinian provenance of binding love to the use of force.

[6] Johnson and Miller differ with respect to interpretation of Augustine and the just war tradition, as well as their evaluation of Ramsey's extension of Augustine's reasoning "in the context of individual relationships, to the case of war" (Johnson 1981, 197). But each emphasizes how modern readers like Ramsey go beyond Augustine's texts and historical context in their efforts to ground war in charity. See, for example, Johnson 2018.

language of agape into a theological eudaimonism structured by the virtue of *caritas*" (2016, 208). Miller is no doubt correct to remind us of Augustine's emphasis on necessity and agent-referring dispositions. He is also correct to highlight that Ramsey's emphases on neighbor-love and third-party relations are not to be found in Augustine's texts on war (2016, 208–19; see Ramsey 1961, 15–33, and Ramsey 1968, 141–47). Augustine's texts are occasional, scattered, and contextual. They frequently emphasize prudence, divine providence, and the need to love one's enemy with patient forbearance. His pastoral concern is primarily for the soul of the warrior and the vocation of other office holders, focusing more on the evaluation of persons rather than their acts. They reflect little engagement with what we moderns think constitute conditions of warfare or punishment.[7]

I agree that Augustine does not explicitly justify war as a form of neighbor-love, even in the famous claim that "wars will be waged in the spirit of benevolence" (Augustine 2001). However, it is a separate question if he *could* have done so were he to have made more systematic judgments about particular acts of warfare. How modern Augustinians make use of the idea is yet another matter. I think it would go too far to suggest that joining love and war is merely a liberal Protestant invention that is alien to Augustine's moral vocabulary, let alone a biblical emphasis on concern for the unjust suffering of the oppressed. Augustine's medicinal metaphors of punitive tough love and harsh kindness are fraught ones. Modern Augustinians need to think harder about how earthly peace constitutes a proper object of charity for the mournful warrior and its conceptual distance from Augustine's own writings. But I still think that his account of love can support an other-regarding action beyond inward anxiety about motives, caught up in the sweep of God's providential ordering of the world. Taken together, selections from *City of God* and his letters to imperial officials strike me as providing at least an implicit reference that binds rightly ordered love and concern for non-domination to the use of force.[8] No doubt his theology of love would unleash dynamic processes of moral understanding and social reform foreign to Augustine. Ramsey more than Augustine defends this position on behalf of victims rather than agents or offenders— and, regrettably to my mind, with less lamentation, a sense of tragic compromise, and Miller's appeal to Augustine's "heartfelt grief" (2016, 215). Nevertheless, I remain unclear if Miller rules out neighbor-love as

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[7] Historians increasingly challenge the view that Augustine was the founder of the just war idea, even to the point of suggesting that it rests upon a "house of cards" (Wynn 2013, 24). Wynn argues that Augustine "was made into *one* of the Christian authorities on war through selective and decontextualized citations from his works performed by later medieval canonists and theologians" (2013, 330).

[8] For an intriguing account of Augustine's self-presentation and his actual relations with imperial authorities, see Shaw 2015.

consistent with securing peace through war or, less strongly, simply worries it "courts confusion" and "goes beyond the plain meaning of Augustine's texts" (2016, 211 and 212). On one strong reading, Miller's interpretation finds Augustine's thinking menaced by a troubling split-personality psychology that grounds action only in necessity and acting as an agent of the law. Augustine may invite these subjectivist troubles familiar to role-based ethics in certain passages. But Augustine also seems particularly interested in relating temporal and eternal goods in his pastoral wisdom rooted in love. Love should not do all the work of virtue or action guidance in the case of war. But it need not be separated either.

This review is not the occasion for a full treatment of Augustine, love, and war, especially in relation to longstanding debates about the good of politics or a presumption against violence in the Christian tradition. I have raised this historical issue in the service of a related concern that may be more fundamental. Miller's distancing of Augustine from figures like Ramsey is parasitic on broader claims about the priority of the good that denies to Augustine a "moral theory of duty" (2016, 213). But why pit duty language against teleology? Miller himself tells us that Augustine presumed "a duty to remember justly for the sake of history" (2016, 226). I am not sure that I am qualified to make these judgments because Miller boldly tells us that "we get nowhere reading Augustine's theological ethics until we understand that, for him, the good is prior to the right" (2016, 210; see also 388n6). Ironically, here Miller may fall victim to his own worries about importing modern vocabularies into Augustine or other pre-modern authors who do not neatly fit our distinctions. Augustine certainly never tells us that the good is prior to the right. Of course, it may be an appropriate reconstruction depending on what we mean by the good and the right. It may be true in the sense that something is right because of its logically prior relation to values (whether it be a person's virtue or some other good). I read Augustine, despite recent debates, as a eudaemonist, neither a consequentialist keen on maximizing states of affairs nor a deontologist indifferent to the relations that *constitute* our common good as agents and patients.[9] But this does not mean consequences or duties play no role in his thought, or that the good and the right are understood to be in competition with one another.

Augustine's ethics are difficult to map in the typologies of modern ethics because he was a eudaemonist virtue-thinker who grounds obligations in divine commands issued by the author of a natural law. For Augustine, as for Aquinas, it seems more accurate to hold that the right and the good are always already intertwined and interdependent. Neither is intelligible without the other given the end of virtuous fellowship with God who is

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[9] On eudaimonism and Augustine's ethics, see Clair 2013.

for us and *for our neighbor.* By my lights, this secures a noncompetitive account of the good and the right, the self and the other, not to mention love and justice, harmonized in the pursuit of the good itself, God. The good is ontologically primordial. But, for pre-modern eudaimonists, especially Christian ones like Augustine who are both "agent referring" and "God referring," there is the possibility of interrelating the good and the right rather than reading into them a dilemmatic choice presented by modern philosophy. It is a false choice, both normatively and historically, and one seemingly at odds with Miller's relational account of ethics and his plea for iconic realism.

One virtue of Miller's cultural turn is that his chapter on war moves beyond the ethics of killing to a discussion of a broad range of moral sentiments. His Augustinian realism, less beholden to accounting within the conditions of finitude, focuses on "the cultural forces that inform, and often corrode, expressions of courage and commitment to fairness in times of national distress" (2016, 205). It speaks to matters of both individual and collective psychology without reducing Augustinianism to the limits of politics and the tempered prospects for relative justice under conditions of sin. Given his association of civic virtue and political solidarity with spiritual exercises, it would have been helpful if he made the contrast with Niebuhr's political realism or Rawls's realistic utopia even more explicit. Realism admits as many varieties as Augustinianisms. Moreover, the virtues demanded of ordinary citizens in thinking about war face serious challenges today. For example, how can democratic citizens weigh reasons when the most salient ones are claimed to be secret by a massive security bureaucracy? Yet another pressing theoretical question arises in our contemporary context as well.

Consideration of moral responsibility to others often assumes liability to praise or blame. In this context, Miller appeals to Peter Strawson's influential notion of "moral reactive attitudes" in the context of feelings of resentment, indignation and guilt. While Strawson focused on questions of free will and determinism, Miller extends these psychological concepts to the "rough-and-tumble of political life" (2016, 141). In particular, he notes the moral ambiguity of interpersonal feelings and their need to be tied to claims of justice if they are to be moral emotions. But how does a Strawsonian account shed light on anger, complicity, and moral responsibility under conditions of widespread and deeply historical systemic injustices? For example, how might Miller's Augustinian realism understand the relation between blame and large-scale structural injustices such as those exposed by the Black Lives Matter movement? Call this the *Moral Man and Immoral Society* question. Can we empathize with, and even hold non-culpable, police officers caught up in what we now call "implicit bias" or what Augustinians used to call original sin? Or would this attitude promote too much skepticism about political and moral responsibility? Again, these are

familiar questions for an Augustinian tradition that has long wrestled with the status of moral agency.[10] They are not merely abstract theological ideas. They find concrete expression in the different rituals of the Christian tradition, especially in practices of lament, confession, and reconciliation. But they also admit analogies for political morality outside the context of Christian notions of sin and grace.

Any political morality must have something to say about how stubborn features of social psychology are to be understood in the context of political life. What does it mean to hold someone accountable for psychic forces and unconscious habits rooted in deep histories? In short, how do we understand the justifiable moral anger in those cases where responsibility appears quite diffuse and often arises through no conscious fault? Moral reactive attitudes may not adequately capture the relevant phenomenology of protesting injustices that exceed the ill will of identifiable moral agents. In fact, the model of blaming personal agents can obscure the political response necessary for dramatic social change. I am not interested here in determining any particular case, let alone calling into question the reality of culpable racists, the perversity of will, or the need to prosecute murderers and protest police violence. Structural injustice does not require the inevitability of any particular unjust act. My query is more conceptual, raising the problem of how we assess anger and blame given increased sensitivity to complex political issues that exceed the actions of individual moral agents. These questions swirl around recent debates about global poverty, immigration, and climate change. They also provide a transition to Miller's interest in religion and public life that makes a cultural turn.

2. Religion and Public Life

Miller distinguishes broader issues of religion and public life from more narrow debates about religion and public reason that turn on issues of power and authority. These debates have played a central role in contemporary religious ethics. Like Rawls, Miller couches them in terms of a psychologically realistic form of civic empathy. Here we find no minimalist procedural democracy or defense of secularism. Nevertheless, trading on familiar concerns about Rawlsian exclusivism, some find a contradiction between Miller's account of the moral basis of democratic authority and the policing mechanism of liberalism construed via public reason and the so-called "anemic notions of equality, autonomy, and reciprocity" (Bretherton

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[10] For a nuanced account of blame and moral responsibility from a modified Augustinian perspective, see Couenhoven 2013. Couenhoven's "compatibilist" position makes room for blameworthy responsibility even for some types of ignorance and inherited fault. But he also holds that "recognizing the original sin that afflicts us all might incline us to blame each other less than we otherwise might in this libertarian age" (2013, 11).

2017). Alongside Miller, I do not think those values are anemic. I also do not see any evident contradiction given the work done by the technical distinction between the background culture and the public political forum. In this sense, however, it may be that Miller and Rawls are more concerned with the *legitimacy* of collective self-governance than *sovereignty* or *authority* as such. Miller does not say much about sovereignty, a term that has returned with notable force in recent political theology, other than to equate it with the will of the people (2016, 202). His appeal raises difficult questions about the relation between that will, the body politic, and the grounding of legal norms and the territorial state itself. He does argue that a religious citizen who sees authority deriving from God must "either count herself out as a democratic citizen or ascertain how divine authority is delegated to believers and nonbelievers in matters of democratic policy formation" (2016, 306–07). Here, critics like Bretherton are right to suggest that liberal reciprocity has its limits in constituting the common life of a people. It would have been useful for Miller to address more concretely how a democratic people come to possess sovereignty and its relation to sacred values that need not be linked to conceptions of divinity.

This is not a call to return to medieval and early modern debates, though they may prove instructive for comparative religious ethics. I also affirm a version of "political, not metaphysical," even though I remain skeptical of a freestanding shareable language or common vantage point that all reasonable persons could accept. Miller's ability to distinguish "religious reasons" from "nonreligious reasons" can imply a confidence even greater than the later Rawls. There are virtues of political rhetoric. But I am not convinced they are primarily about the kinds of reasons we deploy. The search for that often fixed and normalizing determinate language, even if unintended, has tended to fuel depoliticization, alienation, and culture wars rather than transcend them. I also think it is at odds with Miller's emphasis on the dialectical and the hermeneutical, even if Rawlsians might accommodate social differences by linking reflective equilibrium and public reason. These issues track familiar debates given disagreements about the good and the right and the loss of some social worlds within egalitarian liberalism.

The deep pluralism of contemporary democratic societies raises issues beyond the problem of epistemic disagreement. Miller argues pluralist democracies are a certain kind of association that do not "meet all our needs or satisfy all our aspirations" (2016, 307). But they do depend on a sociology and psychology. Indeed, for Rawls, public reason "belongs to a conception of a well-ordered constitutional democratic society" (Rawls 1999, 131). I take Miller to believe Americans live in such a society. I am prepared to agree, though less confident these days given the radical expansion of executive power, the fraying of our social fabric, unrestrained commercial interests, rejections of representative politics, and the prospect of authoritarian

nationalism. What if those empirical conditions are not met? This raises questions about "global public reason," but also one for democratic societies increasingly characterized by internally contested public cultures. These may not trouble ideal theory, but they should matter for a cultural turn predicated on respecting difference without abandoning moral judgment. In fact, I think a defense of public reason may be a drop in the bucket given what is needed to promote solidarity in our cultural moment, especially if public reason approaches already dominate our actual politics.[11]

What if public reason debates also took a cultural turn away from its uninviting philosophical scholasticism? More Hegel, less Kant. Do we find Rawls's democratic public culture with enough shared basic ideas and principles? Perhaps. Miller recognizes that beyond the exchange of reasons, democracy is a social fact and a culture that includes "dramatic ritual performances and other formalized symbolic practices" (2016, 21). Those performances and practices are the stuff of what is sometimes called civil religion—controversially so, often dependent on something transcendent to actual people, law, and government.[12] At one point, Miller tells us it is a difficult question "whether coexistence in a liberal democracy would count as thick or thin relations" (2016, 240). Whether thick or thin, Miller's moral basis of democratic authority assumes a democratic culture of mutual recognition. Is this authority contingent on the justifiability of *associative duties* or is it more of an empirical concession to prioritize fellow citizens in order to fulfill a general moral obligation? Moreover, does Miller have any advice for how intellectuals might support such a culture in the practices of everyday life where the dialectic of identity and alterity is under threat?

3. Religious Ethics and Higher Education

Miller notes, though somewhat quickly, that advancing work that reflects a cultural turn "will mean developing undergraduate and graduate education in a more interdisciplinary way than is currently the case in religious ethics" (2016, 73). I would like to hear more about what that looks like in practice, especially as I have tried to incorporate more anthropological and comparative work in my teaching and research. He gives us helpful examples, both in his own work and discussion of others. He admits the difficulty of different traditions of scholarship, particularly navigating fluency in religious and philosophical ethics alongside the in-depth immersion of ethnographic work or cultural studies, not to mention other disciplines and approaches. What would a curriculum in religious ethics

[11] See, for example, Shields 2009.

[12] In a provocative essay, C. Travis Webb recently has argued that the idea of civil religion as an "otherworldly" religion has never been taken as seriously as it should by the field of religious studies (Webb 2018).

look like given conditions of finitude and the need to frame our discipline in a way that outsiders—be they other ethicists, theologians, or scholars of religion—understand? How do we assess the inevitable gains and losses that coincide with pluralizing the field? How might the subfield roster of exemplary texts differ from other subfields in religious studies? These questions have been central for developing young fields like religious ethics, and frequently have been discussed in the pages of this journal. Today, they have an added urgency given the competitive realities of the academic job market and the social and political context of the contemporary university.

Again, Miller is not prescribing a new method or new curriculum. I suspect there are few religious ethicists who would deny the value of the cultural turn. In fact, given the salience of ethnography and anthropology, recent scholarship in both theological and religious ethics strikes me as having made the turn. But how do we balance initiating younger scholars into the subfield while also achieving literacy in the wider field of religious studies or other disciplines? What do religious ethicists do that other scholars of religion do not? I am thinking primarily about graduate education, and the sort of questions doctoral students might encounter from a hiring committee. But religious ethics might also have something to say to recurring debates about the ethical dimensions of the humanities curriculum at the undergraduate level. These debates have once again become intense, sharing in the anxieties about ethical formation, secularity, and value neutrality which Miller addresses. Does this book have anything to contribute to the ethical commitments and purposes of the modern university? I certainly think so. One of my humanities colleagues recently told me that the only defensible ethical discourses left in the university were bland notions of diversity and critical thinking. He said it not by way of a lament or nostalgia. In fact, the implication of his remark was that it is the price we pay for pluralism. He added, with a more polemical edge, it also reflects the only reasonable response to the dangerous legacy of religious ethics. Miller's book provides good reason to think that more than the field of religious ethics is at stake in challenging that view.

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