

## **Book Reviews / Comptes-rendus**

**David Novak, *Athens and Jerusalem: God, Humans, and Nature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 392 pp., ISBN: 978-1487506179.**

On several occasions, philosopher and theologian David Novak refers to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Responsibilities to show that rights must be grounded by a belief in God. The philosophical implication of this legal concept is that reason is dependent on faith. In his latest work, *Athens and Jerusalem*, his first book-length study of the topic, Novak explores the relationship between reason and faith, primarily in a comparative capacity. In doing so, Novak joins the ranks of another famous Canadian philosopher, the late Emil Fackenheim, whose work was similarly defined by this question. The book is based on Novak's Gifford Lectures, delivered in 2017.

In the first chapter, Novak argues against three misperceptions about the relationship between faith and reason. The first is that faith relates to revelation, while the latter relates to reason; the second is that only philosophy is entitled to treat questions of universality; and the third is that metaphysical commitments have no place in public discourse. Instead, Novak argues that philosophers also have faith commitments, that philosophy must similarly be constrained in the current political climate, and that bracketing metaphysical commitments leads to a "might makes right" type of society. These themes lay out the project of the text, in which Novak goes on to compare the Greek and Jewish views of the relationship between God and nature, God and human beings, human beings and nature, and human beings with each other, before comparing the views of Plato and Philo, Aristotle and Maimonides, and Emmanuel Kant and Hermann Cohen. Following the first two chapters, each of these comparisons is framed in terms of the aforementioned four relationships. However, the choice of these categories is not an uncomplicated one, mainly because they are not entirely natural to the philosophers that he treats.

In the second chapter, Novak focuses on the relationship between God and the world and God and human beings. Whereas according to the Greek view, man is not answerable to God, in the Jewish view that concept is an essential part of the relationship with God. With respect to the relationship between God and nature, the difference is that, in the Greek view, God has a logical relationship with nature, whereas the Jewish position is that it is an ontological one, inasmuch as God's life is "totally apart from the created universe." These ideas lead to a discussion of miracles and God's immutability, in which Novak draws on Hume, the Bible and the Talmud. In the third chapter, Novak concentrates on the relationship between humans and nature and with each other. Unlike the Greek view, in which true justice cannot be sought outside of the heavens, in biblical theology, righteousness and justice are to be done on earth. Further, the relationships with other human beings must also be

underwritten by a relationship with God. The difficulty with these two chapters is that the Bible does not engage directly with Greek thought, and while there is no consensus about how much of the Talmud responds to Greek thought, scholars generally do not find too many instances of it.

In the fourth chapter, Novak compares Plato and Philo. As Novak shows, much like Plato, Philo believes that contemplation of the heavenly bodies is the highest philosophical quest. And although Philo's notion of God is monotheistic, it is a God that is reached through superseding nature. In Philo's acceptance of Plato's ideas, however, Novak charges that he has undermined God's transcendence by making existence "too far removed from God's concern" (136). With respect to the relationships between humans, Novak notes that, for Philo, the relationships with other human beings are only significant because of God. The question one is left with, therefore, is whether this is slightly modified Platonic philosophy, or an entirely different perspective.

In the fifth chapter, Novak briefly touches on the "universalist challenge" faced by Maimonides, before introducing Aristotle's causes. Novak then shows that, for Aristotle, ethical teleology and practical teleology are unrelated to each other, which is not the case for Plato. This distinction is easier for Aristotle to make than it is for Maimonides, since he is a consummate theologian. When it comes to the cause of the universe, Novak makes it clear that for Maimonides, God should be seen as the technical cause. Novak convincingly shows that this position presents several difficulties, not least of which is how Maimonides can accept that God influences the world, since in Aristotle's model, God is coequal with it and that any change implies a change in God, which Aristotle cannot accept. Novak therefore suggests that Maimonides is speaking metaphorically. Novak's reasoning is that we cannot directly speak of this causality—a combination of formal cause and technical cause—since God creates the world with a blueprint but also chooses himself as that blueprint. Maimonides also faces another problem, which is how he explains prayer, given Aristotle's view. What follows is an analysis of prayer, a key component of which is the claim that, for Maimonides, unlike Aristotle, prayer is not the contemplation of God apart from the world, but contemplation of what God does in the world. The implication, however, is that Maimonides is not fully engaging with Aristotle but reinterpreting a fundamental metaphysical concept in a way that Aristotle would probably find unintelligible.

Unlike the other philosophers treated up until this point, the greatest challenge to Jewish thought, on Novak's view, is Kant. This perspective puts Novak somewhat at odds with Fackenheim, who is Hegelian. Novak's chapter on Kant is guided by two questions. The first of which is why Kant must use reason to discover nature and the second is why we ought to be concerned with the "independent existence of the data" itself (208). The former is answered by the fact that we need nature for our survival;

the latter by the fact that our knowledge, or limitation thereof, plays out in ethics, since we cannot know others in themselves and must respect them. On this point Novak finds a parallel in the Jewish view of nature inasmuch as it is something we have no dominance over. In a fairly complex section, Novak then explains the *noumenon*, which he defines as an intelligent being and presents Kant's view of it as an individual affecting this realm through interaction with other human beings, before touching on the concept of autonomy.

In the following section, Novak deals with the three formulations of the categorical imperative. For Novak, the first formulation pertains to how people relate to themselves, the second to how they relate to each other, and the third pertains to "the political relationship of rational beings" (231). In what he calls the "Jewish reaction" to these formulations, Novak draws on Hermann Cohen to present a case that it is "command of goodness" itself that commands human beings, but he finds this to be problematic, since God is equally subservient to this goodness. As for the reaction to the second formulation, Novak shows how Cohen grounds the discovery of the "fellowman" as depending on God as its precondition. And while this interpretation grounds love of other human beings in something beyond the human will, Novak questions whether Cohen has simply forced Jewish sources into a Kantian interpretation. The reaction to the third formulation, which closely relates to Kant's view of the relationship between religion and state, and thus to Cohen's claim that Judaism is the true "visible Church," brings up Jewish notions of messianism, which for Cohen is based on Kant's notion of the kingdom of ends and which is criticized by Novak as being "unrealizable in history." With respect to the relationship between God and humans, which is not possible for Kant, Novak finds that that problem is somewhat remedied by Cohen: God is seen as the end for moral action. Novak completes the chapter by stating that Kant's view of the relation between God and nature is not found in Jewish thought, but he nevertheless analyzes the Jewish response to it: although nature is ultimately for the sake of the relationship between humans and God it cannot be fully reduced to it, as Novak learns from the fact that there are blessings on natural occurrences, regardless of their impact on humans.

The book is missing a general conclusion, perhaps because there are so few structural similarities between the ways in which the various theologians engaged with the philosophers that influenced their thought. More importantly, among the philosophers he mentions none of their positions are shaped by the views of the corresponding theologians. In this sense, this impressive study of the relationship between Greek and Jewish ideas ultimately raises the question of the extent of their interaction or the need for one to be grounded by the other.

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