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*Process Ethics: A Constructive System.* By KENNETH CAUTHEN. Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984. Toronto Studies in Theology, vol. 18. 353 pages. US \$59.95.

Moving against a trend within philosophy to think of ethics as independent of religion and metaphysics and against a trend within theology to think of contaminating New Testament ethics with philosophy as being dangerous, Kenneth Cauthen, professor at Colgate Rochester Divinity School, hopes "to produce a synthesis of Christian ethics based on the Bible and moral philosophy based on reason and experience" (p. 26). Cauthen's process ethics is an "ellipse with two foci . . . revelation and reason, or . . . Christian ethics and philosophical ethics" (p. 12). From one focus he presents a *Christian* natural ethics, from the other a Christian *natural* ethics (p. 20).

His metaphor of an ellipse with two foci is useful, applicable repeatedly throughout a wide-ranging essay. Rights-based (deontological) and utilitarian (teleological) ethics are twin foci in moral philosophy. *Agape* and *eros* are twin foci in the Christian ellipse of love. Love will rotate around both sacrifice and

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equality; ethics will turn on both love and justice. A completed ethic will have complementary centers in individual and community. A strength of this work is its capacity to synthesize by dialectical process.

After an initial chapter setting out this goal and strategy ("The Task and Method of Christian Natural Ethics"), Cauthen turns to an overview of contemporary moral philosophy, assessing the strengths and weaknesses of teleological and deontological ethical theories, in the end blending the two in "An Inclusive Ethical Strategy." Then he turns to Biblical ethics in "An Ethic of Sacrificial-Equalitarian Love." Finally, in two chapters ("The Just and Good Society: A First Approximation" and "A Second Approximation") he sets forth an account of the just society. This involves theoretical accounts of the good life, the good person, the good society, and also examination of many practical, specific issues faced in American life. There is an appendix on economic justice in a capitalist society. In these chapters, correcting a prevailing overemphasis on individuals, Cauthen leads away from individualism toward a corporate view of society.

*Zygon* readers will be particularly interested in how little tension Cauthen feels between the naturalistic (and Christian) ethics he advocates and the evolutionary processes in nature. "Stated philosophically the principle is this: Respond to the creation of life in the evolutionary process by honoring the intrinsic value of living beings and by promoting the fulfillment of their potential. Stated theologically, the principle is this: Respond to the action of God in creation and redemption by loving others as God has loved you and by actualizing the Society of God on earth" (p. 127). Also, Cauthen's analysis of the legitimate place of self-love (to which we are biologically impelled) in a constructive tension with love for others (to which we are ethically urged) can help those who are puzzled over the seeming stronghold of self-interest so omnipresent in biological organisms and the seeming impossibility of producing genuine altruism in a human nature evolved from the beasts. Cauthen, however, does not face the tangled issues raised for ethics by biology (especially sociobiology). The naturalistic dimension of his ethics would have been more credible had he done so.

Cauthen is evidently at home in the literature of both theological and philosophical ethics and moves between these fields with unusual freedom and competence. Within Christian ethics, his discussion of self-giving love and its relation to self-love ("Love your neighbor *as yourself*") is perhaps the strongest chapter in the book. One reason is that it imports analytic skills honed in philosophical ethics to solve the dilemmas of *agape* and *eros*.

Cauthen concludes his Biblical ethics with the self speaking to the other:

I will love you and seek community with you unconditionally. I will stand ready to sacrifice for the sake of that ideal without ceasing come what may. What I seek is mutual self-realization in a fellowship of giving and receiving in which responsibility and benefits are shared. But I will keep my part of the bargain whether you keep yours or not. I will count your needs equal to mine and will sacrifice my own interests for the sake of meeting your greater needs. But I will not cease to count my own needs as worthy of equal attention and will guard my own rights and my own just access to my own good (p. 171).

Some will feel that this has compromised those topsy-turvy commands in the Sermon on the Mount that urge a radical self-emptying love. It is a little hard to imagine the last sentence of the conclusion above on the lips of Jesus. The reservation is too calculating, too guarded. But perhaps this is what an operational Christian morality comes to when the self is given equality with the other,

and both loved—when a philosophical, naturalistic ethic blends with a Christian ethic.

Within philosophical ethics, in the chapters on the just society, Cauthen is impressive in his capacity to argue with John Rawls and Robert Nozick. There is much of value in these chapters, although they have some tendency to treat too many issues too lightly. A more serious shortcoming is that Cauthen does not show here enough capacity to bring the Biblical sense of justice (righteousness) into social concerns for justice. God's righteousness, as portrayed in both Testaments, does not so much assess competing claims as it does deliver and save the unjust. "In thy righteousness deliver me and rescue me" (Ps. 71:2). God "himself is righteous [=just] and . . . he justifies him who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). The divine justice actively makes things right, delivers unjust persons not simply by vindicating them against oppressors or competitors but by making them just. Cauthen touches this saving element in divine justice (p. 209) but does not actively integrate it into his account of the just society.

Rather, the agenda for the debate in the last two chapters is almost entirely set by philosophical ethics, a matter of adjudicating conflicting interests. One could wish, for instance, speaking from their focus in the *Christian/natural* ellipse, that Christians could contribute more insight into how to make for righteousness in affirmative action and reverse discrimination cases (pp. 257-60, 305), in the abortion debates (pp. 268-74), in deciding whether society should provide a guaranteed annual wage (pp. 282-84), in permitting or prohibiting tax exemption for schools practicing racial discrimination (pp. 274-77), or in inheritance policy (pp. 287-89). So far as Cauthen moderates the discussion here, Christians seem no better able to debate these issues than are secular philosophers or ordinary citizens; the Christian faith offers little truly prophetic perspective on justice. There ought to be some baptism of justice. If this cannot be done in the courts of a nation constitutionally neutral to religion, where each must be given his or her due, then surely the Christian community present in that society ought to add something more positive than an otherwise unaided humanism can supply.

To some extent this issue reflects a still larger, unresolved issue throughout the book—the mix of Christianity and of philosophical naturalism in this blended ethics. Seen as two foci in an ellipse, it would seem that, while the two centers are often congenial, each pulls ethics to some extent in directions contrary to the pull of the other. I gather that this generally is Cauthen's intent. But he can also say that his humanism and his Christianity "coincide"; they meet in "a convergence of claims" (p. 132). He proposes "a congruence . . . between moral philosophy and New Testament ethics" (p. 156). "I maintain that there is a correspondence, if not identity, between agape and the philosophical claim that we are obligated to honor the intrinsic worth of every person" (p. 130). Congruence, converging claims, identity—these pull the foci closer and closer together, and often Cauthen seems to say, or to hope, that Christian ethics and philosophical ethics, if both are done well, will uniformly recommend the same conduct.

But he also complains that philosophical ethics has been, and must be, shallow. "Philosophical ethics as generally practiced in American universities tends to be truncated and superficial . . . lacking anchor in bedrock reality" (pp. 116-17). "A secular ethics without recourse to a transmoral resolution is metaphysically shallow and existentially inadequate" (p. 118). One's ethic does depend on one's metaphysics; the way one believes that the universe is built governs what conduct one judges to be fitting within it. "At the ultimate level it

may be said that ought can be derived from is" (p. 104). "Moral living is attuning oneself to the character and aims of the universe" (p. 106). At this point, philosophical ethics does not know grace or God's justice. It cannot deal redemptively with tragic choices (see p. 118). "Beyond all human limitations or analysis and action is the final appeal to the religious resources of grace, of divine forgiveness and shared suffering amidst the tragic conflicts of existence. An autonomous ethics divorced from the ultimate situation of human beings involved in both finitude and sin knows neither the heights nor the depths of existence and experience. Such an ethics finally fails both philosophically and morally" (p. 249). Further, the rationality of Christian ethics comes within the experience of that faith. "A Christian natural theology or ethics can justify its claims rationally but only or mainly to those who stand within the same circle of faith" (p. 15).

In such moods, Cauthen provides a useful challenge to the autonomy of ethics, at least to the autonomy of certain kinds of ethics. But then it is no longer clear how the New Testament and moral philosophy can converge in recommended conduct, be congruent, commensurable, complementary; indeed they no longer seem to be the twin foci of a single ellipse. Cauthen wants to have his cake and eat it too.

In Cauthen's account ethics is clearly a process, a dialectic between ethical concerns in tension. I did not, however, find this work to be especially informed by process philosophy as a metaphysical tradition descending from Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. Cauthen notes that he intends process philosophers to be a seminal presence but not use their technical (and rather formidable) language (p. 4). His argument keeps polar elements in tension, often with a creative synthesis, but it does not evidently owe much directly to process philosophy. If "Process Ethics" had been dropped from the title and something like "A Synthesis of Christian Ethics and Moral Philosophy" substituted, I would not have noticed the difference.

The book would have been easier to read with an expanded table of contents and with titled section heads. Its price will also deter many readers.

HOLMES ROLSTON III  
Professor of Philosophy  
Colorado State University