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### Myk Habets

**R. John Elford and D. Gareth Jones, *A Tangled Web: Medicine and Theology in Dialogue*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009 (288pp) [ISBN 978-3-03911-541-9]**

Peter Lang is starting a series entitled *New International Studies in Applied Ethics*, this work being reviewed is the premiere volume. Elford and Jones (eds.) have compiled a series of essays stimulated by D. Gareth Jones' visits to Liverpool and corresponding colloquia papers. The focus of these collected essays is to produce a volume in which one may appreciate how theological and biomedical research and practice may not only intersect but also enlighten each other—a daunting promise from the outset.

Each time a collection of essays on the intersection of theology and medicine crosses my desk I tend to consider the piece in light of the premiere compendium of theological discourse in medicine, *On Moral Medicine* (Lammers and Verhey, eds.). However, as I worked through this volume, I was swiftly moved to evaluate the collection of essays on their own merit. Truly, the pithy and pointed dialogue throughout this text lends itself to an engaging and enriching thought experience that does not serve to emphasize opposition but rather cooperation. However, that same pithy and pointed dialogue leaves one to consider not all is being said—such is the limitation of any compendium developed from essays initially intended to capture the attention of an audience. Nevertheless, as I will continue to show, this first volume does well to not only inform the reader of the intersections of medical science and theological wonder but also it excites the reader (or at the very least me) to approach this interdisciplinary dialogue with a renewed hope that the faithful speech of

theology may have an influential and necessary place at the table; rather, the bedside, the lecture theatre, or the lab.

The book has been divided into three sections, which attempt to give the collection of essays some focus and a sense of utility. The first section, *Theological Background*, begins with Gerrard Mannion call for theological consideration that is not simplistic and theologically unreflective (35), but rich and positively opportunistic; eager to draw sound insight and moral direction from dialogues that span multiple disciplines, cultures, and worldviews but also hopeful that peculiar insights birthed from theological reflection may be apprehended and esteemed in the marketplace. Elford, Hood, and Mealey follow Mannion's charge and echo his sentiments by emphasizing the limitations of theological reflection to garner the special knowledge required to grapple with ever-evolving technologies and biomedical advancements. Yet each also offer a warning: unless the voice of theology is once again heard in the marketplace, the relentless pursuit of human-perfection may become burdensome rather than a process or partnering in the redemptive work of Christ.

The second section, *Moral Boundaries*, includes five essays that move from theory to practice; considering various issues raised by the research and practice of medicine. Here, Jones' essay, "The human body: an anatomist's journey from death to life," is particularly noteworthy. At least for me, as an instructor of human anatomy and physiology and a son to a retired funeral director, I found Jones' consideration of how one should *treat the dead* to be a thorough application of the theoretical vision of the first section. However, it was Mannion's own essay about genetic technologies and community values that demonstrated how sociological, technological, ontological, and theological values must be considered to form a clear picture of the technological trajectory and moral dilemma raised by progressing genetics. Yet, Jones reminds the reader in another essay that there are limitations to the *tangled web* of medicine and theology.

The final section, *Regulation and Policy*, addresses the problem of policy making. If anything highlights the strained dialogue of theology and medicine than the political backdrop, which governs the practice of science and the voice of theology it is the topic of regulation and policy. Here one is reminded that the biomedical technologies, advancements, and practices addressed in the previous chapters are of an applied nature, confronting humanity in such a way as to call into question their safety, integrity, and utility. Throughout this section one is able to consider the relevance of theological discourse that may untangle the web of

confusion and concern to help inform and articulate policy recommendations. Yet, once again, the writers of these essays do a fine job at speaking faithfully (doing theology) in context as they challenge the reader to consider the tenuous relationships between moral concern, policy delimitations, and biomedical progress.

Though an excellent resource, this text does have some shortfalls. The brevity of each chapter and the lack of opposing voices prevent this book from being considered an extensive dialogue. However, such a book would be volumes long requiring a series within a series. A more legitimate concern that I considered as I read through this book was the tendency to focus on novel technologies rather than routine and regular concerns raised at the proverbial bedside. It is this on-the-frontiers-of-medicine concentration that weakens the utility of this text, and others like it. Of course, the glamour of these novel technologies and the constant media attention do give warrant to the writers to consider these topics, yet I wonder if there is a large audience that may benefit from these considerations? Nevertheless, the inclusion of topics regarding public scrutiny, researcher integrity, and cadaveric care-taking, for example, do balance my concerns and bolster the importance of this book for care-givers, decision-makers, and professionals.

All in all, I would highly recommend this book. The integrity of thought in each essay demonstrates the commitment of each author to rigorously and veraciously grapple with the intersecting paths of medicine and theology—two disciplines that attempt to illumine the path to human flourishing. Moreover, I would argue the editors were successful in their vision to produce a volume that is able to demonstrate how careful and collaborative discourse may be accomplished by both scientists and theologians thinking about the tough questions being raised by the practice and progress of medicine.

**Ashley J. Moyse**

**John H.Y. Briggs (ed.), *Pulpit and People: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Baptist Life and Thought*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009. (208 pp.) [ISBN: 978-1-84227-403-3]**

This book focuses on a crucial period of English Baptist history. The English Baptists had had a good first century in terms of growth and consolidation. The granting of a significant level of toleration in 1689