Catholicism and Liberalism, edited by **R. Bruce Douglass and David Hollenbach,** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Pp. xv and 352.

PAUL J. WEITHMAN, University of Notre Dame

The subject of this book is the possibility that Catholicism and liberalism might "discover that something constructive can come of **engaging** one another over their differences" (p. 7, emphasis original). The book's treatment of this subject is interdisciplinary: contributors include distinguished moral and systematic theologians, Catholic historians, political scientists, an eminent Catholic ecclesiologist, a canon lawyer and the senior religion correspondent of the *New York Times*. Their essays are uniformly clear, literate, erudite and extremely interesting and scholars interested in any of the disciplines represented will find that *Catholicism and Liberalism* amply repays their study.

Scholars of philosophy, however, will find the book perplexing. If its contents are an accurate indication, the meetings from which *Catholicism and Liberalism* resulted did not include philosophers. Various of the essays in the book address philosophical themes, but none focuses on the conceptual problems that are the staples of political philosophy. These omissions seem puzzling in light of the book's subtitle, according to which the volume anthologizes "contributions to American public **philosophy**" (emphasis added). They seem especially so given the book's point of departure. *Catholicism and Liberalism* is premised on the claims that momentous changes have taken place in the Catholic church since Vatican II and that those changes make intellectual encounters between Catholicism and liberalism both imperative and fruitful (pp. 9ff.). But the thirty years since the council have also seen momentous changes in Anglophone political philosophy, including the resurgence of liberalism in a very powerful form. The possibility of mutually beneficial contact between Catholicism and liberalism therefore seems to depend upon the possibility that Catholic social thought can advance the discussion of questions now outstanding in liberal theory. Yet none of the essays in this volume surveys those questions in a systematic way.

It would be a mistake to conclude that the book's constituent essays lack philosophical interest or that its omissions of philosophers and of the sustained discussion of philosophical questions are unjustified. To appreciate the philosophical import of the essays and to understand what initially seem glaring omissions, it is necessary to grasp the philosophically interesting and contentious assumptions that underlie the conversation to which *Catholicism and Liberalism* is a contribution. I therefore want to elucidate those assumptions before turning attention to any of the essays.

Those assumptions are best brought to light by examining the notion of "public philosophy" mentioned in the subtitle of *Catholicism and Liberalism*, for contemporary political philsophers may find it unfamiliar. Examining that notion, in turn, requires imputing to the editors of *Catholicism and Liberalism* an idea that is not explicitly discussed in the book but is central to the way Hollenbach and Douglass conceive of its purpose. The idea is that of a "public consensus". That idea, together with the companion idea

of a "public philosophy", plays a crucial role in the political writings of John Courtney Murray, the great Jesuit liberal who died in 1967. The fact that Murray's words grace the frontispiece of the volume under review, open Douglass's "Introduction" and are prominently cited in Hollenbach's conclusion together suggest that this volume's editors believe themselves faithful to the spirit of Murray's project. Their fidelity in its turn raises the possibility that Murray's idea of a public consensus is as important to them as it was to him.

The following six features of the public consensus are crucial to that notion as Murray conceived it.[1]

(1) *Matters of public concern and discussion.* The public consensus has propositions as its objects. Among those propositions are some which express claims about what constitutes a society's public life and thus about what matters fall within the proper scope of public concern and discussion. Among these matters of public concern are education, the operations of government and of political institutions generally, the content and dissemination of popular and high culture, the integrity of the family, the operation institutions which distribute wealth, the extent of compliance with traditional morality and the state of public discussion itself.

(2) *Moral consensus.* Also among the objects of consensus are the propositions that certain values are to be realized and moral principles satisfied in the various areas of public concern and discussion. These include principles of justice, ideals of civility and reasonability, aesthetic values, and values associated with a virtuous citizenry and with proper respect for human sexuality.

(3) *Moral and religious pluralism.* Public consensus does not require consensus on a moral theory or religious view which imposes systematic unity upon these values and principles. Neither does it require consensus on a systematic conception of political morality of the sort that Rawls defends.[2] Instead, a public consensus is consistent with a moral consensus of the sort (2) describes together with disagreement about how the objects of the moral consensus are theoretically unified.

(4) *Dynamism of the public consensus.* Social change continually confronts the public with new challenges in the areas of public concern. On-going public discussion of those challenges is on-going public discussion about how the values and principles on which there is moral consensus are to be applied to and realized in new situations. Changes in culture and mores also demand public discussion of how the moral consensus might be altered or reshaped.

(5) *Norms of public discussion.* This on-going public discussion is governed by norms requiring civility and courtesy of discussion and serious consideration of alternative points of view. These are moral rather than legal norms, and are themselves objects of the public consensus. As Murray conceived ideal public discussion, it need not approximate egalitarian deliberative ideals like the "ideal of deliberative democracy" or the social contract.[3] Rather, Murray thought that the discussion which forms, applies and extends the public consensus ought accord a special role to intellectual elites.[4]

(6) *The public philosophy.* A society's public philosophy is a subset of its

public consensus. It includes the norms, values and ideals to be realized or satisfied in its public life, including its public discussion. Because it is a part of society's public consensus and because the public consensus is dynamic, the public philosophy is dynamic, and grows through public discussion which privileges intellectual elites and is governed by norms of civility.

Murray published his *We Hold These Truths* in 1960 as a contribution to American public philosophy so conceived. The editors of the book under review published *Catholicism and Liberalism* thirty-five years later with the same purpose in mind. Its task is to consider whether Catholicism can now contribute to the public consensus and public philosophy of the United States. That public philosophy is, they think, identifiably liberal but is not identical to any of the liberal theories now current in departments of philosophy. This explains their exclusion of professional philosophers. Philosophical theories like those of Rawls and Dworkin are not the public philosophy to which Douglass and Hollenbach think Catholicism can contribute or which they think Catholics can accept on their own grounds. They are, rather, alternatives to Catholic liberalism which attempt to inform public philosophy in different ways than Douglass, Hollenbach and their contributors hope to do. The editors exclude systematic consideration of these philosophical liberalisms because they judge it more important to determine what contribution Catholicism can make to American public philosophy than to compare it with its rivals.

To see that this is the book's purpose, note that taking it as such explains the book's contents as well as its omissions. The natural way to determine what contribution Catholicism can make to a liberal public philosophy would be to raise historical and theological questions about Catholicism's previous encounters with liberal political thought and practice, its credibility as a contributor to liberal discussion in light of its internal governance, and its ability to adopt and adapt concepts like rights which are central to liberalism. These are just the areas of inquiry that contributors to *Catholicism and Liberalism* explore, and explore very well. The splendid essays by Peter Steinfels, Philip Gleason and Joseph Komonchak survey Catholicism's encounters with European and American liberalism from the late 18th-century to Vatican II. Essays on Catholicism and feminism, on Catholic teaching about the family and on the rights of persons in the Church—by Mary Segers, Laura Gellot and canon lawyer James Provost, respectively—consider areas in which Catholicism might seem most vulnerable to liberal critique. They therefore consider, in effect, why Catholicism might lack credibility as liberalism's interlocutor.

The two most outstanding essays in this collection are those by David Tracy and David Hollenbach. In the former, Tracy argues that classics of Catholic thought have an inherently "public" character. Despite their explicitly Catholic origin, imagery and language, they convey messages that can be received by anyone who encounters them, whether Catholic or not (pp. 202-3). It follows, Tracy argues, that the introduction of religious classics into public discussion is not the illicit introduction of privately accessible premises into an argment that ought to be based only on public ones. It is rather the presentation of art that is religious in origin to a plu-

ralistic society whose members are capable of learning from it. Thus Tracy argues that if liberals accept the notion of a classic as a work of art that can be publicly received whatever its origins, they will be committed to a less restrictive view of how the public consensus grows than they typically endorse.[5] In the latter essay, Hollenbach argues for the compatibility of Catholicism with rights understood as guarantees of "the minimum conditions for life in community" (pp. 138ff.). The essay leaves some crucial questions unanswered, and readers must refer to Hollenbach's "Afterword" (pp. 323-43) to understand the meaning of "community". The ellipses in Hollenbach's argument are, however, matters of necessity, for the essay builds on fifteen years of his work.[6] They should not obscure the essay's achievement and its very important contribution to this volume. By arguing for a conception of rights that entails some of the interpersonal duties central to liberal theory, Hollenbach shows that Catholicism shares enough of liberalism's language and commitments to make common cause on some issues and to contribute to the growth of a liberal public consensus. But by defending a notion of rights that is inconsistent with certain claims about personal autonomy which secular liberals often endorse, Hollenbach shows that Catholicism maintains sufficient critical distance from liberalism to retain its integrity.

If reading *Catholicism and Liberalism* as a continuation of Murray's project explains its contents, this interpretation also points to the book's shortcomings. There are serious problems with Murray's conception of and contribution to American public philosophy; those problems infect the book under review. I now turn to three of those difficulties.

First, why think there is a public consensus and a public philosophy in the United States? Murray would argue that postulating a public consensus is necessary to explain salient features of American political life. To the extent that there is a continuous tradition of appeal to certain values and principles in political argument, to the extent that political discussion is conducted and resolved with reasonable civility in the face of pluralism, to the extent that citizens recognize what constitutes their public life, Murray would say, there must to that extent be a public consensus. The problem with this argument is that the notion of a public consensus would be extremely difficult to define and operationalize. There may therefore be both conceptual and empirical difficulties with Murray's claim that the notion of a public consensus plays the role in social scientific explanation he supposed.[7] Moreover, even if the best explanations of American politics would have postulated a public consensus in Murray's time, it is far from clear that they would do so now or, if they would, what the contents of the postulated consensus would be. For the sake of completeness, *Catholicism and Liberalism* should include an essay on what it is Americans believe late in the 20th century and what evidence there is that they believe it.

Second, it is questionable whether Murray's claims about the formation and growth of public philosophy are still true. It may have been true in Murray's time that the terms of public discussion and the growth of the public consensus were determined by "careful university professors, the reasoned opinions of specialists, the statements of responsible journalists, and the solid pronouncements of respected politicians".[8] But lowered stan-

dards of education, the increased use of FAX and electronic mail by political pressure groups, the American and British electorates' repudiations of large, centrally-planned and -governed welfare states, the advent of soundbite political journalism and the gradual eclipse of the printed word as the medium of mass political communication all suggest the marginalization of the intellectual elites George Will once dubbed "the theory class".[9] They therefore suggest that the terms of American public debate about, for example, welfare reform, health care or gun control, are now set quite differently than Murray claimed a generation ago. It follows that if Murray were alive today, he might find it difficult to influence American public philosophy as he did in 1960. This raises questions about how a book like the one under review can influence American public philosophy, as its subtitle promises it will. The volume collects between two covers the work of America's leading Catholic liberal intellectuals. It says nothing about the mechanisms by which their work can influence the large number of Americans who do not read books like *Catholicism and Liberalism*.

How is the extremely impressive, and distinctively Catholic, liberalism of this book to gain the public's attention and shape its consensus? One obvious answer is that the tenets of Catholic liberalism might seep into American Catholic culture via their incorporation into preaching and study groups of church documents like the American bishops' pastoral on the economy. The problem with this answer is suggested by the facts that in the last twenty-five years, the church attendance of American Catholics has fallen and their attitudes to abortion and artificial contraception have become comparable to those of their non-Catholic compatriots. Thus the events which made this book's encounter between Catholicism and liberalism possible occurred just as American Catholics were becoming decreasingly attached to their church and increasingly selective about which of its teachings they accept. This suggests that the liberalization of American Catholics since Vatican II makes them less likely than they were in Murray's time to attend to the distinctively Catholic liberalism their church should now endorse if the conclusions of *Catholicism and Liberalism* are true. The implications of this suggestion are unwelcome to those of us who consider ourselves Catholic liberals. Perhaps the suggestion is incorrect. Whether it is, and how works like this one can shape the public consensus, should themselves be addressed by essays in this book.

The most serious problem with Murray's notion of a public consensus is the moral role he assigns it. Murray recognized that public and private institutions which regularly impinge on areas of public concern require legitimation. He thought that the public philosophy, together with civil dialogue based upon it, provide what legitimacy these institutions enjoy. Crudely put, Murray thought public action legitimate only if civil public discussion could show it consistent with or required by the public philosophy.[10] Clearly this condition, together with the privileged role of intellectual elites in the formation of the public philosophy, commit Murray to a conservative and elitist conception of legitimacy. His conception ignores the possibility that the composition of elites and the terms of their consensus are themselves the result of historical processes that are morally illegitimate because oppressive or exclusionary of women, minorities and the

otherwise marginalized. It therefore ignores just the worries that lead some contemporary philosophers to engage in feminist critiques of extant power structures, others to despair of legitimacy in the spirit of Foucault, and still others to define it by reference to the ideal and egalitarian forms of democratic deliberation I mentioned earlier.

This problem with Murray's project affects *Catholicism and Liberalism* as well. Many of the essays in this book challenge American liberalism by challenging the autonomy and social atomism that permeate American life. But, with the exception of Hollenbach's essay and afterword, the book is insufficiently critical of historic restrictions on participation in important political or religious discussions. Even the essays where such criticism would be expected—those on feminism and on the rights of persons in the church—are remarkably restrained. The book is therefore insufficiently attentive to the ways in which what consensus there now is in either America or American Catholicism might reflect restrictions on who was permitted to speak in the first place. Perhaps there were no such restrictions, perhaps what restrictions there were are justifiable, or perhaps there are important and principled distinctions to be drawn among them; without their careful examination, we cannot be sure. It is here that the omission of contemporary political philosophy from this volume exacts its highest price. The theory of democratic liberalism, as articulated in contemporary American philosophy, is thoroughly committed to egalitarian ideals of deliberation. Its inclusion would usefully have balanced this otherwise splendid collection.

NOTES

1. For these six features, I draw primarily upon John Courtney Murray, SJ, *We Hold These Truths* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960) pp. 79-123, but also on other passages in the book. For some of Murray's thoughts on morality and the conditions of culture, for example, see pp. 155-74. For his thoughts on the ideal of civility, see pp. 5ff.

2. See John Rawls *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

3. For the ideal of deliberative democracy, see Cass Sunnstein *The Partial Constitution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); for the social contract as a deliberative ideal, see my "Contractualist Liberalism and Deliberative Democracy" (*Philosophy and Public Affairs* 24 (1995): 314-343.).

4. See Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

5. Thus Tracy's emphasis on the reception of classic works of art might be contrasted with Rawls's claim that "all ways of reasoning [...] must acknowledge certain common elements: the concept of judgment, principles of inference and rules of evidence, and much else, otherwise they would not be ways of reasoning but perhaps rhetoric or means of persuasion. We are concerned with reason, not simply with discourse." See his *op. cit.*, p. 220.

6. See David Hollenbach, SJ *Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

7. As it is a matter of scholarly debate whether the notion of civic culture has the explanatory power its proponents contend. For this crucial notion, see Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba *The Civic Culture* (Princeton: Princeton

University Press, 1963); for criticisms of Almond and Verba, see Alasdair MacIntyre "The Essential Contestability of Some Social Concepts" *Ethics* 84 (1973) 1-9; Edward N. Muller and Mitchell A. Seligson, "Civic Culture and Democracy: The Question of Causal Relationships" *American Political Science Review* 88 (1994): 635-52.

8. Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

9. George Will "Conservatism and Character" in his *The Morning After* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), pp. 365-68, p. 365.

10. See Murray, *op. cit.*, pp. 103ff. In these passages, Murray relies upon Adolph A. Berle, Jr. *Power Without Property* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959), pp. 98-116, where the issue of legitimacy is more explicitly addressed than in his own discussion.

Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?, by **Norman Malcolm,** edited with a response by Peter Winch. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994. Pp. xi and 140. $30.50 (Cloth).

RONALD E. HUSTWIT, The College of Wooster.

This work of Norman Malcolm is more a lengthy essay than a book. It was, according to Peter Winch's "Preface," Malcolm's last complete piece of philosophical work before his death. Winch believes that Malcolm did want it published, but that he would have worked on it more before submitting it. Because of its length, about 94 pages, the publisher requested that Winch add commentary in order to bring it to book length. In his commentary, Winch has "sharp disagreements" with Malcolm's claims. I will not discuss those disagreements in this review. I will say that Winch's commentary adds the aspect of an on-going philosophical dialogue to the book and that his objections seem carefully made, accurate, and strong. Nevertheless, Malcolm's thesis is quite interesting, and I would not have him withdraw it for Winch's objections.

Malcolm, then, has written another book on themes in his teacher's work. This one compares Wittgenstein's thinking to the kind of thinking that religious people do when actually living and talking in "a religious point of view." According to Malcolm, this is meant to be an analogy. It is not that Wittgenstein takes up religious themes or discusses religious language. Rather, there is something about his thought that reminds Malcolm of the way in which religious people think. Malcolm then interprets the following remark of Wittgenstein according to his understanding and comparison of how religious people think to Wittgenstein's philosophy. The remark is quoted from a conversation with M. O'C. Drury: "I am not a religious man but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view" (Rush Rhees editor, *Ludwig Wittgenstein, Personal Recollections*, p. 94). Malcolm's question is: What did Wittgenstein mean by this remark?

A quick glance at the book would seem to indicate that the subject matter was Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. After a chapter in which Malcolm puts Wittgenstein forward as having said or written certain things which show that he was in fact thoughtful about religion, the