

apply the text to contemporary situations—as homiletical material for our Christian journey.

My own assessment of this work is somewhat undecided and imprecise, particularly because there are so many avenues by which to critique the work. Brigg’s writing style is winsome and easy to follow. His thesis is quite clear, yet the diversity of his chapters (each could be self-contained) and the variety of sub-methods he employs is disconcerting. He uses some historical-critical tools, yet dismisses them as being pointless on other occasions. He admires modern scholarship, yet advocates returning to pre-modern approaches. Although somewhat frustrating, I found the work to be enlightening, engaging, and informative overall. Certainly, it is worth reading in light of the lack of significant commentaries on the book of Numbers. The work provides a fresh look at important biblical passages and wrestles with ways to apply God’s Word to contemporary situations.

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**Rae, Scott B. *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018. 522 pp. \$39.99 hardcover.**

Some people would assert that loss of respect for the law and the failure to teach time-tested religious ethical standards in schools could be some of the reasons explaining the rise of immorality and the loss of civility in contemporary western culture. Therefore, it is vital that educational institutions of all levels offer classes in ethics, but teaching ethics from a biblical perspective is often met with skepticism by students, parents, or faculty, even in Christian institutions of higher education. Scott Rae, professor of Christian ethics and dean of faculty at the Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, has written *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics* to address this predicament.

This textbook is organized topically into sixteen chapters. The first four chapters cover the basics: why morality matters, ethical theories, the basics of Christian ethics, and ethical decision making. The next four chapters delve into issues involving life at the margins such as abortion, contraception, stem cell research, genetics, cloning, physician-assisted suicide, euthanasia, and withdrawing treatments at the end of life. The last eight chapters cover various ethical issues in no particular order: capital punishment, war, sexual ethics, environmentalism, the ethics of work, violence and gun control, race, gender, and diversity, and immigration issues. The back of the book has twenty-four pages of footnotes, a Scripture index, and a general index.

A companion DVD has sixteen 30-minute discussions matching topics in each chapter of the book. These short videos are suitable for showing in class. Key

words or concepts are highlighted on the screen as they are being discussed. On the Zondervan Academic website, students can access companion materials. They include five-minute videos and “flash cards” of terms from each chapter. Instructors can register to receive teaching resources that include convenient PowerPoint slides and an instructor’s manual having helpful chapter summaries, learning objectives, and a bank of test questions.

*Moral Choices* has many strengths. Scott Rae begins by making the case for a transcendent, objective, and universal moral law, in contrast to contemporary society’s appeal to ethical relativism. The core assumption of Rae’s ethical teaching is that “the *ultimate* source for morality is not God’s commands but God’s character” (68, emphasis his). I agree with Rae that “at its heart, Christian ethics is a blend of both virtues and principles” (68). He is an unapologetic proponent of the sanctity of human life and the traditional one-man, one-women marriage. While these hot-button topics are sometimes difficult to discuss in the classroom, Rae writes and presents those topics in a winsome way which should not give offense to those students who might have competing views. Rae has a lucid writing style, but he does not hesitate to dive into complex philosophical concepts (e.g., “The Ring of Gyges” and the Euthyphro dilemma). The text is replete with biblical passages and textboxes that highlight chapter themes with real-world cases or biographical material. He does highlight the work of Martin Luther (77–78). Summaries of what was discussed, review questions, suggestions for further reading, and cases for class discussion appear the end of the chapters. As an added bonus, *Moral Choices* is extremely affordable as compared to other ethics texts.

Now for some of the weaknesses of *Moral Choices*. Since Rae is an evangelical, he emphasizes the sovereignty of God rather than the Theology of the Cross. Rae founds normative ethics on God’s character “as clarified by Jesus” (68), but he might have been more intentional about grounding Christian ethics on the person and work of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. Rae does briefly mention vocation but only in passing, and it is not listed in the index. While Christian ethics is properly founded on law and gospel, Rae does not emphasize that the chief motivation for moral behavior is the gospel. As many ethics textbooks do, he conflates teleology with consequentialism (40), but classical teleology, as seen in the Roman Catholic tradition as developed by Thomas Aquinas, has a *telos*, i.e., a goal or purpose, for our lives and imposes limits to moral behavior, whereas consequentialist ethical theories like utilitarianism and egoism do not. For teaching purposes, it would be helpful to have the chapters organized as units, e.g., introduction to ethics, biblical themes, the edges of life, the callings of the Christian, and societal issues. The classical Principles of Biomedical Ethics (autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice) are mentioned only in passing. While they have limited use in ethical decision making and character formation, health care students need to be aware of them since almost all secular ethical discussions in today’s medicine use that terminology. I found the videos quite helpful, but they would not be suitable to show at every class session. While the content is

very good, the videos consist of short presentations by Rae, which are rather dry and could stand to be improved with images and other visual content. Another shortcoming of the DVD lectures is that they sometimes refer to chapter and page numbers that match older editions of the text, which can be confusing.

I recently adopted *Moral Choices* for a Christian Ethics course, and, so far, I am glad I did. I got a sense that students *did* read the book (in contrast to other textbooks I had used in the past). While Lutheran instructors will find the need to explain some textbook content in light of confessional teaching and make some tweaks to the PowerPoint slides, much of the content can be used as is. Scott Rae is an unabashed advocate for the dignity of the human person from conception until temporal death. He does not apologize for applying normative biblical principles. The textbook is most suitable for a university setting, but it could also be used in upper-level high school courses and even for an in-depth Bible class series about Christian ethics. Rae presents biblical ethical principles in a straightforward way so that instructors with a minimal amount of theological and/or philosophical training can teach ethics competently.

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**Prior, Karen Swallow. *On Reading Well: Finding the Good Life through Great Books*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2018. Hardcover. 267 pages. \$19.99.**

Literature is a powerful medium for communicating moral and spiritual truths. The subtitle of this book points to a Christian understanding of “the Good” by means of Christian virtues. In twelve chapters, Prior, an acclaimed author and prolific English professor at Liberty University, illustrates and illuminates the four cardinal virtues (prudence, temperance, justice, and courage), the three theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity/love), and the five heavenly virtues (chastity, diligence, patience, kindness, and humility) using, as she states, “works of enduring quality, notable for their form as well as their content” (10). She asserts in her introduction, “Reading literature, more than informing us, forms us” (22).

According to Prior, “reading well is, in itself, an act of virtue, or excellence, and it is also a habit that cultivates more virtue in return.... Reading virtuously means, first, reading closely, being faithful to both text and context, interpreting accurately and insightfully. Indeed, there is something in the very form of reading—the shape of the action itself—that tends toward virtue” (15). Her advice is simple, yet remarkably profound: “Read books you enjoy, develop your ability to enjoy challenging reading, read deeply and