conclusions grounded in solid theological reasoning rooted in Scripture (which is liberally referred to throughout) and Christian history. This is married to science and current understandings of the ecological crises humanity currently faces, producing a “creed for today” that affirms authentic Christian belief while situating that belief in our current lived reality. This has the effect of both enhancing the mystery of the divine while also making this mystery more concrete and integral to human life.

This work would be suitable for advanced undergraduates in theology or ethics and is especially suitable for students of spirituality and ecological ethics. It is also a thought-provoking work for personal spiritual introspection and growth, especially for those who sometimes struggle to articulate the deep connections that exist between the created world and Christ.

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Thought Experiments in Ethics is an attempt to provide a novel view of thought experiments from the perspective of the university professor who aims to go beyond theoretical education. Through Kovács’s work, lecturers in Christian ethics and anthropology now have a chance to experience working with thought experiments in a way which goes beyond the limits of argumentation. The originality of the book is in its treatment of thought experiments: they are not simple illustrations, or elements of ethical lines of thought, but rather tools for education. The challenge they pose to the intuitive apparatus of students might not only lead to understanding, but to true ethical conversion.

Kovács works not only with the “classics” of thought experiments, such as the trolley problem, the violinist scenario, or the experience machine, but tries to broaden the scope by including stories from the Bible and literature. The most characteristic example comes from FerencSánta’s The Fifth Seal, a novel centered around the story of Tomoceuszkakatiti and Gyugyu, an evil tyrant and a slave. Kovács confronts the reader with the necessity to choose between the fate of the two protagonists of the story and thus successfully demonstrates how thought experiments transcend the limits of argumentation. In being whirled by the dilemma, readers can have firsthand experience about how thought experiments work. They have a certain “existential force” due to their power to “reveal something hidden about ourselves” (7), they work with specific rules, such as “Tertia non datur!” (9) and are analogous with the reality of the readers (10). The key role of these three features is also demonstrated through the Parable of the Good
Samaritan, taking the reader back to its original setting and underlining once more the context bound character of thought experiments and helping preachers and teachers to understand why their audience might miss the point of biblical parables today. The use of the term “pragmatics” is also justified by the emphasis on the context, the pragmatic force and the effect on the hearer.

The book explicitly reaches back to the revolution of the teaching of ethics in 1960s America, when a “new generation of philosophers emerged who were less interested in the discourse on the philosophy of language and keen to explore questions of practical interest” (76). Kovács names Judith Jarvis Thomson, Michael Tooley, Philippa Foot, and James Rachels, most of whom published regularly in the journal Philosophy & Public Affairs. They coined many of the thought experiments which are now part of any standard curriculum of ethics. Kovács underlines the innovative character of thought experiments especially in the field of bioethics, where complex questions “could now be brought before the public using a simple story and a well-formulated question” (78). Despite his obvious enthusiasm for the use of thought experiments in the classroom, Kovács is also critical and aims to show the limits of teaching with the help of imaginary cases.

The second part of the book discusses particular thought experiments in detail, sparking the intuition of the readers in a careful fashion. The original and numerous alternate versions of Robert Nozick’s Experience Machine, Richard Sylvan’s Last Man Argument, Philippa Foot’s Trolley Problem, and Judith Jarvis Thomson’s Violinist Analogy, offer a playful and demanding introduction to these classics of thought experiments. They approach different questions of human life, such as the importance of reality, the value of nature, our “not-fitting-into-the-world” (210), and the delicacy of the bond between parents and children. At this stage Kovács turns the focus from ethics to anthropology as he stresses that thought experiments “entail a certain implicit anthropology,” which manifests “in the clash between intuitive responses and moral expectations” (210).

Critics, especially moral theologians, might find one flaw in Kovács’s book. One might feel disappointed by the lack of solutions to the numerous ethical puzzles in the book. Opposed to the tradition of casuistry, Kovács describes thought experiments as tools for challenging our intuitions, but it does not seem to be his goal to provide solutions for those facing an ethical dilemma. Nevertheless, the whole book appears to be a persuasive argument for professors of ethics and moral theology to make a better use of thought experiments in lecture halls.

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