

Person, society and state in the thought of Rowan Williams

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Introduction

Anglican social thought is a diverse, sprawling body of ideas that has evolved over time in response to numerous circumstances and challenges. It is both more diffuse and less complete than Catholic social teaching. This is because Anglicanism consists of a global communion of self-governing national churches operating in widely differing confessional, cultural and political contexts, and because it lacks a magisterium capable of defining the content of its social principles authoritatively. Even if we restrict our attention to the Church of England, we struggle to identify a coherent and consistent body of thought that commands allegiance – even attention – across the whole church. The Church of England faces the additional challenges that its contributions to social thought emerge from diverse and often uncoordinated organs, and that it contains within it sharply contrasting theological commitments.¹

Yet in this incomplete patchwork quilt that is the Church of England's social thought I think we can still discern, at least since the work of Archbishop William Temple in the mid-twentieth century, a number of recurring normative commitments. These commitments are not uniquely Anglican yet their particular combination and inflection lend them a recognisably Anglican flavour. Such commitments concern the dignity, freedom and rights of the human person, the embeddedness of the person in a fabric of social obligations, relations and communities, and the purpose of the state to promote justice and the common good. Temple's influential work *Christianity and Social Order* (1942),² with principles of 'freedom', 'social fellowship' and 'service' at its centre, stands as the nearest thing to a consensus statement (at least at the elite level) in the twentieth century, even though it had no formal status. Anglican social thought is as much represented in the work of individual theologians as it is in any official statements.

¹ See, e.g., George Moyser, ed., *Church and Politics Today: The Role of the Church of England in Contemporary Politics* (T & T Clark, 1985); Eve Poole, *The Church on Capitalism* (Palgrave, 2010).

² William Temple, *Christianity and Social Order* (Shepherd-Walwyn/SPCK, 1976).

It seems appropriate, then, to focus specifically on the work of Rowan Williams, one of the most distinguished Anglican theologians writing today. While he has been working on social and political themes from the start of his career, during his tenure as Archbishop he took the opportunity to present many influential and sometimes controversial public speeches which, like Temple's book, were taken to be an important barometer of the mind of the church. His recent book, *Faith in the Public Square* (Bloomsbury, 2012), gathers many of these speeches and will be the focus of this paper.³ The book is wide-ranging, penetrating and subtle, reiterating at many points the central theological themes of his earlier work. Yet it develops core Anglican social commitments in intriguing and often compelling ways (albeit at times in dense prose). It amounts to a sustained argument, launched from many vantage-points, in favour of allowing religious faith to make an active, constructive and critical contribution to the public realm. The book promises to be a significant reference point for Anglican social thought for years to come.

Williams claims that he is not offering a 'compendium of political theology' but only a 'series of worked examples' of how theology might speak to public affairs, while admitting that, retrospectively, he was able to discern 'elements...of a broader theory...of faith and the social order' (2). One of the aims of my paper is to show that there is more systematic coherence to the book than he here implies and to that end I'll try to reconstruct at least some of those elements into a more organised whole. The first part of the paper, 'Person and Society', briefly expounds what I want to call his 'embodied-personalist' vision of human beings. The second addresses the themes of society and state, with special attention to two terms which are Williams' own: 'interactive pluralism' and 'procedural secularism'. I also want to offer two critical observations: first, that there is something of a lacuna in his thought when it comes to connecting his rich and dynamic account of persons with his broader account of social institutions; second, that in spite of the many penetrating insights he offers on the role of the state, there remains an ambivalence in his thought on its distinctive moral purpose.

³ Unless otherwise noted, page references in this paper are to this book. The paper is a provisional, working analysis of and response to the book. Apart from two lectures not included in the book, I do not here refer to Williams' many other writings touching on social theology. For overviews of his broader theology, see, e.g., Mike Higton, *Difficult Gospel: The Theology of Rowan Williams* (SCM, 2004); Benjamin Myers, *Christ the Stranger: The Theology of Rowan Williams* (T & T Clark, 2012).

I Person and Society: 'Embodied Personalism'

I've chosen the term 'embodied-personalism' to highlight that while Williams embraces a 'personalist' or 'relational' view of humans beings which is quite familiar within Catholicism and Orthodoxy, his striking emphasis on the *bodily* location of personhood lends his personalism a distinctive flavour. I'll discuss three interweaving themes: humans as priests; humans as embodied; and humans as relational. I'll only offer a very brief sketch here as I want to spend more time on the theme of society and state.

Humans as priests

Williams' social thought builds on one of his most fundamental theological commitments, that creation is an 'act of divine self-giving, the bestowing of God's activity in and through what is not God' (177). The only appropriate human response is, he says, 'to become able to make creation a gift – to receive it from God in blessing and thanksgiving, to offer it back to God by this blessing and gratitude (that is, to let go of the idea that it is just there for our use), and to use it as a means of sharing the divine generosity with others' (177). And these 'others' are not only other persons but all other creatures – the point naturally arises in three penetrating chapters devoted to the contemporary environmental crisis (chs. 14-16). This 'offering back' to God by humankind of the gifts of creation is described as a 'priestly' role. The unique vocation of humans as images of God is the high responsibility, as Williams puts it, to 'name the world aright', to 'orchestrate the reflection of God's glory in the world by clothing material things with sacred meaning and presenting the world before God in prayer' (178). Treated thus, the environment becomes 'sacramental' of the initial gift from which it originates. 'The 'face' of the earth becomes an aspect of the face of God' (194). Humanity would be radically incomplete were it to renounce this priestly vocation (196). Equally, to fulfil it adequately, humanity must maintain an awareness that it remains fully embedded in the material processes of a world it can never finally master (191). It must renounce modernity's aspiration towards the 'capacity for self-creation' (64).

Humans as embodied

So humans are called to cultivate creation, while acknowledging their own materiality, their embodiment, and all the attendant biological and social dependence and fragility

this brings. For Williams, then, true human dignity can never be found in striving to rise above our embodied condition or to master it rationally but only in embracing it gratefully and without resentment (191).

This is a theme recurring in much of his earlier work. In this book, the theme is developed most fully in two remarkable chapters on human rights (chs. 12 and 13). Williams does not follow other leading Augustinian theologians in casting doubt on the very concept of human rights as a suitable carrier of Christian meanings. Rather he proposes a novel theological re-founding of the concept in human bodiliness. Indeed he traces the remoter origin of the notion as far back as the early church's recognition, developed in response to slavery, that the human body could never be regarded as an item of property (152). Christianity did not question slavery on the basis that a person has 'ownership' of their body; it discerned that the concept of ownership simply doesn't apply here. Rather, the body is 'the organ of the soul's meaning...the medium in which the conscious subject communicates' (152); and here, the term 'communication' stands for the totality of a person's interactions with the world. Williams asserts, strikingly, that it is '[t]he recognition of a body as a human body [that] is...the foundation of recognizing the rights of another' (152). And for him this is crucially because when we recognize a body as a human body we recognize it as a 'vehicle of communication' (152); for 'the body *speaks*...it is the way I make myself present to myself and to others' (154). And this must be affirmed even, indeed especially, for those who can only 'communicate' with difficulty, if at all; for, as he adds, 'they still have faces' (154). This conception of human rights stands sharply opposed to dominant secular theories that seek to ground human dignity in specific capacities – usually mental ones – such as consciousness, rational agency or moral autonomy (153, 154). Such capacity-based accounts inevitably get drawn into devising lists of essential criteria for who is fully entitled to human rights, thereby placing the rights of the less than fully rational person, or those of the unborn, elderly, or severely disabled, in jeopardy (153).

Humans as relational

The relational character of personhood is another theme running throughout much of Williams' earlier writings. He actually addresses it in a particularly focussed way in the 2012 Theos lecture, delivered after the book appeared: 'The person and the individual:

human dignity, human relationships and human limits'.⁴ The lecture draws on the Russian Orthodox thinker Vladimir Lossky, one of his earliest theological influences.

In the lecture, Williams draws on Lossky's argument that the mystery of personhood cannot be accounted for in terms of a human 'nature' understood as a set of discreet properties characterizing every human being. As Lossky puts it, "person" signifies the irreducibility of man to his nature'. And the element that, in Lossky's words, 'goes beyond [a person's] nature' is not first of all something interior to the person but rather the *relational nexus* in which every human being finds herself. In Williams' words: 'What makes me a person, and what makes me *this* person rather than another, is...the enormous fact of my being here rather than elsewhere, being in these relations with those around me....I stand in the middle of a network of relations, the point where the lines cross'. And this 'point' is borne by a human body, so that, as he puts it, 'we relate to one another as bodies'. The body not only *speaks*; it also '*receives and digests communication*' (156).

Relationality runs so deep in personhood that it is actually impossible to separate some abstract entity called 'the person' from the web of intersecting relationships by which it is constituted. Rather, 'in relationship each of us has a presence or a meaning in someone else's existence. We live in another's life'. Humans certainly have freedom and responsibility, but they are not mere isolated 'individuals'. Williams distinguished his 'personalism' from modern 'individualism'.⁵ The latter proceeds on the skewed assumption that 'what comes first is this isolated core which then negotiates its way around relationships with others but always has the liberty of hurrying back indoors'.

When we combine William's notion of embodied personhood with his radically relational view of the person, we find a powerful and distinctive basis for asserting a universal 'human dignity'. Williams defines this as 'the unconditional requirement that we attend with reverence to one another'. The requirement follows from the recognition, available in principle to all, that every embodied human individual displays the essential mysteriousness of personhood. Even more fundamentally, this dignity is

⁴ At time of writing (November 2012) this lecture is available from the Archbishop of Canterbury's website: <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2636/archbishop-delivers-fifth-annual-theos-lecture>. Unattributed quotations in this section are to this lecture (for which the website version gives no paragraph numbers).

⁵ Jacques Maritain drew a similar distinction in *The Person and the Common Good* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947).

grounded in our relation to the Creator: 'Before anything or anyone is in relation with anything or anyone else, it's in a relation to *God*', by whom 'I am already grasped, addressed, engaged with...[an] everlasting attention and love'.

II Society and State: 'Interactive Pluralism' and 'Procedural Secularism'

We've seen, then, that Williams' 'embodied personalism' already contains a series of thickly social conceptions: the relational self; mutual belonging and dependence; the bodily and social grounding of human rights. Such a perspective naturally yields in Williams' thought a strongly positive appreciation of many forms of human association and community as indispensable to the flourishing of persons and the realisation of human dignity. Human beings are created for mutual 'givings and receivings' that will be expressed dynamically in myriad ways that could never be comprehensively mapped. In the book Williams has pertinent things to say in passing about many particular forms of human association or community but his more general account of such bodies and their relation to the state utilizes two terms of art which I now want to explore: interactive pluralism and procedural secularism.

Interactive pluralism

Before defining this specific term, let me begin with a brief sketch of the broad social theory lying behind, after which I'll pose my first question. Williams' reflections on the nature of modern society are particularly indebted to the early twentieth-century strand of 'political pluralism' associated with Acton, Maitland, and Laski and with the Anglo-Catholic thinker J. N. Figgis and his more contemporary heir David Nicholls (50; 81; 126). The overriding emphasis of this group of theorists is that persons are not primarily and certainly not exclusively members of the single comprehensive community of the state but rather first of all belong to what Williams terms 'first-level associations', larger than the individual but smaller than the state. These are the primary locations in which people participate in cooperative activity, are formed as persons, and find their social identity. They are not creatures of the state nor are they its dependent organs. They naturally and rightly assume that they possess the right to exist, to act corporately and to govern their own internal affairs (50). For pluralists, then, the state is not, as Williams puts it, 'the all-powerful source of legitimate community life and action', but, rather, 'the structure needed to organise and mediate

within a “community of communities”, a plurality of very diverse groups and associations of civil society....’ (126).

In the book, among these various groups Williams is particularly interested in ethnic and religious communities, which he sometimes refers to collectively as ‘moral communities’. This is because they are the most formative sites of the ‘multiple loyalties’ that citizens in modern societies find themselves bearing and which furnish them with vital moral and social resources, while also presenting them with significant challenges that Williams wishes to address. Diverse ethnic and religious loyalties, and the communities which form and express them, play a fundamental and constitutive role in the lives and social identities of many contemporary citizens. A core claim elaborated in the book – and which was really the chief concern of his much-misunderstood ‘sharia law’ lecture – is simply that ‘our social identities are not constituted by one exclusive set of relations or modes of belonging’.⁶

To relate this claim to the first part of the paper, we might say that ethnic and religious affiliations are particularly important instances of the relationality constitutive of embodied persons made in the image of God. To ignore, disrespect or damage such affiliations is then to breach the human dignity of their members. Williams is especially alert to two powerful threats to these and other communities, especially minority or otherwise vulnerable ones: the tendency of modern secular states to deny them proper public recognition and to place vexatious demands on them; and the power of globalizing markets to corrode their distinctiveness by imposing upon them a universal culture of consumerism (109-110).

Williams does not attempt to offer a detailed account of various types of social relationship required for a flourishing human life, such as we find in Catholic social teaching: for example, marriage, family, kinship group, neighbourhood, ethnic community, trades union, business enterprise, education or professional group, cooperative society, voluntary or cultural association, religious association, city, state, and so forth. Now this in itself is no criticism; he is not presuming to offer a systematic

⁶ ‘Civil and Religious Law in England: a religious perspective’. Currently available at: <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1137/archbishops-lecture-civil-and-religious-law-in-england-a-religious-perspective>. Also published in *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 10.3 (2008), 262-282. For commentaries on the lecture, see, e.g., Mike Higton, ‘Rowan Williams and Sharia: Defending the Secular’, *International Journal of Public Theology* 2.4 (2008), 400-417; Jonathan Chaplin, ‘Legal Monism and Religious Pluralism: Rowan Williams on Religion, Loyalty and Law’, *International Journal of Public Theology* 2.4 (2008), 418-441.

social theory. Yet here, perhaps, we do encounter an important lacuna in his thought, one that leaves the link between his rich vision of the embodied relational person and his account of plural social institutions somewhat unclear. For to assert that human personhood is rooted in our biology and our sociality invites a discussion of whether the specific design of our biological make-up and the recurring needs of our social existence point to a preference for certain forms of social relationship and institution over others. It is certainly true and important to say that human persons are formed by their participation in a dynamic labyrinth of interconnected relations. But it is also important to begin to spell out what kinds of relation and what kinds of connection encourage true human flourishing as intended by the Creator and which work against it. One traditional way to pose this question is to ask whether we can discern any imperatives of ‘natural law’ which might guide the design of human relationships and institutions (although this is not the only way to pose the question).

The importance of the question is relatively clear in the case of longstanding relationships such as marriage and family, where the turbulent current debate over same-sex marriage seems to cry out for greater clarity on, for example, whether or not there is something we might call the ‘normative design’ of marriage and family, and if so what it is. But it is equally important for modern institutions such as educational, health care and business organisations; and for the state, to which I return. Consider business corporations: if the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* is right to propose that norms such as gift and solidarity are not to be seen as external ethical constraints on economic activity but rather are internal to it,⁷ then far-reaching implications seem to follow for the ‘normative design’ of corporations and the markets in which they operate. Or consider ethnic communities. It seems important not to conflate amorphous and difficult-to-define groupings such as ‘the Polish community’ or ‘the Bengali community’ with organised associations having an ethnic character (the ‘Bengali community centre’). And it is equally important not to conflate ethnic associations with religious ones: the Bengali community centre is not to be confused with the Bradford council of mosques. These distinctions may seem captious but on the ground they are important; to anticipate the next section, it is important to know the normative design of a social institution (or, if it has one) if we are to know what we may reasonably expect of it in its ‘interactions’ with other institutions and with the state. In fact in the book Williams

⁷ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, §36.

offers numerous insightful general reflections on what counts as normative *behaviour* or *goals* for a range of social institutions (for example, he devotes a whole chapter [ch. 21] to prisons). What is perhaps missing, however, is a more specific account of what I am calling their normative *design*; or, at least, some explanation of why such an account is unnecessary or inappropriate.

Let me return to Williams' own account. The model he recommends for how the plural communities and associations of a modern society ought to relate to one another, and to the state, is 'interactive pluralism' (61, 81). Interactive pluralism is far from the 'static pluralism' produced by 'Balkanizing' versions of multiculturalism, which offer only the 'juxtaposition of mutually non-communicating groups' (58). Here ethnic or religious cultural identities are frozen in time, leaving each to remain locked within its own outlook, immune from external challenge. Ironically, while such a model purports to protect such communities from harm by others, its effect is to disrespect their very public distinctness, leaving their ethnic or religious identities as merely 'decorative' (102).

Interactive pluralism certainly offers a robust defence of the distinct character of plural communities. But it also requires a public framework in which they are prompted to cooperate with each other in action and to engage with each other in civil but critical dialogue. It's worth noting here that a deep and pervasive emphasis in Williams' broader theology is the vision of a fundamentally unified human race, and the radical inadequacy of settling, even in this age, for social arrangements which leave them rent asunder by one kind of division or another, or even not talking to each other. The eschatological hope of future restored communion must inform our response now in the face of fracture and conflict; alienated humans and their communities must somehow be brought into communication.⁸ And this must include a public framework at the level of society as a whole. To bring this about, there must be some entity capable of engaging in what Williams calls 'brokerage' (or 'mediation'), where communities withdraw into themselves or come into conflict, as they frequently do (50). This is the state, which through law 'provides the stable climate for all first-level communities to flourish and the means for settling, and enforcing, "boundary disputes" between them' (50). This brokerage role is not merely to protect communities against each other but also to

⁸ See Higton, *Difficult Gospel*, ch. 5.

facilitate their mutual cooperation: ‘The state is thus more than a tribunal; it exercises its lawful character by promoting and resourcing collaboration’ (59).

Law in a pluralist state concerns not only groups, of course, but individuals. And – to link this point to the first part of the paper – a crucial purpose of law for Williams is to express the state’s commitment to the universal dignity of persons. Law expresses a mutual recognition among citizens of a minimum benchmark of equal respect, secured, for example, through its protection of human rights and through guaranteed benchmarks of welfare and security (45-6). I think an important question is evoked by Williams’ notion of the brokerage role of the state but let me first outline what he means by ‘procedural secularism’.

Procedural secularism

The idea of procedural secularism seems to partly overlap with that of interactive pluralism, although I don’t think Williams intends them as synonyms. The following statement shows the connection: the role of the state is, he says, to ‘[serve] the healthy coexistence and interaction of diverse communities of conviction and loyalty by creating for all of them a “civic space” where all can find a voice’. He then adds: ‘This is what is commonly meant by calling [the state] “secular”’ (128). A properly ‘secular state’, he holds, is not one committed to advancing a secularist worldview, imposing one contested vision of what counts as human flourishing on the whole of society. That would be a ‘programmatically secularism’ (2-3; 20-1, 37). By privatizing deep convictions about the human good, programmatically secularism banishes deep, plural moral visions to the margins of democratic debate, and thereby also removes them from any public scrutiny.

Procedural secularism is ‘secular’ in the very different sense that it acknowledges a crucial jurisdictional limit on the state. A procedurally secular state refrains from actively promoting, endorsing or preferring any one of the worldviews – religious or secularist – adhered to by its morally and religiously diverse citizenry. It refuses to ‘seek legitimacy by simple appeal to one tradition of faith’ (135). Yet it does not seek to distance itself from religious communities but remains open to active cooperation with them: ‘it can move into and out of alliance with the perspectives of faith, depending on the varying and unpredictable outcomes of honest social argument,

and can collaborate without anxiety with communities of faith [in the provision of public services]....' (33).

Yet its interactions with faith groups are not purely ad hoc or pragmatic. A procedurally secular state will recognise that the democratic motivations of its citizens will atrophy if they are required to adopt the supposedly value-free language of public neutrality. '[T]he sphere of public and political negotiation flourishes only in the context of larger commitments and visions, and...if this is forgotten or repressed by a supposedly neutral ideology of the public sphere, immense damage is done to the moral energy of a liberal society' (35; cf. 53). Such a state will therefore facilitate an 'argumentative democracy' (135). In an argumentative democracy debates will certainly be 'noisy', but marked by civility and informed by an empathetic attempt to enter into the perspectives of others. Such diverse moral and religious perspectives are not inherently threatening to civic unity but furnish essential resources for democratic deliberation over public affairs. 'Rather than trying to build civic loyalty from nothing, a sympathetic state will build on the experience of co-operation and passionate concern for the common good that is nurtured in particular communities, especially by a religiously-formed ethic of self-giving....' (128). Williams repeatedly stresses that the purpose of the inclusive, interactive democratic forum he favours is not simply to allow minority communities to put their particular convictions on display or even have them respected in the public forum but also to generate resources for vigorous political deliberation over the common good. In that process every perspective must reckon with coming under reasoned criticism, and so having to change as a result. Again the legal system of a pluralist state plays a key role. Such a system permits a 'crowded and argumentative public square', yet 'one which acknowledges the authority of a legal mediator or broker whose job is to balance and manage real difference' (27).

Once again, then, we meet the notion of 'brokerage'. But before scrutinizing that notion further, let me quickly complete Williams' account of procedural secularism by noting the sense in which he regards it as an originally Christian contribution to western politics. Procedural secularism, he argues, ultimately originates in the rival claim to authority presented to the ancient state by the church. The Christian challenge to the Roman empire meant that 'the state has a proper power (...), but it is not a holy power. It can be challenged, and its finality can be contested. It has become secular....' (52). Williams shows how this assertion of the inherent limits of political authority

became a constitutive commitment of modern liberalism (cf. 84, 78). His conclusion is that it is Christian theology that has supplied liberalism's strongest defence of political liberty and that liberalism neglects this foundation at its peril: 'Faith is the root of freedom and programmatic secularism cannot deliver anything comparable'. It will always 'carry the seeds...of that "totalizing" spirit which stifles critique by silencing the other' (32-3).

Concluding question: what is the moral good of the state?

Let me conclude the paper by exploring further William's concept of 'brokerage' role of the state. I begin by noting that Williams' conception of the state converges with other modern traditions of Christian social thought, especially pluralist ones, in seeking to strike a distinctive path between individualist liberal conceptions and state socialist, or other collectivist, ones. He is critical both of the contemporary 'market state' (a term adopted from Philip Bobbitt) and the centralizing bureaucratic state, such as the British version of 'Fabian corporatism' (277). Yet we may ask whether the metaphor of the pluralist state as a 'broker' between diverse groups provides a sufficiently robust alternative. In the chapter 'Law, power and peace' (ch. 7), Williams is aware that the pluralist theory is vulnerable to the criticism that it leaves the state without a specific moral good of its own (57). He wants to avoid such a criticism by proposing that interactive pluralism does indeed imply such a good: 'the co-existence of moral communities in a complex state could be seen as itself a convergent morality of sorts, and one with a theological underpinning' (58). This 'good', he goes on, amounts to three things: the requirement that each account of the common good 'expose itself to the exchanges of the public forum'; the avoidance of a static pluralism; and the protection of society against 'uncriticized, sacralized power' (58).

As stated here, however, this still seems to amount to a rather 'thinner' – more 'liberal' – notion of the political good than Williams otherwise seems to want. For at other points Williams also seems to work with a seemingly thicker understanding of the moral good of the state. We've already seen that he sees the state, operating through law, as establishing a 'universal tribunal' which protects the equal dignity and human rights of all citizens. But that fundamental task is not a matter of 'brokerage', since such basic rights and freedoms are not routinely up for pluralist negotiation; that is their

very point, as he elsewhere recognizes (163-5). And in the chapter ‘Big society – small world?’ (ch. 22) he argues that the government’s programme of localism and decentralization will succeed only if it also generates upward political pressure on government for what he calls ‘a morally robust programme for the common good’ (272). He goes on to mention a wide variety of concrete examples of what such a programme might entail, some involving direct state provision and other involving offering support to initiatives coming from civil society (272-5).⁹ And I can’t resist noting here that, unlike many who invoke the term, Williams invokes the Catholic principle of ‘subsidiarity’ *correctly*, namely, not as a general call for decentralization but rather as ‘the principle that decisions need to be taken at the *appropriate level*’ – which, in the cases he is discussing, means the state level (276; cf. 55).

My point is not to query any of the particular state activities he recommends, but to note that most of them go well beyond what could properly be called a ‘brokerage’ function. Williams at several points himself explicitly justifies such activities in terms of the familiar Catholic notion of the ‘common good’, but then we are left wondering what the relation between these two notions is and which is doing the real work. Let me briefly offer one suggestion. This is simply to replace the ambiguous, and somewhat managerial, term ‘brokerage’ with that of ‘justice’. Justice has always been conceived in Catholic social thought as an integral component of the common good but it has never been understood simply a brokerage or mediation. At times Williams hints in that direction, describing the role of the state not only as brokerage but as ‘adjudication’ (50). Adjudication is surely a better term, since it connotes a just weighing up of various legitimate claims against an objective normative standard of ‘rightness’. Something like it is at work in Oliver O’Donovan’s influential Anglican political theology, in which the role of the state is characterised as ‘public judgment’,¹⁰ and in the neo-Calvinist theory of the state where it is captured by the term ‘public justice’.¹¹ Williams certainly invokes the term ‘justice’ frequently in the book, although usually, it seems, to mean something like fair or equal treatment. Other Christian accounts of justice,

⁹ E.g., fair taxation; investment in a real not a virtual economy; support for children and families; establishing a ‘national parity of standards’ in health, education, welfare, social care and housing; the Big Society Bank; establishing public infrastructure, such as transport; and, at the global level, determining the size and recipients of overseas aid; addressing the power imbalances of a globalized economy; supporting the Tobin tax.

¹⁰ Oliver O’Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment* (Eerdmans, 2005).

¹¹ Jonathan Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd: Christian Philosopher of State and Civil Society* (Notre Dame, 2011), ch. 10.

however, carry wider and more differentiated layers of meaning, offering various 'normative standards of rightness' that might be appealed to in deliberating on what justice requires for this or that social institution or relationship. Drawing on those richer accounts could, I suggest, help address the lacuna in William's account of social institutions I noted earlier. For we might then be able to propose that the specific moral good of the state includes doing 'justice' to the particular normative designs of the plural communities of society.