no amount of activity can hope to redeem human existence. By disregarding the writings on suffering that pervade Schopenhauer's work, Marcin significantly understates the radically disinterested picture of justice that it entails.

Marcin should not be faulted for being more interested in temporal justice than Schopenhauer is. *In Search of Schopenhauer's Cat* concludes with a provocative and impassioned plea for a virtue-driven legal ethic not content with making criminals suffer for their transgressions and convinced that justice requires treating them with the love and dignity befitting their potential, rather than the judgment and punishment that suits their behavior. But in making this plea in the crucial penultimate chapter, Marcin conspicuously drops Schopenhauer—who strongly doubts that legal pressure can alter the criminal will—and instead cites Gandhi, adding afterwards only that this view of justice is "compatible with Schopenhauer." Were this a book about Gandhi (or, perhaps, Gandhi's cat), the idea would merit serious attention; here, it seems misplaced, but still promising as a normative conception of law that awaits a more thorough defense.

–JOHN HOLZWARTH

THE METAPHYSICS OF LOVE

G. J. McAleer: *Ecstatic Morality and Sexual Politics: A Catholic and Antitotalitarian Theory of the Body* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005. Pp. xvii, 237. $55.00.)

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Communitarian critics of liberalism have long argued that despite liberalism's putative neutrality, it in fact entails a distinctly voluntarist conception of the person. While Sandel and others have rightly identified weaknesses in the liberal anthropology, their criticism typically remains superficial, for it largely remains, in Rawls's famous phrase, "political not metaphysical." They rightly emphasize our interdependence, the common good, and the social context for personal development, but they fail to provide a metaphysical account of such phenomena. Herein lies the importance of G. J. McAleer's new work, *Ecstatic Morality and Sexual Politics*. Like other critics of liberalism, McAleer exposes the Rawlsian fallacy of metaphysical neutrality, but unlike other critics, he boldly investigates the deepest roots of that fallacy. His critique is uniquely powerful because it is uniquely profound. While others concentrate on the negative social effects of liberalism, McAleer shows that these effects are epiphenomenal of a primary philosophical problem: a grave misunderstanding of the ontological order. Politics, he insists, inevitably reflects a particular anthropology that, in turn, reflects a particular understanding of the order of being. In short, metaphysics matters. According to the author, one's conception of the political order will reflect one's conception of the

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relationship between God and man, soul and body, and form and matter; only a proper conception of the latter will deliver a true understanding of the former.

For McAleer a theory and practice of politics conducive to human flourishing and concord depend upon an ontology of peace, which he finds in the metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas. In Thomas at the foundation of reality there is peace; the most basic relationships in the order of being are harmonious. Most fundamentally, God, the creator of all things, is characterized by a self-giving love—an ecstatic love—that gives of itself for the good of the other. Recalling Pseudo-Dionysius's famous dictum, "Bonum est diffusivum sui," McAleer observes, "All being in Thomas's conception is ecstatic" (13). By *ecstasis*—which is McAleer's term, not a traditional Thomistic term—McAleer means the movement by which a subject transcends itself in order to achieve fruitful communion with another. Just as God, the supreme good, is diffusive of himself, all of creation issuing from the divine *ecstasis* shares the "giving and generative character of Being" (13).

Indeed, the most basic relationship between form and matter reflects this character. In the Thomistic *concreatum*, the relationship between form and matter is one of mutual desire and harmony. As McAleer puts it, "In Thomas, form and matter have always ecstatically reached out the one to the other" (17). The peacefulness of this basic ontological unit informs the whole created order. Just as form does not forcibly impose itself upon matter, so, too, the soul does not violently suppress the body and reason does not despotically control sensuality. Instead, each finds its proper fulfillment in peaceful union with the other. Difference, in other words, does not imply conflict. Likewise, as McAleer sees it, the human being, though mysteriously composite, nevertheless seeks his perfection in union with the immaterial God; the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body is a resounding affirmation of such a view.

McAleer's metaphysical reflections are the springboard for his social observations. In keeping with the natural law, he argues, human beings experience a hierarchy of desires that naturally renders the person increasingly ecstatic, that is, other-centered, oriented toward the common good, rather than to narrow self-concern. Thomistic natural law, McAleer insists, is Christocentric, patterned in its ecstatic structure by Christ's ultimate self-diffusion on the cross. Life is thus ordered to a radical, sacrificial love, a "love that wounds the lover" (116). Living in accord with Thomistic natural law, the author contends, will yield the great desideratum that eludes political liberalism, peace, insofar as natural law precepts, coupled with the teachings of the Catholic Church, guide men to live in accord with the ecstatic structure of reality, that is, to live their lives as a gift for others. McAleer argues that the attitude of self-gift reduces violence in every arena of human life, but perhaps most dramatically in the area of "sexual politics."

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In this regard, he recounts the biblical observation, vividly amplified by Augustine, that with the advent of sin, human sexuality became a locus of domination. Appealing to the sexual ethics of Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II, McAleer insists that the only antidote to such sexual violence is an ecstatic sexuality, one that reflects the generosity and generativity of God by opening the self in service to the other and in receptivity to new life. Contrary to the ideology of liberal sexual culture, McAleer argues that Catholic teaching regarding contraception in fact liberates sexuality from the confines of selfishness, freeing the spouses from self-preoccupation so as to enjoy a transcendent love.

Self-preoccupation is not simply a problem for sexual ethics, however. McAleer perceives this vice to be widespread; indeed, he thinks it endemic to contemporary liberal democracy, infected by an ill-founded equalitarianism that is hostile to difference, hierarchy, and, at its root, nature. Following Aurel Kolnai, the author observes that modern politics is a forum for self-assertion, for the arrogation to the self of the privileges ordained by the created order. McAleer understands the demand for gay marriage to be just this sort of egalitarian assertion. Benign though it might seem, the equalitarian structure of rights embraced by liberal democracies will destroy the most basic units of civil society and pave the way for a totalitarian state. Such is the logic of politics when divorced from an adequate metaphysics.

McAleer's argument concerning the connection between ontology and social order is profound and provocative. It is also timely, as the debate between liberals and their conventional critics has grown stale, in need of an infusion of arguments from first principles. It is also made timely by Benedict XVI's *Deus Caritas Est* that has invited new reflection upon the nature of divine and human love. *Ecstatic Morality and Sexual Politics* is an important book on both counts.

It is not without its problems, though. Three main issues deserve mention here. First, McAleer's argument hinges on his claim that Thomistic metaphysics is ecstatic, from the nature of God down to the human *concreatum*. As D. C. Schindler has pointed out, however, there are texts in Thomas (e.g., *S.T.* I.32.2) that raise questions about the ecstatic character of being. To what extent can the receptivity to the other that ecstatic desire implies be attributed to God as Thomas understands him? Would not Thomas's description of divine self-sufficiency and impassibility call into question whether *ecstasis* per se can be a considered perfection? Since his thesis rests squarely upon this point, McAleer would have done well to come to terms with this problem. Another difficulty with his argument concerns his characterization of ecstatic love as a wounding love.Given that his intention is to show that Thomas offers an ontology of peace in stark contrast to the metaphysics of violence found in the moderns, it is curious that he would lean so heavily upon the negative metaphor of wounding to describe the nature of Christian love. (Indeed, his

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language on this score can be aversive, such as when he refers to an openness to new life as the "procreative lesion" [128].) While McAleer intends to ground his argument about ecstatic being in the created order in its integrity, the metaphor of wounding would seem to characterize the risks of love in a postlapsarian state. Recall that the wounds of Christ were inflicted upon him violently by sinful men; they did not emerge naturally in the act of creation. One wonders whether McAleer would have done better to focus upon the generosity and receptivity found in the Trinitarian relations as a foundation for the other-centeredness of love. Finally, Thomistic political theorists will likely balk at the negative account of the state offered in McAleer's final chapters. With an uncharacteristic lack of subtlety, McAleer baldly asserts, "[T]he Thomist tradition acknowledges that domination is fundamental to the state" (147). He fails to acknowledge that Thomas considered political authority a natural institution, necessary before the Fall, and possessed of the dignified task of cultivating virtue and coordinating the common good. By contrast, politics, in McAleer's treatment, is sadly reduced: "The point of politics is to retrench higher goods by moderating the pervasiveness of the domination of the state" (148). Those readers who have been sympathetic to McAleer's rich account of metaphysics as a basis for political order will be disappointed by his rendering of politics.

Despite these limitations, *Ecstatic Morality and Sexual Politics* merits careful attention, as it offers an indispensable reminder of the importance of first philosophy for the proper ordering of everything else.

–Jeanne Heffernan Schindler

FRANKLIN AS A PHILOSOPHER

Jerry Weinberger: *Benjamin Franklin: On the Unity of His Moral, Religious, and Political Thought* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005. Pp. xvi, 336. $34.95.)

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Jerry Weinberger has written a book like no other about Benjamin Franklin. He has taken more seriously than anyone else the thought that Franklin's writing is multilayered, that no word is misplaced, and that every apparent contradiction or problem points to a hidden resolution that represents Franklin's true teaching. Guided by this approach, Weinberger produces some amazing results. His intensely close readings of Franklin's writings often have compelling force, and no Franklin interpreter henceforth should write without taking them into account. In some instances, however, the readings seem forced, and the reader may wonder with justification whether this is really what Franklin had in mind.

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