Caesar in Gaul and Rome, although somewhat uneven, offers a rewarding study of Caesar's written thought and political career as well as of Roman imperialism, in general. It is a valuable book that helps one see the significance of Caesar's actions and account.

–Jan H. Blits

THE ROOTS OF MODERNITY

Stephen A. McKnight: *The Religious Foundations of Francis Bacon's Thought* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2006. Pp. xiv, 193. $37.50.)

DOI: 10.1017/S0034670507000605

In a broad overview of many of Francis Bacon's works, Stephen A. McKnight seeks to show that Bacon is not an unbelieving philosopher and that his project—commonly referred to as the conquest of nature for the relief of man's estate—is rooted in "genuinely and deeply felt religious convictions" (11). In making his argument, McKnight usefully raises, but does not settle, the difficult question of the role of Christian belief in Bacon's thought and activities, a question related to the broader debate about modernity as secularized Christianity. As McKnight puts it, misunderstanding "the role of religion in Bacon's program … also distorts the understanding of modernity" (159).

McKnight takes issue with interpreters of Bacon's thought such as Faulkner, Kennington, Weinberger, and White, who "dismiss Bacon's religious references as disingenuous" (7). One explanation McKnight offers for the proliferation of so many apparent misreadings of Bacon is that scholars such as Weinberger "dismiss … the [intellectual, cultural, and political] context of Bacon's writings" (171, n. 17). Whether McKnight is correct or not about the inattention to context in these authors—and it is hard to see how, for example, a book like Weinberger's *Science, Faith, and Politics* (Cornell University Press, 1985), deeply steeped in Bacon's intellectual and cultural sources and in reflections on Bacon's relation to Machiavelli, can be accused of relying on the bare Baconian text alone—McKnight's own approach is also primarily textual. McKnight's avowed goal is to show that Bacon had "deeply felt religious convictions," and his primary argument consists in calling attention to religious "leitmotifs," "motifs," "key terms," "symbols," "elements," "themes," "patterns," "images," "imagery," "allusions," "associations," "references," "[drawings-upon]", "sentiments," "preoccupations," "tone," "esoteric traditions," "language," as well as to the religious "[self-]presentation" of Bacon (e.g., 1–4, 14–18, 20–21, 29, 35, 40, 42, 44, 47, 54–55, 64, 69, 71, 72, 76, 79–80, 86, 90, 102, 104, 113, 129, 135, 145, 149). McKnight himself states that his study "has sought to establish the central role religion plays in Bacon's thought *by demonstrating the*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670507000605 Published online by Cambridge University Press

pervasiveness of religious motifs, scriptural references, and biblical doctrines in his writings" (151; emphasis added). In other words, by his own admission, McKnight's main argument—though it is obviously interwoven with a more daring argument about Bacon's intention to return humanity to Edenic purity and perfection, an argument discussed below—consists in drawing attention to a religious surface in Bacon's works. McKnight's argument characteristically maintains that any interpretation that sees Bacon as skeptical about the goodness of Christian charity is untenable because it is not "commensurable with Bacon's *references* to Christian charity" (172, n. 26, emphasis added). Yet Weinberger and White do not disagree with the observation that there are pervasive religious themes in Bacon's work, or that characters in Bacon's *New Atlantis* believe in some kind of Christianity (42–43). In fact, and as McKnight himself notes (10–11), this very pervasiveness is a premise for their arguments concerning Bacon's use of religion. For the most part, however, while often referring to their conclusions, McKnight does not address Weinberger's or White's argument that Bacon invited alert readers to read him with suspicion or "esoterically."

McKnight's reliance on Bacon's religious language for support for his thesis is additionally problematic in that this language is indebted, as McKnight himself argues, to a strikingly eclectic mix of many different traditions. As the dust jacket announces, McKnight "demonstrates that Bacon's Christian ideas are augmented and transmuted by related themes and imagery found in *prisca theologia*, a mixture of Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, alchemy, magic, and Jewish esoteric traditions" (see also, e.g., 64–70, 106, 109).

Yet McKnight does not help his case in asserting that his thesis is demonstrated through the cataloguing of religious themes in Bacon. His deeper argument is that Bacon's optimism about the future of humanity, through the success of the scientific and technological aspects of the modern project, makes no sense unless we view Bacon's project as providentially directed towards the extirpation of the original sin. McKnight insists that one cannot otherwise reconcile Bacon's confidence in the possibility of radically improving human life with his acute awareness of the defectiveness of human nature as he and we know it. Bacon's belief in a fundamental "transformation of human behavior," argues McKnight, "can only be understood in relation to his religious conviction that true religion and a proper understanding of human nature will overcome the sins of pride and vanity. . ." (99–100; also 47, 60–61, 86, 97, 100–102, 153–59).

It is safe to say that Bacon occasionally exhibits extraordinary optimism; McKnight's explanation of this display deserves consideration. Indeed, it is perhaps precisely the other strand in McKnight's argument—his emphasis on Bacon's use of religious imagery—that induces him to attribute this display of hopefulness to millenarian sentiments. But other explanations are possible and even plausible. For one, Bacon may not be as optimistic as he appears. One reason he may have for exaggerating his hopefulness is to inspire some of his followers to try to effect whatever (ultimately limited)

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670507000605 Published online by Cambridge University Press

improvements to the human condition can be made. Even if there is a certain utopianism in Bacon's thought, it might credibly be traced to expectations of what prosperity, "enlightenment," and psychopharmacology can do to eliminate human ills and evil. So the millenarian hypothesis may prove superfluous.

Yet there are additional reasons for concluding that the fundamental direction of Bacon's program is at odds with traditional Christianity. To begin with, one phenomenon that "learned times," prosperity, and peace tend to produce, according to Bacon, is widespread atheism or what might be called the emergence of "last men." A number of serious deviations of Bacon from Christianity can be cited. While according to Genesis 1:26 man, indeed, is granted dominion over the earth, man is not granted such dominion, as Bacon claims, over "nature" or over "the universe." Besides, the character of the dominion granted by God can hardly be consistent, to use Baconian language, with a mode of "enslaving," "killing," "racking," or "conquering" nature. Furthermore, if Bacon's science is the tool of the fulfillment of God's promises, a vast number of presumably good souls (not only pagans, but also all pious Christians living well into modernity) will miss out on the good of individual immortality, a prominent aspect of our prelapsarian condition, which McKnight claims Bacon's project is meant to restore.

In calling attention to the somewhat bizarre eclecticism of Bacon's religious sources, McKnight himself seems to concede that Bacon's vision of the salvation of humanity through science is not exactly congruent with any particular version of Christianity. But however modified Bacon's Christian convictions may be, McKnight argues that Bacon intends to fulfill the very heart of the Christian message: "[A] realization of a true Christian self [perhaps one among many possible ones], who seeks to obey the commandment to love God and one's neighbor as oneself." Yet it is hard to see how McKnight's otherwise erudite and engaging study could have shown that Bacon's emphasis on "prolonging life" and benefiting from nature would give birth to such pure love or would overcome man's alienation from God (cf. 166, n. 20).

–Svetozar Minkov

SCHOPENHAUER'S QUIETISM AND LEGAL REFORM

Raymond B. Marcin: *In Search of Schopenhauer's Cat: Arthur Schopenhauer's Quantum-Mystical Theory of Justice* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006. Pp. xvii, 183. $34.95)

DOI: 10.1017/S0034670507000617

With a slender spine and a playful title, *In Search of Schopenhauer's Cat* seems poised to take a shot at the elusive crossover market. The title plays on a quantum physics volume that did precisely that in the 1980s; moreover, the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670507000605 Published online by Cambridge University Press