

Graham James McAleer. *Erich Przywara and Postmodern Natural Law: A History of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019.

In 2014, theological authors John Betz and David Bentley Hart published the first English translation of what has been heralded as a work of great philosophical and theological significance, namely *Analogue Entis* by Erich Przywara, S.J. (originally published in 1932). In *Analogue Entis*, the Thomist Przywara engages then contemporary philosophers and theologians who were working outside of a Thomist framework, such as pioneers of the phenomenological method. Outside of a relatively small niche, however, the vast majority of Anglo-American philosophers have never heard of Przywara and would be highly reluctant to engage *Analogue Entis*. While one central barrier is its apparent irrelevance, another is inaccessibility. These barriers may amount to the same problem: although in contemporary Anglophone philosophy there is sustained interest in Thomism, phenomenology has dramatically waned in significance.

McAleer seeks to make *Analogue Entis*'s contribution to natural law ethics accessible and relevant to contemporary Anglophone audiences through a discussion of *inter alia* "robots, fashion, Islam and sumptuary laws, Nazism (fascism and race), rule of law and the managerial state, embryos, family, migration, body modification, nature, vanity and extremes of wealth, establishment, and subversion" (ix). Readers should note that although all of these issues are at least mentioned in the course of the monograph, the discussions are commonly abbreviated. The first three chapters are largely historical, and the remaining five chapters are more contemporary—these latter being a mixture of something like a casuistic analysis of current issues (such as those mentioned in the list above) and engagement with contemporary theorists writing on these subjects. The historical chapters mainly deal with meta-ethical topics of human nature, relevant for understanding the *telos* of natural law theory. Application to natural law moral principles come in later, engaging an idiosyncratic array of topics in applied ethics.

McAleer's casuistic analysis is characterized by brevity, which should be expected in a text of about 100 pages. The text glides swiftly between topics

as diverse as bodily modification (e.g. piercings) to corsets to tax havens, even within a single page (99). For this reason, the reader may have a difficult time piecing together a comprehensive picture of the moral principles at work. One exception to this relative brevity is McAleer's discussion of the so-called "burkini" (a woman's swimsuit that covers the body typically from neck to ankle, often with an accompanying hair covering). The burkini gets a relatively extensive discussion (71–5) compared to other surveyed topics. (Yet one may note that an almost equivalent amount of space is dedicated to a discussion of James Bond plotlines; 93–6.)

Given his relatively extensive treatment of the burkini, a discussion of his argument provides a useful illustration of how McAleer sees *Analogia Entis* contributing to contemporary natural law. McAleer himself appears to be keenly interested in moral issues of fashion, discussing elsewhere a jacket made of Alexander McQueen's skin (86–7), and pointing the reader to an already (self-)published monograph on fashion topics (to wit, "ethicsoffashion.com") in a footnote (121).

McAleer appears to argue that there are moral problems with the burkini—at least as worn in public in America and Europe, presumably—because it flouts Western fashion trends (73). And because it is designed to cover up, it is a "decapitation" (73). So-called "decapitation" is a central theme of the book, with a great many practices or ideas dismissed for the presumptive decapitation involved. The inspiration appears to come from Przywara, who—according to McAleer—argues that ethics must avoid the dual perils of Robert Kilwardby's "angelism" (which ignores the body) and Schopenhauerian "vitalism" (which ignores all but the body). Failure involves "decapitation."

In arguing for a rejection of the burkini because it flouts Western fashion trends, McAleer does not discuss or evaluate the moral relevance of what might be called a meta-trend in Western fashion: to be stylistically contrarian, to purposively break with established customs. Alexander McQueen's designs were downright weird, but if McQueen's styles constitute acceptable envelope-pushing, it's unclear why a burkini is condemned. McAleer also does not discuss what appear to be limitations to the moral relevance of fashion trends. If future Western fashion involves nudity, the potential ubiquity of the practice would not count as a legitimate moral justification. We must all cover ourselves to some extent in public, after all, even if doing so is stylistically contrarian (to varying degrees). McAleer's reflections on so-called "decapitation" from covering up gesture ambiguously at the contrary, which makes an attentive reader wish for greater depth of moral analysis—particularly as one would expect Przywara to reject public nudity (as well as the bikini, which McAleer appears fond of, 75).

For reasons like these, the reader is often left to wonder how much of the text comprises natural extensions of Przywara's thoughts, and how much is uniquely McAleer. McAleer hopes to turn others into readers of Przywara (xiv) and styles his text as an updated "commentary" (ix-x)—albeit one that occasionally and only in passing identifies the source text upon which a comment is offered. Like Przywara, McAleer's text appears to want to bring something like a Thomist perspective to bear on some segments of the contemporary philosophical community—Anglophone postmodernists, say. This target audience likely serves to explain McAleer's style, for contemporary philosophers working outside of postmodernist currents will likely find his brevity jarring and intellectually unsatisfying. Such philosophers, like myself, will find a more stimulating contribution in McAleer's first three chapters, which involve a historical overview contextualizing *Analogia Entis's* significance for natural law.

At its core, the project of bringing natural law theory—and major contributors to a proper understanding of that theory—to the fore of contemporary moral discussion is eminently worthwhile, and for this reason McAleer's efforts are to be commended.

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