

natural rights and the sorts of rights the state should protect in its laws (chap. 11), and natural law and its alternatives, including social contract theory, utilitarianism, and Kantianism (chap. 12).

This book is an ideal text for the nonspecialist who is unfamiliar with natural law reasoning. For this reason, I am sure it will prompt in such readers many questions that go beyond the author's stated purpose: "to sketch or outline a way to the natural law from human dignity" (1). But I suspect that is precisely the sort of conversation with his readers that Professor Berquist sought to initiate in the writing of this book.

–Francis J. Beckwith  
Baylor University



David Walsh: *The Priority of the Person: Political, Philosophical, and Historical Discoveries*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020. Pp. xii, 357.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670521000255

Gloom pervades Catholic political theory. In his recent encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, Pope Francis expresses concerns about young people abandoning democracy. Patrick Deneen thinks liberalism has failed. In this "postliberal" moment, *Commonweal* and *First Things* debate young integralists reviving old arguments that political power should be subordinated to church authority. Even Charles Taylor, long attuned to the upside of the secular age for Catholics, now warns liberal democracy is in deep trouble.

David Walsh remains optimistic, though. The present slough of despond is not a crisis of liberalism, he thinks, but a crisis of liberal self-confidence. Respect for persons still energizes liberal activism. For Walsh, human rights are truncated expressions of the infinite dignity of persons, a belief with a Christian source. Liberal democracy is the "most adequate political expression of Christianity," Walsh argues, because liberal democratic regimes reflect the transcendent worth of all persons (49). *The Priority of the Person* defends these variably secularized Christian aspirations on philosophical grounds.

The book's "burden" is to show that liberal democracy is not only viable, but also validated by modern philosophy's profound and obscure insights about persons (31). It makes a companion volume to Walsh's 2016 study *The Politics of the Person as the Politics of Being* (University of Notre Dame Press). Its

sixteen ruminative essays clarify Walsh's personalism, sometimes tangentially by way of figures like Benedict XVI, Rawls, and Solzhenitsyn. The author is frequently in sympathy with Jacques Maritain, the twentieth-century Catholic personalist who contributed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But Walsh reminds us that Schleiermacher coined the term "personalism," and that the philosophy of the person is a broadly post-Kantian legacy (15).

What Walsh calls "postsubjective" personalism indicates that we live within persons, who are the conditions of experience. He commends Derrida and Levinas, whom he calls Heidegger's "most penetrating successors," for insisting that the encounter with Being must involve responsibility to the other (219). Their insistence recalls this sanguine Irishman to the melancholy Dane, for it is Kierkegaard who grasps the fundamental problem of ethics. Persons can become subjects. Somehow, at some moment, we may take responsibility for our past and future selves, ordering our histories. We can somehow choose to become moral agents capable of making eternal commitments to others, as to our spouses, or to God.

Two essays greatly clarify Walsh's method: "The Turn to Existence as Existence in the Turn"—Walsh often indulges antimetabole—and "The Turn to the Subject as the Turn to the Person." Since his 2008 book *The Modern Philosophical Revolution* (Cambridge University Press), Walsh aligns Kant, Hegel, Schelling, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Levinas, and Derrida "converging on an ever-more adequate conception" of a "common project" anticipated by Kierkegaard (215). Critics like Thomas Hibbs rightly claim that shoehorning Nietzsche and Levinas into one project is unconvincing political-theory-as-restatement. But Walsh argues that any critique of modern subjectivism, like Leo Strauss's or his one-time mentor Eric Voegelin's, must account for the source of the critic's anachronistic convictions (200). Walsh overcomes this historicist quandary by ordering history back towards the person who orders history in the first place. This move offers ample interpretive license: "Those who present themselves to us with all of their glaring flaws not only compel themselves to wrestle with the blockages but, more importantly, impose on us the obligation of extending their thought into regions that they themselves were not always prepared to go" (164). Walsh does not merely restate, for example, Levinas's prioritization of ethics; he overcomes Levinas's concerns about affirming God's presence in the world.

Challenging Walsh's interpretation of almost any figure, then, fails to lay a glove on his essentially philosophical project. Except maybe Kierkegaard. In "Why Kierkegaard Is the Culminating Figure in the Modern Philosophical Revolution," Walsh explains how Kierkegaard "overleaps" the critical exchange from Kant to Derrida and reaches its "culmination" (215). He homes in on Kierkegaard's description of how individuals choose themselves in the ethical life. At a decisive moment, within my relationships to others, I take eternal responsibility for myself. This ethical decision precedes my being or my identity. In *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard argues that I can only choose myself when I apperceive some eternal truth that determines who I

am; thus Socrates could affirm he was animated by love for eternally beautiful souls; thus Kierkegaard could affirm a hidden god created him because of god's desire to be loved in freedom.

Kierkegaard is not only unprepared to go, but conscientiously prepared not to go, into some regions whither Walsh extends his ideas. Modernity, for example. Kierkegaard loudly spurns modern philosophy, often playing the Socratic renegade. This complicates his status as Walsh's culmination of a distinctly "modern" philosophical revolution. Walsh should account for Kierkegaard's self-understanding as a philosopher in dialogue with Socrates. Why would the love of beautiful souls that sustained Socrates's search for eternal truths no longer be available to us? The debatable presence of a Socratic live option in Kierkegaard suggests either that Strauss's attempt to return to Socrates is not so naive as Walsh claims, or that Kierkegaard is equally guilty for failing to account for his anachronistic convictions.

Walsh downplays Kierkegaard's antidemocratic sentiments as well as his antihistoricism. In *Two Ages*, the liberal democratic public sphere amounts to so many expressions of envy. And Kierkegaard begins *Philosophical Fragments* with an apologia for "apragmosunē," his political irresponsibility, since he refuses to desecrate the significance of the era or epoch that the public demands of its Hegelian philosophers. Walsh dragoons Kierkegaard for his "raid on the inarticulate," not only to attempt to describe the ineffable transcendence of persons, but also to describe the essence of our liberal democratic age (25). But Kierkegaard's antipolitical ideas are lodged deeply in his thinking about how individuals constitute their own histories as opposed to shared, political, or "world-historical" consciousness. Where is the unintelligible knight of faith? Walsh's consideration of Kierkegaard's political theory does not attempt to clear this blockage as laparoscopically as he should.

In "The Person and the Common Good," Walsh endorses Hegel's reformulation of the common good as an open, dynamic process. We live within a "mysterious nexus" of persons, Walsh thinks, which allows us to transcend ourselves in responsibility to others (93). It ought to underwrite our commitments to democracy, to markets and their social ends, and to unborn persons (84 and 309). In free self-sacrifice for one another, hopeful persons find the "democratic power" to order history (70). Walsh never implies that one must merely be a good liberal democratic citizen to be a good Christian, but neither does he take on board the Kierkegaard who squirms at the Hegelian conflation of political and Christian hope.

Walsh, then, not Kierkegaard, is the culminating figure in this modern philosophical revolution. *The Priority of the Person* shores up an original project worth contemplating as such. Political theorists who despair of liberalism should meet Walsh's argument beyond historical-interpretive questions. I include heirs of another modern philosophical revolution beyond Walsh's purview. Most critical and democratic theorists turn away from transcendent concepts like personhood altogether, and towards bodies, affects, and an immanent world. Against so much applied Continental philosophy now,

Walsh defends a spiritually inflected liberalism he thinks we cannot and will not live without. In defying academic trendiness, Walsh is at his most Kierkegaardian.

—Robert Wyllie  
Ashland University



Pierre Manent: *Montaigne: Life without Law*. Translated by Paul Seaton. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020. Pp. xv, 262.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670521000243

What has the European become? That is the question Pierre Manent seeks to answer in *Montaigne: Life without Law*, following on his *Metamorphoses of the City* in which he traced the “western dynamic” to its present form of the European nation-state. In *Montaigne*, he sees the “profound transformation of the self-consciousness of the human being,” which is “the passage from the agent to the subject” (117). The European has become the subject.

Manent presents this transformation in terms of the gap between and the relation between words and actions. The Christian religion had created an immense gap between what human beings said they believed and what they actually did. Machiavelli’s “effectual truth” sought to free action from its pretended subservience to words, while Luther and Calvin sought to connect men directly to the Word of God, without the intermediary of the Catholic Church and tradition. Those two reformations gave us “the association composed of the neutral state and the nation bound to a Christian confession” (6). Montaigne is a third reformer, overcoming the gap between words and actions in his literary invention, the *Essays*. A new kind of word is necessary to express a new kind of human being.

Manent begins his account of the transformation from agent to subject in “the primary human situation” of war, which Montaigne locates not in a “state of nature” but in the social order. War is understood as the extreme form of comparison, the situation in which men elevate or abase themselves in acts of comparison. Comparison is “the principle of all social order” (40) and “the soul of the *Essays*” (56). However, Montaigne’s is a strange new kind of comparison, for he separates admiration from imitation and he admires without envy: he is content to be what he is in his weakness and imperfection. He never struggles within himself to conform to a “best