

Two Case Studies in Schelerian Moral Theology: The Vatican's 2005 "Instruction" and Gay Marriage

G. J. MCALEER
Loyola College in Maryland
Baltimore, Maryland

IT IS LIKELY that Max Scheler (1874–1928) was the principal intellectual source of modern Christian personalism. Probably the major intellectual movement within Christian thinking in the twentieth century, Christian personalism has many noteworthy advocates. By far the most famous of these is Karol Wojtyła/John Paul the Great, but others include Marcel, Ricoeur, Przywara, von Balthasar, von Hildebrand, and Aurel Kolnai. Today, however, Scheler figures only indirectly in Catholic thought. Relatively few books appear in any given year about him, and some of his important works are not even in print.¹ Three possible reasons come to mind to explain why Scheler no longer figures prominently in Catholic thought: In developing his Thomism, John Paul II expressed reservations about Scheler;² the enormous revival of Aquinas's ethical theory in Catholic quarters after a fraternization with alternatives, one of which was Scheler's value theory;³ and a very influential group of contemporary Thomist moral theologians deny one of Scheler's signature theses—the hierarchy of value.⁴ Nonetheless, I think Thomism can still

¹ Transaction Press is soon to reissue Max Scheler's 1913 classic, *The Nature of Sympathy*.

² Note the shift from the markedly Schelerian *Laborem Exercens* to a modern Thomist classic like *Veritatis Splendor*. See Michael Waldstein's interesting discussion in the new edition of John Paul II's theology of the body, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 63–77.

³ S. Pinckaers, O.P., *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 7.

⁴ J. Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 92.

make use of Scheler; and I think his phenomenological ethics, and those he inspired, can serve moral theology well.

Eros and Virtue: A Reflection on the Vatican's 2005 "Instruction"

Who can doubt that the relationship between sex and liberty is basic to today's politics? For some, traditional sexual morality is a benighted left-over from an illiberal past long since swept away in the social revolution of the 1960s. For others, the evidence is clear that ignoring the demands of traditional sexual ethics hurts marriages, families, entire communities, and is nothing less than total indifference to the plight of the vulnerable. Who can doubt also that the confusion about sexuality within Western civilization is also a stimulant to the growing tensions between our civilization and Islamic communities in the West and across the world? Little surprise then that the Vatican's 2005 Instruction on the question of whether men with "deep-seated homosexual tendencies" can be candidates for the priesthood was met with all the signs of confusion typical of our age. Welcomed by some, met with indifference by others, some were hostile and dismayed,⁵ others were left more confused than ever.⁶ Published early in the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI, the document had been in preparation for a long time. The document,⁷ as many have noted, is terse, running to only three pages, and its essential claims are trenchantly stated. Nonetheless, the basic logic of the argument is clear, especially to those familiar with Aquinas's moral theology. Moreover, the argument is right, I think. After presenting the argument with the support I think it relies upon from Aquinas, I will further elaborate a defense of the Instruction through the reflections of Aurel Kolnai (1900–73). In 1930, Kolnai, a phenomenologist powerfully influenced by Scheler, published a remarkable book on sexual ethics.⁸

Since the Instruction is so terse, rather than reading it for the argument one has to construct the argument from various indicators. The text suggests

⁵ On the silence of most bishops and the dismay of many Jesuits, see Richard John Neuhaus, "While We're At It," *First Things* 167 (November 2006): 79.

⁶ For the befuddlement of a supposedly "leading Catholic writer," see Peter Stanford's "Once Again, I'm Ashamed to Be a Catholic," *The Daily Telegraph*, October 3, 2006, 19.

⁷ Congregation for Catholic Education, "Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders," www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20051104_istruzione_en.html.

⁸ A. Kolnai, *Sexual Ethics* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005).

at least three arguments. I will state these and describe an obvious rejoinder before mounting a defense. A central claim appears to be that a personality organized around homosexual tendencies is incompatible with the priesthood because such a person, unlike a heterosexual candidate for seminary, has not had to renounce conjugal life. This renunciation is essential:⁹ For, positively, it is a gift of the entire person—sexuality included—to the life of the Church in imitation of Christ's self-donation to his spouse, the Church.¹⁰ Secondly, a priest must have an intuitive grasp of conjugal life¹¹ as this mystery sits at the heart of the Church.¹² A little more darkly, and now following the logic of Aquinas's moral theology, the text's development suggests a third argument.

The claim provoking most discussion—though it is by no means new—is that “deep-seated homosexual tendencies” are “objectively disordered.”¹³ This claim is followed two short paragraphs later by another claim: “Such persons, in fact, find themselves in a situation that gravely hinders them from relating correctly to men and women. One must in no way overlook the negative consequences that can derive from the ordination of persons with deep-seated homosexual tendencies”¹⁴ This sentence speaks of the consequences of tendencies and clearly evokes the classical moral theological interest in the propensities to morally evil action at the behest of deadly sin. The famous deadly sins are not moral acts but emotion-laden channels of appetite making persons prone to disordered acts.¹⁵ Aquinas makes a distinction between evil, sin, and moral wrong. Evil is privation, sin a privation within a personality, and moral wrong is an act done with deliberate will by a person.¹⁶ A deadly sin is a privation within a personality, a

⁹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 441.

¹⁰ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, §§16 and 23.

¹¹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 441. For my defense of John Paul II's claim that bodily inclination is spousal, see my *Ecstatic Morality and Sexual Politics: A Catholic and Antitotalitarian Theory of the Body* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005). For a fine treatment of contemporary Catholic opinion on natural inclination, see M. Levering, “Natural Law and Natural Inclinations: Rhonheimer, Pinckaers, McAleer,” *The Thomist* 70 (2006): 155–201. For Max Scheler's treatment of the topic that no doubt proved an important resource for John Paul the Great, see *The Nature of Sympathy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970).

¹² Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005), §11; John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, §22.

¹³ Congregation for Catholic Education, “Instruction Concerning the Criteria,” §2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo*, q. 15, a. 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, q. 2, a. 2.

disorder, making the right relationship of will to reason extremely difficult. A moral wrong is an act of deliberate will done without the appropriate virtue. In the Instruction, we read that persons with “deep-seated homosexual tendencies” “find themselves in a situation that gravely hinders them from relating correctly to men and women.” Translated into Thomas’s language: Persons fail to properly love their neighbors when they fail in the life of virtue; persons are gravely hindered in living according to virtue by one, or some combination, of the seven deadly sins.

For Thomas, because he insists that moral precepts follow the virtues,¹⁷ the life of virtue is the basis of friendship. It is in these terms that any Christian assessment of the “relating” of Christian men to other men and women must be understood. Of course, the “relating” that is most at stake in the question of which men can be candidates for priesthood is the Christian man’s relationship to Jesus, the God-man.¹⁸ Friendship with Christ, like every moral relationship, relies on the choice of a moral object. Each moral object has a matter, that is, it prominently includes one of the four moral virtues.¹⁹ Even though the matter of a moral object is some particular virtue (for example, justice) still the choice of the will must, for an act to be moral, be a choice in which all four virtues are affirmed.²⁰ On account of the connectedness of the virtues, a person cannot affirm one virtue rightly unless all of a person’s appetites are correctly ordered by their respective virtues. If moral objects differ materially on account of the prominence of one of the basic virtues, they also differ formally in that the primary virtue composing the matter can be further differentiated as per circumstances in which the agent finds himself.²¹ If a man with “deep-seated homosexual tendencies” is “gravely” hindered in relating to Christ, which virtue is he prone to fail? I believe there is an a priori reason why a priest, or a candidate for priesthood, with “deep-seated homosexual tendencies” is prone to fail in virtue and friendship with the God-man. And I suggest there is an a priori reason why that failure is one of justice.

A rather predictable rejoinder to the Vatican’s position can be stated as follows: The gay man gives his entire self to the Church; true, he does not renounce nuptial desire but it was never in his gift; chastity is in his gift, and this he freely offers in service of Christ. This challenge elides the exact character of erotic renunciation, I now argue.

¹⁷ Ibid., q. 2, a. 6.

¹⁸ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, §82.

¹⁹ Aquinas, *De Malo*, q. 2, a. 6.

²⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 65, a. 1.

²¹ Aquinas, *De Malo*, q. 2, a. 6.

Christ is not merely a common good able to be shared by many, Christ is the universal good, the Alpha and Omega, the slain foundation of the world (Rev 13:8). Only an agapic love for Christ can facilitate for others Christ as a good undividedly shared out:²² Charity is the "source, criterion, measure, and impetus for the priest's love and service to the Church."²³ A man of deep-seated homosexual tendencies will be prone to fail the People of God in ministry, and this will be a failure of justice, because he cannot relate to Christ as a common good, to a Christ to be shared undividedly amongst many. Phenomenology shows an erotic object is always an exclusive object, an object privileged amongst others as peculiar to me. *Eros* tends toward a privileged, rather than common, good.²⁴ The erotic object of the same-sex tendency of the seminarian is a deadly sin and an impediment to ordination, because an impediment to virtue. Why? It is a priori that a priest with same-sex desire has not been asked, and cannot be asked, to renounce erotic desire.

In *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict XVI argues *eros* and *caritas* stand in continuity with one another.²⁵ In arguing that *caritas* disciplines and purifies *eros*,²⁶ the encyclical touches upon an especially profound question. Its grave moral matter notwithstanding, erotic desire, as Kolnai forcefully points out, privileges a singular relationship, for sexual love "radically exalts" the beloved.²⁷ Erotic desire selects out of the world of possible objects a devotional object,²⁸ a particular person to be the exclusive recipient of personal desire. Benedict is well aware of this.²⁹

The object of erotic desire is an exclusive object, and on the basis of this *type* of devotion marriage is built. When thinking about the relationship between *eros* and *caritas*, it is not enough to note that as sexual love opens out onto love proper an ecstatic movement of sacrifice begins: One starts to serve another.³⁰ For when this is true of erotic desire, as in

²² John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, §23.

²³ Ibid., §§23, 27, 48.

²⁴ This is not to say that privilege cannot serve the common good. Marriage—an institution of privilege—serves the common good in myriad ways but does so on account of the exclusive nature of the relationship between the man and woman and, in principle, the unique relationship they have with their children. I make this point in detail at McAleer, *Ecstatic Morality*, ch. 8.

²⁵ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, §4. I discuss this by no means obvious claim at greater length in my essay, "Pleasure: A Reflection on Benedict XVI's *Deus Caritas Est*," *Nova et Vetera* (English), vol. 5:2 (2007), 315–24.

²⁶ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, §4.

²⁷ Kolnai, *Sexual Ethics*, 131.

²⁸ Ibid., 122.

²⁹ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, §§2, 6.

³⁰ Ibid., §7.

marriage, it is still a sacrifice centered on a privileged, exclusive object:³¹ One sacrifices for *her*, one's wife. The priest does not have as the object of *caritas* the same kind of object a married man has erotically.³² The latter is a privileged object, the former a universal object, a common good to be shared undividedly. "I cannot possess Christ just for myself," writes Benedict.³³ But he also writes: "Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice-versa. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love."³⁴ What Benedict means here, *all he can mean here*, is that self-donation marks both married love and the love of God. He cannot mean that as a husband relates to his wife so a priest relates to Christ: Because even a generous erotic love is quite different from *caritas*; their respective objects are structurally different.

I submit that, on the basis of the distinction between the objects of *eros* and *caritas*, there is a structural difference between heterosexual and homosexual desire as this is relevant to priestly love of the God-man who is Jesus. The priest's desire for Christ obviously is of a male-to-male pattern of friendship. In the case of the heterosexual priest, this male-to-male relationship is predicated upon the renunciation of desire with a male-to-female pattern; that is, the renunciation of erotic desire *and its object*. The renunciation of self in service of another is redoubled in priestly service when a privileged, exclusive object is renounced: For when the object is renounced, that is, the devotion peculiar to erotic love, *eros* is also renounced. As John Paul II explains, *eros* is always "desire of possessing" and as such not charity. He fully accepts that this desire can be loving but always, fundamentally, *eros* is an egocentric desire.³⁵ Kolnai prefers the language of privilege, but his analysis makes John Paul II's point. Removing the privileged object of erotic desire internally frees a now suspended "erotic" desire to become not a generous erotic love but a love of radical generosity, *agape*. As John Paul II observed, the biblical and Greek language of sexuality is very different, and so "great caution"

³¹ Ibid., §11.

³² Hence John Paul II writes: "[M]an (male and female) is able to choose the personal gift of self to another person in the conjugal covenant, in which they become "one flesh," and he is also able to *renounce freely* such a gift of self to another person, in order that by choosing continence "for the kingdom of heaven" he may give himself totally to Christ." *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 439.

³³ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, §14.

³⁴ Ibid., §11.

³⁵ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 315, note 56.

is necessary when speaking of *eros*.³⁶ Hence, he comments that "it is indispensable that *ethos* should become the constitutive form of *eros*."³⁷ Priestly ordination is the interior evacuation (not cancellation) of *eros* and its filling with *ethos*, the biblical ethics of *agape*. The "spousal character" of the priest rests upon, as John Paul II put it, "a heart which is new, generous, and pure."³⁸ To use an image from Benedict, ordination is the culmination of a process wherein *eros* turns against itself.³⁹ Emptied of a privileged object through ordination, *eros* is confirmed substantively as *ethos*, an expressed imitation (through the gifts of the Holy Spirit) of the Love who knits all things (Ps 139:13 and 136:1-9).

In the case of a man with deep-seated homosexual tendencies, the male-to-male pattern of friendship with Christ is not predicated upon the renunciation of exclusive erotic desire. That is, the *pattern* of his erotic desire is not, cannot be, definitively renounced at ordination. Of course, it may well be, as a matter of fact, that such a man happens not to be, erotically, in love with anyone in particular. Indeed, he may not be especially "charged" erotically. But the important point is that priesthood *confirms* a pattern of desire that is, for the homosexual, an *erotic pattern* of desire; and this is not the case for the heterosexual. In the case of a man with such tendencies having an intense friendship with the God-man, Jesus, there is no structural reason to believe that that male-to-male relationship could be severed from exclusive erotic desire. Since there is no structural renunciation *possible*, and given the intensity of the male-to-male friendship demanded by the priesthood, we must expect a man with such tendencies to relate to the God-man erotically, and thus exclusively. Such desire cannot *sufficiently* share Christ. John Paul II argues that the priest's *amoris officium* establishes a norm of "undivided love . . . for God and for God's people."⁴⁰ The priest with an erotic attachment to Christ divides his love for Christ against God's people.

The priest with a deep-seated homosexual tendency must a priori have a pattern of erotic desire that looks at Christ not as a common good but as a privileged good. The priest who makes a gift of himself to Christ, and through Christ to the People of God, rejoices that his love object is shareable. This is not true of the privileged love object that is the interior

³⁶ Ibid., 215.

³⁷ Ibid., 319.

³⁸ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, §22.

³⁹ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, §12: "His death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him."

⁴⁰ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, §29.

of erotic desire, and so there is no possibility, a priori, of anything but a radically diminished spiritual paternity. It is an act of justice to the People of God that the priest acts as a minister of the universal good of Christ undividedly shared out. The peculiar nature of the erotic object forecloses this generosity, and justice, and yet on this basis does the priest's special conjugal life flourish and find fulfillment in paternity: "to give birth to Christ . . . in others."⁴¹

Ressentiment and Gay Marriage

An idea famously associated with Nietzsche, a man made into a powerful ally of secularists in the West's culture wars, *ressentiment* does have some pedigree in Catholic thought. Scheler wrote a book on the topic where he both defended Christianity from the charge of *ressentiment* and used the concept very effectively to criticize the ethics of humanitarianism.⁴² Karol Wojtyla made use of the concept in his 1960 *Love and Responsibility*. Nietzsche observed that whenever something traditionally identified as good is labeled by critics as a disease you can be sure that *ressentiment* is afoot aiming to eradicate a moral value. Wojtyla argues in *Love and Responsibility* that the violence of the attack upon chastity as a sickness can have no other origin than *ressentiment*. Interestingly, the later cultural analyses of John Paul II do not make similar use of the concept. Even in 1960, Wojtyla did not point out the darkest origins of *ressentiment*, a sense of impotence transformed into hate. There probably are very fine pastoral reasons, or simply rhetorical ones, for not suggesting that one's intellectual and moral opponents are motivated by hatred, but nonetheless, the remarkable analytic power of *ressentiment* ought not to be set to one side.

Everyone remembers the response to the 2004 presidential election: "The Bush victory was powered by homophobia." Was it not a constant refrain? A slogan that aimed to devalue the "moral vote" of 2004? No sooner had I opened my office door the day after the elections than an academic colleague of mine shot through it and said just this. My colleague is a scholar of nineteenth-century German philosophy. I asked her: Would Nietzsche not be certain that denunciations of a long-standing

⁴¹ St. Charles Borromeo, *Acta ecclesiae mediolanensis* (1599), 1178, quoted in John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, §72.

⁴² M. Scheler, *Ressentiment* (1912; Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2003). First published in 1912, a larger edition of the work appeared in 1915 and this after a reassessment of humanitarianism in 1913. In his 1913 *The Nature of Sympathy*, Scheler reaffirmed the usefulness of Nietzsche's moral-cultural analysis properly modified but argued that humanitarianism had a positive role to play in ethics. This reassessment in no way alters my sense of how his ideas can usefully be applied to the issue of gay marriage.

moral judgment as a *disease* were animated by *ressentiment*? This question met complete silence and thereafter: "I've never thought about it like that."

Yet it seems at least plausible that the rapid change in our culture from *certainty* that homosexual sex is morally wrong to sponsorship of homosexual *marriage* as a positive good in television, film, and education might have as much to do with *ressentiment* as with any other cause. If contemporary academia sees the sinister work of *ressentiment* everywhere amongst rightists, and in Christian communities especially, it seems perfectly reasonable to ask academic progressives to consider whether it plays a role in their campaign for gay marriage. It certainly is uncanny how closely the desire for gay marriage fits the analysis of *ressentiment* found in the works of Nietzsche and Scheler.

Ressentiment flourishes, argues Scheler, where there is a "discrepancy between the political, constitutional, or traditional status of a group and its factual power."⁴³ It is commonly heard that gay marriage is the great civil rights issue of the age. Whilst many of us might think this title goes to the need for legal protection of the unborn, the analogy between Jim Crow and gay marriage rings hollow. Advocacy of gay marriage is an upper-middle class phenomenon where many very successful people in all walks of American life feel acutely a disparity between their very real factual advantages and privilege and the failure of law and the social order to reflect the relationships they have built upon those advantages and privilege. To overcome this discrepancy, equality is sought with those who are favored by the traditional order, but the equality can only be sought by a *devaluation* of the qualities that have found favor. Gay marriage is not a valorization of marriage as some of its advocates claim; it really can only be a devaluation. The devaluation wrought by *ressentiment* is necessary because the reason for the discrepancy in the first place is always some matter of impotency. The homosexual cannot overcome this impotency, and so a devaluation of the moral order is necessary: An attempt is made to "blind" people to the moral value of what has traditionally found favor. The apparent affirmation of the value of marriage in the desire for gay marriage is actually underwritten by the devaluation of the value of fecundity, and marriage gutted of its dynamic content. *Ressentiment* aims to falsify, says Scheler, any values that might "bestow excellence on any possible objects of comparison." Is not marriage, really, an institutional affirmation of the value of fecundity? An institutional affirmation of privilege, in fact? More forcibly put: The instituting of a moral preference for certain kinds of sex acts and the declaration that these kinds of sex acts

⁴³ Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 28.

are of greater moral and social worth than other kinds of sex acts?

Scheler would not be surprised in the least about the campaign for gay marriage. *Ressentiment* seeks to invert the moral hierarchy wherein vital values stand higher than utility values. The mark of an age of *ressentiment*, he argued, is an age of subjectivism wherein everything that is not earned by individual effort is cast down. Vital values, such as the power of certain sex acts to create new life, are not given to all; and such power and value is never earned. The ruling ethos of an age of subjectivism is the radical rejection of inequality stemming from natural or divine gifts, argued Scheler.⁴⁴

Inequality is a corollary of privilege. The drive for gay marriage was always inevitable if de Tocqueville's famous observation holds true: When equality defines a society, more and more hostility toward privilege increases as its effrontery becomes more evident. As Roger Scruton has observed, the institution of marriage does nothing less than sustain and protect "the unfair privilege which every love contains."⁴⁵ Catholic social thought, oftentimes cast as "progressivism," is well aware of the importance of privilege. The 1995 *Catechism* speaks of the family as "the *original cell of social life . . . a privileged community*."⁴⁶ The family is a privileged community, says the Church, for at its heart is marriage, a privilege on account of certain kinds of sex acts. The natural law affirms that those sex acts that permit a bodily giving of self are normative: It is such acts that imitate the bodily gift of Christ. For the Christian it is a complete mistake to think that marriage is an institution first and foremost of fine, loving feelings. Defenders of gay marriage often rely on a Cartesian justification that couples (or multiple persons, in fact) joined "at the heart," having an emotional commitment, have a right to marry. Such a defense elides the character of sex acts altogether, and marriage is an institution that shows *favor* to sex acts that are able, in principle, to be hospitable to new life. Modeled on Christ's bodily gift of self and its issuance of a new creation, Christian embodiment, and Christian concern for the social order, must follow the norm of the body's gift of life.⁴⁷

Nor ought Christians be defensive about the illumination brought by faith to this social question. Liberal discussions of this issue are always cast in some variant of Kant's ethics, oftentimes with a splash of Mill. As Scheler points out, at the heart of Kant's ethics is the search for the "generally valid law of human volition" (Kant). At its heart, this is a rejection of revelation. Revelation is an insight into values that are particular to some and not had

⁴⁴ Ibid., 97.

⁴⁵ Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 358.

⁴⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §§2206–7, original emphasis.

⁴⁷ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, §12.

by others. Those without insight or who do not bear the revelation must "believe" what others have held in direct experience. The whole idea of revelation, and the ethics derived from it, is anathema to the equalitarianism of Kant's "generally valid law." Rawls's famous "original position" is a conceit "winnowing away the features which distinguish persons from one another," generating, as Scruton puts it, the "disprivileged."⁴⁸ To Rawls, the leading Kantian of the last century, it is just obvious that politics is about equality, for politics must be shaped by a basic norm, what is "generally valid" for the will. Make no mistake, for the Kantian liberal there can be no possible justification for marriage if it distinguishes between human wills. It is little wonder that political parties pervaded by the spirit of Kant are so hostile to faith and its insight into values. It is a singular service of Scheler's ethical writings to show that the liberal insistence on a publicly available reason for discussions of politics is premised on the extraordinarily parochial ethical presumption that true ethical values are available to all or not at all.

The privilege of marriage is first and foremost a social expression of certain kinds of acts but there is, of course, an intimate relationship between persons and acts, as Karol Wojtyla makes clear in his contribution to phenomenological philosophy, *The Acting Person*.⁴⁹ For this reason, the "impulse to detract" evident in resentment of a moral order that supports the privilege of certain kinds of sex acts is further nourished by one of the other "harms" at the root of *ressentiment*: the "damaged feeling of personal value, [a person's] injured 'honor.'"⁵⁰ Homosexuals clearly resent the idea that they are not viewed as equal to heterosexuals, and for this reason the latter have a good that homosexuals envy (this was not always true and nor are all homosexuals like-minded about gay marriage). About this "injured 'honor,'" Scheler comments:

If we are merely displeased that another person owns a good, this can be an incentive for acquiring it through work, purchase, violence, or robbery. Envy occurs when we fail in doing so and feel powerless. . . . [Envy] leads to *ressentiment* when the coveted values are such as cannot be acquired and lie in the sphere in which we compare ourselves to others. The most powerless envy is also the most terrible. Therefore *existential envy*, which is directed against the other person's very nature, is the strongest sort of *ressentiment*.⁵¹

⁴⁸ For further discussion of Scruton's argument, see McAleer, *Ecstatic Morality*, ch. 8.

⁴⁹ Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki (1969; Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979).

⁵⁰ Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 27.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

Ressentiment, observed Nietzsche, “is in its very essence a negation of everything ‘outside’ and ‘different,’ of whatever is ‘not oneself’: and *this* negation is its creative deed.”⁵² The desire for gay marriage is the desire for an identity with heterosexuals. It is the desire for a social “blindness” to an existential difference. But all interested in pluralism must be especially wary of calls for such social “blindness.” A call for gay equality respecting marriage is a call for the diminishment of diversity, in fact. The campaign for gay equality in the United States, including the right of marriage, has for its symbol an “=” sign. An identity sign is not a sign of diversity but points, deep down, to the logic of totalitarianism. Kolnai argues that behind equalitarianism is a horror of division, for “no man must hold more or be more than his fellow man.”⁵³ Marriage is an inevitable target. For marriage, like every privilege, as Kolnai explains, is “the social projection, the institutional recognition, the traditional embodiment of the essentially insurmountable dividedness”⁵⁴ found throughout reality. Insistence upon a social “blindness” to mask an existential difference is really to set up a dispute with reality itself. To set marriage upon a principle of equality is, as Kolnai puts it, to “speak the idiom of Identity” in which humans assert their sovereignty to posit and generate not only civil society but reality itself. Kolnai explains:

The metaphysical core of the concept of social Totality is the concept of Identity; and the postulate of Identity, again, is implicit in man’s pretension to metaphysical sovereignty, his aspiration to be God: for if I admit any entitative “otherness” of mind and will on a footing with myself, if I am aware of any human consciousness and purpose really distinct from my own, if I recognize any valid law and authority over and above my will—and not an efflux and manifestation thereof—I cannot be God.⁵⁵

Heterosexuals are often asked: “How does gay marriage hurt you?” But anyone wary of human willfulness, and its totalitarian history, can rightly acknowledge a deep concern. Those opposed to gay marriage should make the argument that good social order is acutely threatened whenever pluralism *and the dividedness upon which it rests* is cast aside in favor of an identity reliant on the idea of the totality of the will, that is, a subjectivism where reality is suspended and restraint on the will thrown aside.

⁵² Ibid., 24.

⁵³ A. Kolnai, *Privilege and Liberty and Other Essays in Political Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999), 22.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 33.

John Paul II argued that responding to the eclipse of God is the central task for contemporary Catholicism. Actually, everyone interested in good political order should be interested in overcoming the eclipse of God. For when the human is linked with the divine the human begins "to fill a rightful place, to assume a positional value as it were, in the Universe."⁵⁶ This positional value affirms our status as persons⁵⁷ but also shapes and orders our liberty. If what really animates the campaign for gay marriage is *ressentiment* and a reaction to existential diversity then the logic of totalitarianism, and its roots in secular monism, is affirmed once more. Cut lose from the order of reality, the willful effacing of a social order rooted in the privilege of natural or divine *gift* bodes ill. Identity predominates and what is eccentric in human persons is devalued and diminished. Gifts should evoke grateful response for the love they betoken, not the reaction of hostile *fiat*.

In closing, it is worth dwelling on Kolnai's claim that homosexuality is "world-destructive."⁵⁸ As Kolnai points out: "A homosexual couple can together fall in love with a third individual of the same sex."⁵⁹ For this reason, jealousy, shame, monogamy, and other indices of love, "do not mean the same for the homosexual as they do for the heterosexual."⁶⁰ This is a profound observation, and to the Christian it is decisive. Christianity is the belief that the cardinal point of creation and world history is love, the Love Who is the Alpha and Omega. A radical change in the ordinary meaning of the indices of love that gay marriage would sanction is indeed "world-destructive." Kolnai, like Scheler, and one can just as well say Augustine and Thomas, believes that Love generates, sustains, and gives the inner meaning of "the categorial structure of the world."⁶¹ The transformation, inversion, and subversion of values that *ressentiment* fosters is a structural feature of homosexuality. There is an unbroken tradition in Western thought since Plato that argues that love is the key to the metaphysical order. Moral theology belongs to this tradition and so must insist that gay marriage is not some minor blip that we can all learn to tolerate, and perhaps even celebrate, but that it shares with totalitarianism a logic hostile to reality, to love. N V

⁵⁶ A. Kolnai, "The Humanitarian versus the Religious Attitude," *The Thomist* 7 (1944): 432.

⁵⁷ For a disturbing article on just how threatened our status is on account of certain tendencies within biotechnology, see Eric Cohen, "The Human Difference," *Commentary* (December 2006): 37–42.

⁵⁸ Kolnai, *Sexual Ethics*, 192.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*