

# Acting In Concert: Music, Community, And Political Action

Book Reviews: POLITICAL THEORY

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entails the eradication of suffering and principled conflict, leaves no challenge for transformative work or moral action, or even, ultimately, for passionate inquiry.

Even though Lawler remarks that, among other things, this "shows that the Christian conception of the eternal, or infinite, Creator is incoherent" (p. 34), he does not, to my disappointment, respond with any attempt at a refutation. Instead, he descends in the second chapter to a somewhat diffuse refutation of the moving point in which I discern to be the following. Rorty proclaims the impending victory of his view that "a merely material and secular goal suffices: mortal life as it might be lived in the saintly uplands of global democracy and abundance" (cited on p. 48). But in stark contrast to the Hegelian Kojève, Rorty denies that this view can claim to be true, or even that the favored emerging society is "more natural or more rational than the cruel societies" of the past (p. 57), for the truth is the contingency and lack of objectivity of all such ultimately groundless "choices."

But what is the ground of this Truth? Most acutely, what experiences or facts speak against the greater rationality or truth of at least the "sufficiency" of universal solidarity and prosperity? The clearest answer is Rorty's recognition of another Truth, an insuperable dilemma of human nature that Rorty criticizes Marxists for ignoring: "the price we pay" (Rorty writes) is "the culture that put Socrates to death," dominated by the "bland, calculating, petty, and unheroic"; a culture where "we, the people who value self-consciousness, may be irrelevant to the fate of humanity" (pp. 54-5). But then Rorty himself testifies to the unsatisfied or unsatisfiable spiritual longings that block full acceptance of pragmatism's goal as truly sufficient for self-conscious human nature: Rorty's "posthistorical wisdom contradicts his own existence as a philosopher" (p. 59). Rorty is obscure but in fact spotlights the fundamental difficulty by retreating into "irony," and Kojève may similarly betray or call into question his thought by his comparable "irony" (pp. 60-1).

The curious twist is that the chapter on Rorty has as its most serious goal an attempted refutation of the more profound Allan Bloom, as the exemplar of the supposed inherent weakness of intransigently classical (unPascalian) Socratic rationalism. Bloom is portrayed as an unaware witness for Rorty, inasmuch as Bloom's Socratism compels him to describe contemporary students as satisfied in soullessness, which implies that all humanity except the "idiosyncratic" philosopher is naturally incapable, absent historical artifice, of responding to mortality with erotic passion: Bloom's Socratic message is that the "flat soul is the true soul" (p. 69). Not only does this amputate Bloom's moving accounts of the numerous students whose eros he has seen electrified by the redemptive great books, but also Lawler proceeds to contradict himself. In an awkward "Afterword" he is compelled to concede that actually Bloom spotlighted the "boundless" anguish of children of divorce as the "theme of reflection and study." Bloom called them "the symbols of our time because he saw 'their disarray in the cosmos' as only the 'extreme form' of what he called our all-encompassing 'spiritual vortex set in motion by loss of contact with other human beings and with the natural world'" (p. 72).

The unsuccessful attempt to dispose of Bloom is meant to remove the competition from what Lawler so compellingly elaborates and explores in the subsequent, constructive chapters: the Christian writer William Percy, bolstered by the Augustinian sociological class analysis of Christopher Lasch. Here, Lawler contends, we find the authentic, because Thomistic, rationalism, which shows that reason finds its fulfil-

ment, without truncation, in Christian faith and which proves that only reason so conceived can adequately comprehend humanity as constituted by self-conscious erotic mortality. But in fact Lawler has to show that Percy abandoned Thomas's core Aristotelian teleology in the name of a farrago comprising the "tradition of Anglo-Saxon empiricism" (p. 84), a tendentious shot-gun marriage of creationism and Darwinism (pp. 88-9), and a Heideggerian "experience" of the human as "alien" in "a cosmos that is otherwise dyadic" or "stimulus-response" (p. 80).

What Percy calls his "Thomistic science" is, Lawler admits, in truth "a combination of Pierce's semiotic empiricism and Heidegger's [atheistic] existentialism" (p. 97). It is then not surprising that although lip service is paid to "natural law," no attempt is made (in the manner of authentic Thomists such as Victoria, Suarez, or Pieper) to give the much needed argumentative defense of that core Thomistic doctrine. Above all, Thomas's moral grounding in Aristotle's *Politics* and *Ethics*, culminating in the peak of aristocratic greatness of soul as the foreshadowing of the contemplative life understood as the only intelligibly divine life, as the life whose acknowledged supremacy ought to be the beacon of inspiration for every rational human soul, shrinks almost out of sight. With all this subtracted, what is left of Thomas's argument for Christianity as the completion of Aristotelian (the only integral) rationalism?

Lawler's illuminating introduction to Percy as a truly weighty thinker for our time would grow in strength through a franker acknowledgment of the problematic gulf between Percy and genuine Thomism, then through a fairer and less evasive dialogue with the challenging alternative conception of divinity and of humanity found in classical, Socratic-Aristotelian rationalism.

**Acting in Concert: Music, Community, and Political Action.**  
By Mark Mattern. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998. 240p. \$50.00 cloth, \$20.00 paper.

William Chaloupka, University of Montana  
Political scientists have long been ambivalent about including some particular cultural and social modes of action into their direct inventory of political action. Since the 1960s, direct demonstrations, civil disobedience, and popular culture, to name a few, have been slow to capture their attention, despite wide popularity and advocacy for such expressive vehicles. There are good reasons for this reluctance. Such forms are difficult to assess; their importance often remains a matter for speculation; and the range of interpretations can be broad. But whatever the reasons, it is clearly the case that other academic fields have gone farther than political science in studying some of the less mainstream modes of political expression and action.

*Acting in Concert* attempts to deal with one form of cultural activity—popular music—in a way that is distinctively within the realm of political science. Rather than adopt available models in cultural studies or ethnography, to cite two predecessors, Mattern studies music as if it were a field of public action that a political scientist would observe and analyze. Within the overall project of showing that music can have political implications and can be studied in this manner, the primary innovation is Mattern's suggestion of a taxonomy for popular music's political functions. In a community context, music can adopt different strategies for community-based

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helpful, but Acting in Concert: Music, Community, and Political Action. The type of community that is cultivated in Community Music Therapy is that is consistent with diversity, supports collective political action and a strong form of acting in concert in order to describe social activism or community-based. Friendship and Conflict from Social and Political Perspectives Graeme Watson, Acting in concert: Music, community and political action (New Brunswick, New.

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