

BOOK NOTICES

Berube, Michael and Ruth Jennifer. 2015. *The humanities, higher education, and academic freedom*. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Higher Education, especially in the field of the humanities, continues to inspire critical minds around the globe, leading to an ongoing flow of publications on topics in that field. Michael Berube and Jennifer Ruth, both distinguished American academics, are no exception to this rule. What makes their contribution somewhat special, however, is the fact that they focus not only on aspects of Higher Education, but also on the huge literature that was spent on it in the past decades. One of the first things that draw their attention is that the Humanities tend to be presented in a less favorable way, this is as in a state of crisis. What could be meant with that statement, the authors are asking? A closer look at figures reveals that it is not a slump in enrollment, as is often thought, which allows such viewpoint. According to the authors, it is rather the perception of the value of humanities courses that was characterized as in decline, not only in general, but especially also among students and graduates of those very courses. For instance, the lamenting on the perceived “decline” in topics, or on the waning interest in so-called “universal” aspects of human culture is said to be an example of self-inflicted harm that may haunt students and other stakeholders. According to the authors, the root of the problem is the ongoing de-professionalization of the academe in the humanities, with a prolific multiplication of non-tenure teaching jobs, whether short-term or long-term, and a general under-qualification of teaching staff, since too high a share of them are just Master’s degree holders. Blaming the evolution on alleged inevitable socio-economic factors is not courageous, but rather reveals an attitude of quietism, according to the authors. This is a trap in which alert tenured faculty should not step. They should rather question and challenge it, especially through their respective professional associations. The authors illustrate how the refusal to believe that some people are just inevitable victims of the system has shed fruits for the cause of faculty positions. They illustrate from their own experience how the maximization of enrollment per course—by minimizing the number of new courses—can prevent the unbridled hiring of “adjunct” faculty, and save the money to pay for tenured staff, even as these might have to work a bit harder. While the tone of the chapter exhales an atmosphere of contrast between university administrators and faculty, the authors emphasize that administrators should not be painted all with the same brush. However, when necessary, it will not be sufficient to work with them, but respect for the faculty’s professionalism will require working against them and their neoliberal argument that tenure and shared governance are obstacles to change. The book offers mostly practical issues or situations, from which animated technical discussions arise. A deeper and more systematic philosophical

reflection on key-concepts like “profession,” “professionalism,” or “humanities” in the university context would have provided an additional enrichment to this thought-provoking work. (W. V.)

Wilson, David Sloan. 2016. *Does altruism exist?: Culture, genes, and the welfare of others (Foundational questions in science)*. Connecticut: Yale University Press.

David Sloan Wilson, author of *Darwin’s cathedral: Evolution, religion, and the nature of society* (2002), presents the case for the existence of altruism, which is “a concern for others as an end in itself.” According to Wilson, there is a long tradition in science and philosophy that denies the reality of altruism, seeing it as incompatible with the basic principles of natural selection, or considering it ultimately to be an egoistic strategy. Wilson disagrees, evincing another view—multilevel selection theory—which provides a more comprehensive picture of altruism as a selective trait. The theory predicts the survival of the fittest not only within groups, but among groups: “Selfishness beats altruism within groups. Altruistic groups beat selfish groups. Everything else is commentary.” Wilson extends this argument from nonhuman to human life, noting that human beings are unique in our ability to form highly complex functional organizations. “Group-level functional organization evolves primarily by natural selection between groups,” and altruistic groups have an evolutionary edge. The rest of the book applies Wilson’s theory to such areas as religion, economics, and everyday life. While conceding that altruism is vulnerable to some pathological forms, he concludes that it is an important value to cultivate. This is a well-argued work that contributes greatly to both science and philosophy of science. (N. C.)

Emmanuel, S., W. McDonald, and J. Stewart. 2015. *Kierkegaard’s concepts*. Tome VI: *Salvation to writing. Kierkegaard research: Sources, reception and resources*. Vol. 15. Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate.

Another issue in the series produced by the *Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre* of the University of Copenhagen covers the Danish philosopher’s concepts from “Salvation” to “Writing” in the alphabetic order, including, for instance, entries on “Sin,” “Skepticism/Doubt,” “Suffering,” “Teleological Suspension of the Ethical,” “Will,” and “Wordliness/Secularism.” Forty-one articles of four to eight pages, lucidly written by experts in the field, shed a light on the sometimes highly personal use of philosophical and religious terms by Kierkegaard. Due to its high level of specialization, the book is not fit to cater to beginners or to people with only a general interest in Kierkegaard; it will definitely appeal, however, to all advanced scholars of the Dane, as well as to advanced readers in existentialism, philosophy of the human person, philosophy of language, and philosophy of religion. As part of a series, the book is to be situated in the wider attempt of this to cover all aspects of Kierkegaard studies, especially the sources that may have inspired the philosopher, the reception of his work or thought throughout the world, the books he owned in his private library, and a bibliography of works on the Dane’s thought. Since most of the twenty volumes contain more than one tome, the current title is the sixth under Volume 15, which

explains why it begins—or continues—in the middle of the alphabet. With this tome, the collection on Kierkegaard's concepts has definitely been further enriched. (W. V.)

Morris, Ian. 2015. *Foragers, farmers, and fossil fuels: How human values evolve (The University Center for Human Values Series)*. With an Introduction by Stephen Macedo and Commentaries by Margaret Atwood, Christine M. Korsgaard, Richard Seaford, and Jonathan D. Spence. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.,

In this book, Stanford historian Ian Morris, author of *Why the West rules—for now: The patterns of history, and what they reveal about the future* (2010), outlines his conjecture about the origins of human values through the lens of evolutionary theory and sociobiology. Based on the 2012 Tanner Lectures he had given in Princeton, Morris's key claim is that important aspects of ethical life are determined by the manner of energy capture within a given human era: foraging, farming, and fossil-fuel extraction. These eras differ in their prevailing views about social hierarchy, tolerance of violence, gender equality, and income disparities. Foraging societies, owing to their vagrant lifestyle and lack of permanent properties, tend to value egalitarianism and are more tolerant of violence. Farming societies, which are characterized by land ownership and more complex social structures, value social hierarchy, are more patriarchal, and are less tolerant of violence. Finally, present-day fossil fuel-extracting societies, thanks to the industrial revolution, put a premium on equality and are the least tolerant of violence. Morris ends with the prediction that five major forces have the potential to change our manner of energy capture, and hence the prevailing moral norms: uncontrollable migration, state failure, food shortages, epidemic disease, and climate change. Among the commentaries published along with Morris's text include that of novelist Margaret Atwood, who speculates about our human future in light of bio-engineering, and Kantian philosopher Christine Korsgaard, who accuses Morris of moral skepticism in his apparent neglect of "real moral values." Morris gets the last word, however, as the final chapter details his response to his critics. This is an immensely thought-provoking book, true to the scholarly spirit of the Tanner Lectures, and a worthwhile contribution to the contemporary conversation about the link between evolution and moral life. (N. C.)

Landy, Marcia. 2015. *Cinema and counter-history*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Reality has a dimension that is experienced as no longer actual: history. Because of history's non-actuality, knowledge of the past is always mediated and in part a matter of heuristics and interpretation. In the current work, the author explores in five chapters whether film or cinema have any particular value or role in assessing the past and completing its cognition, even in a time that is dominated by the Internet and its readily available information on nearly all possible topics. The author asks herself whether cinema and film, being traditionally associated with fiction and entertainment, are not playing a primary role in the build-up of presumed objective human understanding of the past. Primary guide along this path is the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. The explorations are not limited to movies from one country or language group only, but are

targeting visual texts from all over the world. They are centered around the concept of counter-history, which the author defines in her introduction as “an escape from formal history to a world of affect, invention, memory, art, reflection, and action” (xi). Inevitably, the classical trend of historicizing will be challenged by cinema. Deleuze draws the attention to the “unthought” in human thinking, to fragmented time, implying changes in chronology, significant gaps, dispersed information, and the attempt to visualize an a-centered condition through images in which the body occupies a central position. Counter-history contests deterministic, linear, and reductive thinking that is inherent in a certain type of historiography. The chapters are focusing among others on changes in style perceived to result from the run-up to World War II and its aftermath. Realism and neo-realism, surrealism and naturalism are also presented. Then follow humor and parody as alternatives for melodrama as well as comedy. Postcolonial narratives that are “inventing” peoples’ identities and the relation between temporality (such as continuity, teleology, and eschatology) and truth figure also among the themes. The book closes with a reflection on the fate of cinema in the age of digital media, and on the future of the visual media in the light of today’s society of control. The book ends with an extensive bibliography and a list of notes; very recommendable for students in communication, semiotics, postmodernism (particularly Deleuze), and philosophy of culture! Since the book illustrates the positions taken with plenty of examples from cinematographic production, a thorough knowledge of a wide spectrum of movies is required to appreciate the full taste of Marcia Landy’s work! (W. V.)

Hutton, Sarah. 2015. *British philosophy in the seventeenth century*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

The seventeenth century has been a crucial time, both for philosophy and for Western civilization as a whole. The century offers the scene of a fast changing political order, with new styles of knowledge and artistic expression, and a breakthrough of modernity. However transformational the period and its protagonists may have been, there is a risk for contemporary analysts to mis-assess or over-estimate seventeenth-century authors. Usually, the philosophy of the seventeenth century is studied as a whole, spread over various countries, not just limited to the British isles. Most treatises also select a number of well-known, “great” philosophers, making use of established terminology and categories of classification (for Britain, that could mean Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke). However, Hutton prefers to give a “thick” description of a wider range of individual thinkers, as far as they are engaging themselves in a “conversation” with each other, without any prejudice about who are the more and less “influential” ones. The author admits, however, that some selection had to be performed in a one-volume work. As the book develops, Hutton changes the focus from the context (seventeenth-century perceptions of philosophy and its development, including its teaching in universities) to geographical and historical interaction with foreign or past philosophers, not to the least Aristotle. Only in chapter 5 and following are individual philosophers put in the spotlight, to begin with Hobbes and Herbert. After the university of Cambridge and its school of Platonists, and the state of natural philosophy, Chapter 9 honors the empiricist Locke as another beacon light for scholars of seventeenth-century philosophy. Together with the anticlerical Shaftesbury, he

forms perhaps the most explicit transition figure between the seventeenth and the “enlightened” eighteenth century. The author ends with an *a posteriori* justification of the topic covered: if British philosophy was to be studied, why exactly that of the seventeenth century? The answer is that exactly the seventeenth century has been credited for defining British philosophy, for giving it a voice, an identity. Interesting is still—before the bibliographic references of consulted publications and the name and subject indexes—the biographical appendix, providing in a nutshell all key information about individual philosophers, which can be especially useful for those who are less well known. Herewith, this finely written and accurately documented book ends; warmly recommended for both the basically initiated and the well advanced students in philosophy, history of philosophy, and history of ideas! (W. V.)

Johnson, Mark. 2015. *Morality for humans: Ethical understanding from the perspective of cognitive science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mark Johnson, author of *The meaning of the body* (2008) and coauthor, with George Lakoff, of *Metaphors we live by* (2003), synthesizes contemporary views of ethical naturalism in this thorough and cogent, if repetitive, riposte to Kantianism. He cites primarily John Dewey’s experiential philosophy, as well as the works of contemporary ethicists who have used cognitive science in the service of their arguments (among them Antonio Damasio, Alisdair McIntyre, Patricia Churchland, Jonathan Haidt, and Marc Hauser). Johnson’s ethical naturalism may be best understood in terms of three main points. First, morality is a garden-variety manner of problem-solving which involves intuitive, critical/rational, and imaginative skills. Second, the sources of values are not transcendental; rather, they arise from ongoing interactions of moral agents with their physical, interpersonal, and cultural environment. Finally, as contemporary findings in cognitive science reveal, there is no such thing as a separate moral faculty, or a “faculty of pure practical reason,” as Immanuel Kant says. The latter idea stems from a mistaken and pernicious mind-body dualism. Along with the notion of a unified self and a radically free will, such ideas are unscientific conjectures based on what Johnson calls “moral folk theory.” He presents a stinging attack of moral fundamentalism, the “positing of absolute moral values, principles, or facts.” Under this general umbrella, he lumps together Kantianism (“the supreme exemplar of rationalist non-naturalistic ethics”), dogmatic religions, the views of Clive S. Lewis, and even George E. Moore’s celebrated fact-value distinction, which relegates all moral talk to the realm of the transcendent-unintelligible. He concludes with a discussion of the ethical naturalist’s case for gay marriage, which, given the broadness and familiarity of the premises, most people seem to accept anyway. (N. C.)

Simmons, Michael. 2015. *Universal salvation in late antiquity: Porphyry of Tyre and the Pagan-Christian debate*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

There is little doubt that the established world order is facing unprecedented challenges in 2016. In the light of these, a historically conscious mind cannot avoid making comparisons with the past, such as the end of the Roman Empire as a political and

cultural unity. The third century after Christ, for instance, witnessed a particularly tense situation, with some voices blaming the ongoing decay of the Roman polity on the abrogation of traditional cult, under the influence of “foreign” movements. For Porphyry of Tyre (in Phoenicia, currently Lebanon), it had something to do with “Christian pollution,” referring to an ever expanding sect from Palestine, that would even be uplifted in the fourth century to the dignity of State Religion. The book consists of twelve chapters that are divided into two parts. The first part focuses especially on Porphyry and his dual (or triple?) soteriology that was meant as an alternative for Christianity. The second part places the topic of Part I in a broader cultural and historical framework. Simmons comes up with a new and more adequate classification of *De philosophia ex oraculis* and the triple way to salvation—this is salvation for the uneducated masses (cult and theurgy), for novice philosophers (virtue, especially continence), and for mature philosophers (Neoplatonism). The study of selected Christian authors allows Simmons to confirm that Christian soteriological universalism also played an important role in Porphyry’s lost fifteen books *Contra Christianos*. He acknowledges the conflict and the dialogue that often arose between philosophy and religion, or between Christianity and paganism. In Part II, Simmons proceeds among others to a confrontation between Porphyry and his disciple Iamblichus (Chalcidensis). While they belonged to the same philosophical school, they also disagreed on several points, which is the most likely reason why Iamblichus, a Syrian Neoplatonist philosopher, eventually moved to Syria. The last chapters specifically deal with the question why Christianity was becoming more and more popular towards the end of the third century, and why Emperor Constantine eventually embraced it. The key to the answer lies on one hand in the erosion of the Roman public institutions, and on the other in the attractiveness of Christian soteriological universalism, centered around the idea of Jesus Christ as Universal Savior, which seemed to offer best guarantees for the Empire’s unification. Eight terminological and thematic appendices testify to the scientific character of the book, while extensive notes, a rich bibliography, and an index follow. This book will be most welcome to all who are interested in (late) ancient philosophy, Roman history, (early) Church history, and theology. The interaction between Christianity and pagan cults and philosophy is particularly well described, being important for the adequate understanding of all. (W. V.)