

## BOOK NOTICES

Bubbio, Paulo. 2017. *God and the Self in Hegel*. Albany: State University of New York Press. 228+XIII p.

The author admits that there is nothing new about writing a book on some aspect of Hegel's philosophy; and that, according to Hegel, it is rather the aim or purpose of such a work than its actual exposition that constitutes its meaning. Still, Hegel's philosophy may offer a unique contribution to the understanding of religion and – as such – still be relevant today, as he tries to restore 'content' to religion. If someone ventures to publish on Hegel, this may not be possible without choosing sides in the ongoing debate among diverging interpretations on the German idealist. Especially the role played by Kant's philosophy in that of Hegel and the extent to which Hegel may be considered as a "revisionist" are the main issues here. Bubbio prefers considering himself a "qualified" revisionist, while Hegel, as he rejects subjectivism, is considered a defender of the "mediate objectivity" of metaphysical knowledge: it's about an objective reality, which, however, requires human consciousness to be understood. If Hegel's thought remains first of all metaphysical in nature, this is also because of the central role of theology in it. The author already underscores this point in the orientation of his first chapter, that focuses not only on the thought of Kant, but particularly on religion, especially on the themes of grace, conversion, and on the sacrifice of Christ. The concept of *kenosis* ("self-emptying") is a good example of the interrelatedness of religion and philosophy, as it may be given a role in both, referring to God through Christ. After distinguishing between Hegel's understanding of God as image, as concept, and as idea, Bubbio focuses on Hegel's use (and transformation) of the ontological argument: God's existence may be directly concluded from His very Idea. And that God cannot be thought of without any relation to human subjects is clear from another key-concept, that of Trinity. The triune God underscores his relation to Man, preventing any subjectivist interpretation, just as the theme of the death of God, this is of the abstract God of traditional theism, occurring in incarnation. By zooming in on the relational character of both God and the "I", the anti-subjectivist, idealist approach to religion offers a credible alternative to established God discourses. Bubbio's book will be of particular interest to those dedicating themselves to studies in Hegel and German idealism, as well as to students in related philosophical schools, and even to theology students with a philosophical background and interest.

Nesbitt, Nick (Ed.). 2017. *The Concept in Crisis: Reading Capital Today*. Durham-London: Duke University Press. 320p.

In a time in which interest for Marx and Marxism was thought to have nearly vanished, the present volume proves the opposite: in certain Anglophone intellectual circles, that

interest is alive and well. One among the major *foci* of that interest, which is the topic of this collection of essays, is the work *Reading Capital (Lire le Capital)* of French structuralist philosopher Louis Althusser. His work was the theme of a conference at Princeton in 2013, at which several of the high-quality essays that are forming the newly published collection were presented, even if they were somehow revised afterward. The facts are dating from 1965, when Althusser and his disciples, against the background of the Algerian independence war from France, held a seminar that would culminate not only in Marx-like critique of political economy, but also in the production of a new terminology or set of concepts that would dominate critical theory in later times. Being one among the clearest examples of the relatively short-lived intellectualist or “theorist” surge in Marxist studies, the work was deeply influenced by the Spinozist epistemology of Jean Cavailles. Distinguishing between the “object of knowledge” and the “real object”, Althusser understands knowledge not only as ‘production’, but also as ‘structure’ or ‘historically constituted system of an apparatus of thought’, or an open-ended, infinite construction of “new thought objects, ideas”. The tone and scope of Althusser’s work mean a challenge, not only for existential phenomenology, that irrevocably distinguishes between the object of thought and the intentionality of consciousness or the Transcendental Subject; it also challenges any superficial neoliberal empiricism. This is exactly one of the remote goals of the present collection: to offer, through a range of specialist essays, a stimulus for the development of a renewed and appropriate communist answer – theoretical as it may appear - to the contemporary dominant discourse on global capitalism, as special attention is being given to developments in Latin America. Whether the reader shares this sentiment, or just prefers paying a retrospective visit to one of the dominant currents in Post-World War II French philosophy, the eleven essays of the present title will provide a rich and challenging intellectual experience!

Debes, Remy (Ed.). 2017. *Dignity: A History*. Oxford Philosophical Concepts. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 408+VIIp.

In times of hyper-specialization in academe, there is a lot of talk around on the need of interdisciplinary projects. The work edited by Debes – featuring in the OPC series, or ‘Oxford Philosophical Concepts’ – elegantly demonstrates how specialization and cross-discipline studies may be combined, and how philosophy is an eminent field to achieve this. By the nature of each essay, the book reflects the expertise of its respective authors, but by the collection in one volume under one title, the different expert contributions are made to inspire an internal dialogue in the reader; internal, it has to be admitted, since no direct confrontation is being reported, even as the editor’s acknowledgment suggests that such confrontation has taken place as the book was being prepared. Characteristic of the series is also its prominently historical perspective, both in the diachronic and the synchronic sense: the theme or concept is being investigated as it has evolved through time, while its interference with the social or political or cultural context is being studied as to identify to what problem or question it was meant to provide an answer. After an introduction in which the editor clarifies the relatively recent historical appearance of the “moralized” concept of dignity, and in which the subtle difference is being explained between ‘substantive’ and ‘formal’ claims about dignity – distinguishing, for instance, between what is the basis for

human beings having dignity, and its features, such as ‘unearned’ and ‘distinctive’ – the range of contributions reflects a wide diversity of perspectives: historical as well as cultural and geographic. Dignity is being investigated in the context of Ancient Greece, of Roman stoicism, all the way to Renaissance and early modern times, into the nineteenth century; different disciplines offer their input, from religion to art, or portraiture; major global and regional religions, from Judeo-Christianity to Islam and to Confucianism and Buddhism; mainstream intellectual or cultural movements as well as their main individual representatives are being featured, including Homer, Kant, Diderot, Marx. . . The editor rightly observes at the end of his introduction that not all possible perspectives could be included; the theme of “animal dignity” may be counted among the absent indeed, in spite of its actuality. While the scope of perspectives is undoubtedly interdisciplinary, the major interest is philosophical, however. Even as essays are written in a lively and dynamic style, readers without background in philosophy better keep some reference work at hand. This doesn’t mean, however, that the work wouldn’t be able to interest readers with a broad cultural background, as well as fanatics of conceptual analysis; anyway, something to provoke the appetite for more OPC titles!

Welsh, Jennifer. 2016. *The return of history: Conflict, migration, and geopolitics in the Twenty-first Century*. Toronto: Anansi Press, 2016. 304+XI p.

In this collected Massey Lectures the author systematically challenges Francis Fukuyama’s famous prediction concerning the end of history in the age of liberal democracies. Far from auguring the end of global conflict, the 21<sup>st</sup> century ushers in the return of history, by way of terrorism and human rights violations (“the return of barbarism”), the refugee crisis (“the return of mass flight), Russian belligerence and expansionism (“the return of Cold War”), and global economic injustice (“the return of inequality”). An expert on international relations and a former Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary General on the Responsibility to Protect, Welsh undertakes a masterful analysis and contextualization of the period from the end of World War II to the present day. The ascendancy of liberal democracy, especially after the end of the Cold War, has been undermined in the post-9/11 era, which saw the US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, the chaotic aftermath of the Arab Spring, and the protracted Syrian civil war—all of which indicate the problems that stem from the history of colonization.

Welsh’s book is obviously addressed to a Western, primarily American, audience. While this does not detract from the validity of its empirical observations, especially the astute analysis of the role of social media in contemporary political conflicts, it lacks a comparable assessment of what’s going on in other regions, especially Southeast Asia. For example, there is no mention of the increasing political and economic dominance of China, and how this affects the dynamics of liberal democracies in developing countries in its vicinity. There is also no mention of the rise of populist regimes, from Myanmar’s National League for Democracy to Rodrigo Duterte’s Philippines. All of these also indicate the worrying “return of history”: Or perhaps, in other places in the world, history has never really ended.

Balch, Alex. 2016. *Immigration and the state: Fear, greed, and hospitality*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 308+Xlp.

Alex Balch tackles the politics of immigration, relying on global immigration data. Using the contemporary refugee crisis in Europe as a case study, he examines two dominant reactions: the “politics of hospitality” and the “politics of fear and greed.” He adopts Jacques Derrida’s concept of cosmopolitanism, which is a rereading of Immanuel Kant’s notion of perpetual peace, as well as of Emmanuel Levinas’s ethics of alterity. The book details the dynamics of contemporary cosmopolitanisms, particularly the use of the ethos of hospitality as a way to critique the policies of modern nation-states and their deplorable treatment of immigrants and refugees. However, Balch also points to the problem of hospitality in political theory, which points to the impossibility of its limitlessness. Today, hospitality is highly politicized in First World countries, especially in light of the migrant crisis, resulting in the stark absence of equality and non-discrimination in the so-called liberal democratic states (5). The United Kingdom and the United States are singled out for analysis due to their historically longer exposure to immigration issues. Little study has been done on the topic of immigration in political theory, and Balch’s book attempts to fill the gap in the conversation about state power; identity; nationalism; racism; public attitudes about the other; the political machine of immigration; and the political, social, and economic relations that obtain from these.

The book is divided into three parts. The first details the migrant crisis and various explanations for it, with particular emphasis on the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of the international system of human rights, and the responses of liberal democratic states to immigration. The second part constitutes a comparative study of immigration politics in the UK and the US. Finally, the third part asks whether the trends that emerge from these case studies are the product of the politics of fear and greed. If so, can traditions of hospitality be a feasible response? Balch tries to show how fear, greed, and hospitality variously explain the meaning of the “fair treatment” immigrants. He concludes that liberal democracies have created a hostile environment which divides people into the worthy and the unworthy (243). He inquires into the possibility of a truly effective international human rights regime. Ultimately, he predicts that a truly borderless world is unlikely; however, there are silver linings. The possibility of universal hospitality will always haunt the liberal democratic state (246), and official contrition about anti-immigration violence, though unlikely, is not impossible (247). Policies on immigration reflect the tension between the desire for less immigration or the image of bad immigration on one hand, and the hope for greater justice and fairness in immigration, on the other hand. Ultimately, the politics of immigration turns on the opposition between the idea of universal human rights and state sovereignty. Balch believes that the way forward involves the tradition of hospitality, which—because it is based on the framework of the host-guest relationship—may be disappointing for those who aim for complete equality. Nonetheless, this tradition provides the more enduring language (of welcome, trust, and kindness) for the politics of immigration for liberal democratic states (248). Like Jones and Welsh, Balch places the onus of resolving the migrant crisis squarely on the shoulders of wealthy First World countries, whose historical treatment of other peoples—coupled with the regime of capitalism and globalization—has driven and continues to sustain the crisis.