

## BOOK NOTICES

D'Iorio, Paolo. 2016. *Nietzsche's journey to Sorrento: Genesis of the philosophy of the free spirit*. Translated by Sylvia Gorelick. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 159p. (+X).

Philosophers are sometimes thought to be like disembodied spirits living, thinking and writing in ivory towers. Widespread as this stereotype may be, it does not reflect the real condition in which lots of philosophers are working. Take Friedrich Nietzsche, who is often considered as the founder of contemporary philosophy, who has made raging comments against classical metaphysical spiritualism, and has shown the primacy of the concrete physical world, no matter how fade and painful it may be. Exactly this Friedrich Nietzsche, already significantly affected by his bouts of neuralgia and migraine, who was wrestling with the question whether to give up his teaching position at the University of Basel or not, who also had been a staunch defender of Wagner and his drama, but began to find it depressing, made a trip with some close friends to Sorrento, a scenic seaside resort town overlooking the Bay of Naples in Southern Italy. There, in the heat and the sunlight, he broke with Wagner and managed to reorient his philosophy, four years after publishing his book on *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*. This work was still based on the (Platonic) presupposition of the existence of a metaphysical dimension that justified life – be it as a plaything in the hands of the gods. Nietzsche, though, still glorified the artist as the “most reasonable and wisest man”. However, his opinion began to favor the idea of art as a transformation of the miserable human world that isn't worth great seriousness, as he had learned from Plato's *Laws*. The author connects this move with Nietzsche's experience of church bells ringing on an evening in Genoa, as he was travelling. Those bells became associated with Plato's pessimism and nihilism in relation to the physical world, besides evoking Nietzsche's painful youth experience of the death of his father-preacher. To these “midnight” bells stands the second or “azure” bell, which isn't associated with nihilism, but, on the contrary, with innocence in becoming. In the absence of any metaphysical reality, such as Providence or the Will-to-live, there is only absolute innocence in the world. In the end, the eternal return of the same, as a clockwork whose spring needs to be rewound time and over again – lays the seed of optimism, reviving the meaning of the world. Paolo D'Iorio has demonstrated himself in this work as a perfect travel guide, with elaborate background on the philosopher, on the places he has visited, on his relation with his peers, and on the Greek culture that has so strikingly influenced his thought. It is to be hoped, therefore, that scholars with a special interest in Nietzsche will appreciate having the present title on their library shelves.

Copson, Andrew. 2017. *Secularism: Politics, religion, and freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 148p. (+X).

Philosophers of the analytical tradition tend to understand and to practice philosophy as clarification of concepts. Regardless of whether this description of philosophy is more or less adequate, it catches well what Andrew Copson, Chief Executive of the British Humanist Association, intends to do with his short work on secularism. In his foreword, the author hints at the apparent deficit in popularity of this concept, compared with ‘capitalism’, ‘democracy’, or ‘liberalism’. Asking the question “What is secularism,” he enumerates and clarifies some of its key-features since the Enlightenment. After this, he goes on, offering a detailed description of secularism in the Western world, from the Ancient times to the Enlightenment and eventually until today, with special attention given to the situations in France and the United States of America. A description of secularism in two Asian countries – Turkey and India - follows. In each of these, the difference of connotation associated with the term “secularism” is underscored, whether it be its strong association with the anti-clerical separation of Church and State, with the freedom of religion for all citizens, with the quest for Western-style modernization and control of religion, or with the concern to harmonize the coexistence of many religions. Arguments in support of secularism are also given: from respect for individual freedom, over fairness to pragmatic peace among various religious groups. Likewise, a series of “cases” against secularism are enumerated, including examples from “Islamic” or “Marxist” states, or opinions about the presumed link between the national identity and a particular religion, or the “myth of neutrality,” depicting secularism as an implicit promotion of anti-religious belief. After this, the author offers a review of different conceptions of secularism, and a number of challenges and threats against it which reflect the general anti-democratic and anti-liberal political trend in today’s world. One thing has to be admitted: The author – being a staunch defender of secularism – remains faithful to the definition of its essence, which is the respect for everyone’s fundamental freedom of belief, and the positive acceptance of a diverse society. Therefore, the book will be appreciated as an excellent introduction to secularism, both in the broadness of the topics covered, in the accuracy of their analysis, and in the open-minded approach.

Breazeale, Daniel and Rockmore, Tom. 2016. *Fichte’s Addresses to the German Nation reconsidered*. Albany: State University of New York Press. 303p. (+VIII).

Most students and even teachers of philosophy associate the name of Johann Gottlieb Fichte with German idealism, which is right. However, if asked what this exactly means, or what has been the specific contribution of Fichte to German idealism and of German idealism to modern and contemporary philosophy, they may struggle to provide a coherent answer. The book by Breazeale and Rockmore intends to break through this wall of stereotypes and generalities, not only by offering an in-depth presentation of the philosophy of Fichte, but by highlighting one of his works (actually a series of published Sunday-lectures, read by Fichte during the French occupation of Berlin) that has been grossly neglected by Fichte scholars so far. Perhaps, the reason for this is that it shows the readers a different Fichte from the one that is best known, that is the Fichte of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (“Doctrine of Science”). While the highlighted work – entitled *Addresses to the German Nation* - is somewhat related to Fichte’s epistemology and ontology, it is primarily a work dedicated to the development and purification of a genuinely German way of thinking, assuming that such was needed for the German language and culture to spearhead moral development in

Europe, an idea adopted from August Wilhelm Schlegel. This nationalism or patriotism has been heavily emphasized by readers and politicians, from the time of the first German unification to both World Wars. Precisely this association between Fichte and German nationalism has surrounded the *Addresses* with a halo of suspicion, which the editors felt called to disperse, partially because Fichte himself did not see patriotism as a goal in itself but as some sort of a missionary call to be a model for humanity. Patriotism stands, in other words, at the service of cosmopolitanism. Given this position, it is no surprise that the content of the *Addresses* far exceeds that of a narrow-minded, German-focused nationalist upsurge. Nearly all themes and topics that were dear to Fichte are mentioned at some point in some way, especially educational ones. The body of the book consists of thirteen essays, authored by academicians, all with some degree of expertise in Fichte or German idealism. No conclusion is offered, but the book has a useful index. The detailed approach to the themes in the book, make this book into privileged literature for advanced students of romanticism, German idealism, and the political developments at the crossroads of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Lakoff, George. 2016. *Moral politics: How liberals and conservatives think*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 490p. (+XIX).

The fact that George Lakoff, a (now retired) professor of cognitive science at the University of California at Berkeley, can present the third edition of the present title, ten years after its first version, illustrates how much we are dealing with a “best-seller” in its kind. Of course, there may be other reasons for coming up with the latest edition, which is dealing with two profoundly different political positions in general and very much inspired by developments in the United States of America in particular. And that quite a few things have changed and keep changing there is obvious, judging daily news reports. The author makes it clear that his work is not written by a political philosopher who would make widely use of theoretical speculations, but by a cognitive scientist, who is more empirically oriented and makes use of clusters of positions that have some degree of coherence. One group is called “conservative,” while the other “liberal.” Through cognitive linguistic analysis, the author found that the difference between the two viewpoints has metaphoric roots, as it is connected with their underlying difference in understanding of the concept “family.” Conservatives see the “strict father” model as paradigm for society, backing up their viewpoint with (pretended) literal Bible quotations. Liberals have the “nurturant parent” model as basis for how family and society should work. The author also pointed at the supremacy of the “business” metaphor in moral “accounting” (as we tend to speak of moral “debt” and “credit,” of “reward” and “punishment”). He estimates that Conservatives tend to have a better understanding of the link between their political preferences and the underlying family-based moral ideal than liberals, which may sometimes have harmed the liberal cause (which he seems to regret). The author doesn’t limit himself to the analysis of moral systems; he also demonstrates their link with political systems and explains how opposed positions on major issues in contemporary American politics are related to the same conflicting “family” paradigm, ranging from taxation to gay rights and abortion. An additional complication in the study of moral positions and their foundations is caused by the largely unconscious nature of thinking: most opinions and views are not totally clear,

even to their subjects. For this reason, attention is given to possible non-ideological reasons for political worldviews and to implications of the study for public discourse. The book is recommended reading for students in social and political philosophy, but is also relevant for fields like philosophy of language, linguistics, psychology, journalism, and education.

Wilfried M.A. Vanhoutte