

## BOOK NOTICES

Cappelen, Herman, & Josh Dever. 2018. *Puzzles of reference*. Publisher: Oxford University Press; 224p.

The title of the work of Cappelen and Dever suggests a lot: reference, one of the key-themes in contemporary philosophy of language, is a topic so subtle as to create a virtually unending series of questions for clarification, specification or reformulation. The authors adopt a rather modest approach in this matter: in just ten chapters (one of which is the introduction, while the tenth is some sort of epilogue, addressing the rhetorical question whether we have come at the end of reference- and, if yes, what this exactly may mean), the authors tackle eight different puzzles about reference, against the background of one of the main developments in the field in the past fifty years, the rejection of Fregeanism by Samuel Kripke. The latter opts for rigid designation and the causal-communicative model instead of the descriptive one in relation to proper names, the only category of words that have the capacity to refer, do we get it right? Well, in case we don't agree, this may just be the result of a verbal dispute. Relying on Chalmers' work on the issue, in the final chapter, the authors join his call for conceptual pluralism and conceptual engineering. Basically, if there are puzzles and disagreements in philosophy, it is often because the involved parties do not correctly know and understand each other's position and terminology used in that matter. So, let's ask ourselves what 'reference' or any term 'really' is, and whether we will not end up wasting our time in endless discussions that will lead us nowhere, the authors are suggesting. They also mention that the book should form no problem to non-experts in philosophy and linguistics. Perhaps to support this claim, or just to illustrate that the book could equally function as textbook for a course in philosophy of language, the authors summarize the central points of the text at the end of every chapter; they offer some sample questions, and give suggestions for further reading. The over-all bibliographic list is placed at the end of the volume. Even if the topic of the book may appear somewhat unpopular to those who claim to be oversensitive to 'technicalities', the presentation is certainly dynamic enough to carry the interest of readers with a wide interest in how our language and thought work.

Løland, Ole. 2018. *The reception of Paul the Apostle in the works of Slavoj Žižek*. Basingstoke-New York: Palgrave-Macmillan. XIII+224p.

Løland, a Lutheran minister and theologian, undertakes a daring project: that of reading an atheist East-European philosopher's comments on the apostle Paul, taking into consideration his own background within the 'Scandinavian model', that stands for a society focused on economic productivity, relative social equality and welfare.

Tagging his work as a study in the ‘reception history of the Bible’ (it had to be defended at a theological faculty!), Løland addresses issues like the relation between the historical and the philosophical in Žižek’s reading of Paul, taking into consideration that, according to fundamental hermeneutic principles, a plurality of readings is possible. The biographical dimension of Žižek’s project is not overlooked either, given that a strictly intellectual approach could turn out to be one-sided and fail to reveal some hidden personal motif in the philosopher for him to undertake the project. Žižek grew up in Slovenia, a former Yugoslav republic, under communist rule, which he gradually rejected; liberal democracy, the alternative glorified in the turbulent events of 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe, that culminated in the fall of the Berlin wall, would become his new culprit, however. Questions about the method prevail in the initial approach of Žižek’s relation to Paul, with a special attention to his indebtedness to Hegel, Lacan and Badiou. In the second chapter, the author uses Lacan’s attention for the dichotomy between Jewish legalism and Christian spiritualism in 2 Cor, 3.6., to identify Žižek’s Paul as a champion of introspection and a precursor of psychoanalysis. The author eventually shifts his attention to Romans 7,7-25 which he reads as underscoring hysteria, allegedly the “most subversive clinical structure with regards to social, political, or cultural hegemonies” (p. 123). Last but not least, the political implications of Žižek’s stand are being discussed, qualifying Paul – and ultimately also Žižek himself – as a figure of rupture, a radical innovator. Badiou, and his concept of ‘event’ are playing a central role in this part, as Žižek follows his French idol in drawing a parallel between the historical situation of Paul and ours. Focusing on Gal. 3,28, Paul is perceived as a model of egalitarianism, antinomianism, and ‘unconditional’ universalism, as he opens a new subjectivity, in contrast with the prevailing post-modern rejection of any ‘event’ happening now, preferring particularism (including feminism), ‘communitarianism’, and liberalism, which inevitably provokes the onset of its counterpart, fundamentalism. Paradoxically, from Žižek’s perspective, liberalism can only survive if it pairs with the radical left, as found by Løland. That Paul will be an inspiring guide in that case may only gladden him as a theologian, even as this Paul was made into a proto-Leninist totalitarian by the Slovenian Marxist philosopher!

Kain, Philip. 2018. *Hegel and right: A study of the philosophy of right*. Albany: State University of New York Press. 256p.

With a decades-long career as university professor of 19<sup>th</sup> century political philosophy behind him, Philip Kain is the right person to author an introduction to Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, a work that once used to be the object of neglect and misunderstanding. Kain makes it clear from the start that he wants neither to join those who naively praise the German idealist, nor to side with his critics, who reject him as – for instance – ‘a totalitarian’ (Popper). On the contrary, Kain wants to ‘disagree’ with Hegel, which requires a profound knowledge not only of Hegel himself, but of philosophy as a whole. Disagreement is not a goal in itself, but serves the authentic search for truth (‘to gain a deeper grasp of his thought’) and the determination to share one’s insight

with others ('so that I can better understand, so that I can try to make his thought more accessible, and so that I can draw out philosophical points of independent importance' (p.1). In Hegel's understanding of 'spirit' and 'Idea', there are always two dimensions that are in a dialectic interaction with each other this is the 'whole' and the 'individual'. If sharing his insights with us also means deepening these, Kain appears to have succeeded in his first objective, since his style of presenting topics – from 'spirit' to 'Idea' to 'freedom', 'state', 'right', 'recognition' etc. - is very clarifying indeed. Some events, like the constitution of the State or the establishment of right, can impossibly be the work of individual spirits alone, but are results of a long and complex process involving recognition, which is the basis of the actualization of right. After addressing the Idea of Right, and 'Abstract Right' (involving digressions on themes like property and punishment), the author moves to *Moralität* or 'morality', which is the field of the subjective will, involving 'subjective judgment, moral intention, and conscience' and is to be distinguished from the external realization of right, which is the domain of 'ethics' (*Sittlichkeit*). The chapter on morality offers a good opportunity for the author to come up with a well-documented comparison or contrast between Hegel and Kant, in relation to the categorical imperative. However, in order to have the will and subjectivity coincide with the external good, the focus needs to be directed to what constitutes the basis for human norms or 'ought', which is in customs, laws, practices, institutions, and traditions; freedom (defined by Hegel as as "being with oneself in another") requires the actualization of right, situated in duty. Here, the family (including marriage) is given special attention by Hegel, followed by Civil Society (patterned along a 'social-democratic' blueprint or not) and the State (with its form of government, zooming in on constitutional – rather than 'absolute'- monarchy). Paraphrasing Hegel, Kain writes: "The task of the *Philosophy of Right* is to articulate it [= the Absolute] in greater detail and to recognize it, actualize it, and thus help realize it in the existing world." (p.38). I think this captivating book of Kain has added its share to this project!