

Interpretation

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A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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Oliver Precht, *Heidegger: Zur Selbst- und Fremdbestimmung seiner Philosophie*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2020, 312 pp., €26.90.

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This is, in many ways, an astonishing book, one that is hard to put down. Based on a careful reading of the entirety of Heidegger's collected works, as well as the most important secondary literature, Oliver Precht takes up the challenge of showing that Heidegger has been misunderstood. What was his philosophy, as distinguished from his public teaching? What interested him above all? How did he understand himself? For these vitally important questions, Precht suggests, the existing literature comprising thousands of articles and books provides no satisfactory answers.

The book is structured chronologically following the arc of Heidegger's thought as he presented it: from his early phenomenological work, through his political "error" of the 1930s, to the later works, usually read as unpolitical meditations on the contemporary "night of the world" preparing "a new beginning" on the basis of an attitude of "releasement." Some of the most influential early interpretations of Heidegger—developed, inter alia, by William J. Richardson, Werner Marx, and Rainer Schürmann—followed this narrative arc, usually backwards, beginning from Heidegger's late "self-presentation" (cf. 15). These accounts were partially superseded in the 1980s and 1990s by a wealth of studies that came to grips with Heidegger by situating him within broader currents of philosophical and theological thought, including postmodernism, pragmatism, Aristotelianism, Lutheranism, and Derridean deconstruction, while also beginning "from the start," that is, from his earliest writings and lectures published during those decades. As more and more volumes were added to the collected writings—including, crucially, the lectures delivered in 1933–34, as well as the *Black Notebooks*

published between 2014 and 2020—the awe inspired by the “hidden king” (Arendt *dixit*) gave way to dismay, or revulsion, or to chastened attempts to explain both the seemingly complete subordination of his thought to the “revolution” of 1933 and the exculpatory ramblings contained in the infamous *Notebooks*.

Taking stock of these developments, Precht proposes a fresh beginning (31–32). At the very start of his career, when he began to lecture in 1919, Heidegger made a “radical decision” that determined the course of his thinking—and with it, perhaps, of much of twentieth-century culture (cf. 53). This decision concerned the “nature and concept of philosophy.”¹ Regarding all previous conceptions as flawed or exhausted, Heidegger set out to provide a purely philosophical determination of the meaning of philosophy. The obvious circularity of this quest, he argued, had to be squarely faced, for the very use of such terms as “nature” or “concept” already requires philosophy. Indeed, every time we interpret something—which we do all the time, as long as we exist—we are already philosophizing (cf. 18, 62). Nothing more seems to be needed to ground philosophy as a way of life: all it takes is a “leap” into “existence” and its self-interpretation.

This deceptively simple wager had momentous implications. For one thing, Heidegger rejected every alternative conception of the philosophical quest. Philosophy did not arise from wonder, or from the search for a life according to nature, or (say) from radical doubt. Nor could it be understood as a form of science, theory, or wisdom. If it was to survive, philosophy would have to determine itself out of itself, without being the proverbial handmaid of any other power or influence, including science, theology, and politics.

Such is the wager described in the term *Selbstbestimmung* in Precht’s title: Heidegger strives for a wholly self-determining philosophy, which breaks with the entire tradition and needs only itself. And yet, Heidegger insisted throughout his work that his sole concern was with something “other,” namely, the “truth of Being.” This is the main sense of *Fremdbestimmung*, the other key term in the title. Accordingly, Heidegger’s work must be read in two registers. There is, first, the familiar voice returning again and again to the genuine “matter” (*Sache*) of thought, that is, the “truth of Being.” However, murmuring behind, as it were, one can detect the voice of Heidegger interpreting himself, or, more precisely, “disclosing” the true matter that

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, trans. Ted Sadler (London: Athlone, 2000 [1919]), 10.

concerned him both personally and as a kind of herald announcing a new beginning for humanity. For *this* voice, the “truth of Being”—this is Precht’s central claim—is *nothing but Heidegger’s own teaching* (15, 17–18, 60, 187).

The simplest way of interpreting this devastating thesis seems to be this. Every time we read about the “truth” (or the “meaning”) of “Being” in Heidegger we should know that he means the “being” of his own philosophy. Precht knows very well that countless passages suggest otherwise. Thus, Heidegger expressly denies that there is such a thing as his “philosophy” or his “teaching.” This is partly due to the fact that the “matter” of his thought—as he presents it—is radically impersonal: he calls it, for example, “the meaningful” as “immediately given,” or the “event” (*Ereignis*), or the “there is” (*es gibt*), or movement (*kinesis*). All Heidegger does, it seems, is point to “existentiell possibilities” within this general ontological understanding—possibilities such as being “resolved” or “authentic” or “faithful.” Precht takes this to heart (e.g., 87), and yet he insists that there is much more in Heidegger that remains concealed (186–87).

To discover Heidegger’s philosophy (as distinguished from his teaching) one must first lift what he once called the “phenomenological disguise [*Verkleidung*]” covering his thought (293n30). One may then begin to see that, rather than practicing phenomenology, thus attending to the “self-disclosure” of beings, Heidegger ultimately sought the opposite, namely, to “appropriate” beings, and indeed to “master” the world (e.g., 17). His project was, accordingly, “political,” albeit in a rather peculiar and perverse sense.

Precht develops his argument in painstaking detail over hundreds of pages. Here I can follow only a few threads to try to highlight the audacity and originality of his approach, while also pointing to some limitations.

The book follows three main paths towards the “true intention” behind Heidegger’s work (cf. 295n44). First, Precht keeps track of what Heidegger wrote for close to half a century, noting strategic shifts in the meaning of key terms, together with a series of passages where the “systematic” intention of his work can be discerned (186–87). Second, he provides an incisive—and devastating—account of Heidegger’s political views on the basis of the latest research and source materials. Finally, he pieces together Heidegger’s words and deeds to reinterpret what genuinely concerned him, thus essentially reconstructing his oeuvre from a novel perspective. Throughout, Precht follows hints provided by scholars who knew Heidegger personally—notably, Emmanuel Levinas, Leo Strauss, and Karl Löwith—while also drawing on

Derrida's philological detective work. Excursions into the thought of Kant, Hegel, Rousseau, Lévi-Strauss, and other contemporary scholars open further horizons in this impressively rich book, which excellently displays the patient rumination of philosophical works practiced by Heinrich Meier's students.

Who, then, is Precht's Heidegger? It is tempting to respond that he was simply a contemptible human being, who was blind to anything that escaped his monological fixation on "Being." To judge by the evidence adduced in the book, Heidegger may well have been the most ignorant person ever to be counted among the great philosophers (e.g., 134, 300n71, 302n85). Seemingly knowing next to nothing about political institutions, economics, international relations, or other foundational matters (notably Jewish history and culture), Heidegger was also a sinister character. The evidence of his moral obtuseness is overwhelming. Most bizarrely, he claimed that the Shoah was an act of "self-destruction" by the Jewish people (230). He also believed that the suffering inflicted on the Germans during the war was even more extreme than the crimes committed by the Nazis (232, 311n142). However, the gravest crime was not inflicted on a country or people: apparently Heidegger believed that his own "insights" had suffered the worst fate insofar as they were not recognized. Somehow, he thought this was more "uncanny" than the concentration camps and the gas chambers (232–33).

Precht's aim is not simply to condemn Heidegger's conduct as evil or shameless or cowardly. Rather, he seeks to show how his disastrous political involvement was integral to the very "cause" (or "matter": *Sache*) of his philosophy (26).

Heidegger's main interest was to be recognized by future philosophers (18, 113). Since he also believed that all human beings could (and should) become philosophers, his quest for recognition extended to humanity as a whole (18, 23). These convictions gave rise to a unified project, which Precht calls a "philosophical politics" (23, 52). The key to this politics seems to be the decision (previously mentioned) to create a "purely philosophical space," that is, to determine philosophy's theme beyond any conceivable influence (cf. 55). Thus Heidegger decided to turn away from the world in order to appropriate it—and to exclude every other perspective on it (17). Staying in the provinces (both literally and figuratively), his putative "dialogues" with (for example) Japanese thinkers were really monologues, focused on the "*Sache des Denkens*," that is, on his own thought (38). He was singularly uninterested in how human beings actually live, despite all his talk of "being-in-the-world." Political care of the world was wholly alien to him. And he saw no point

in discussing the actual domination (or exploitation) of human beings that robbed them of the “authentic possibilities” he wrote so much about (60).

Similar charges have been made by Emmanuel Levinas and Günther Anders, among others. But no one, as far as I know, has gone as far as Precht in showing just how thoroughly Heidegger’s philosophy revolves around itself—and nothing else. Philosophy for him was not about understanding, or theorizing, or addressing fundamental human questions; it was about waking up from the “drowsiness” of our everyday existence, which he likened to the Platonic cave (e.g., 95). How this liberation may happen is a central question for Heidegger scholarship, usually addressed in terms of a passage—triggered by angst—from “inauthentic” to “authentic” existence, or from prephilosophic to philosophic understanding. On this conundrum, Precht provides extensive evidence that there is simply no such passage. Or rather, *if it exists*, it requires what Heidegger called a “violent laying hold and dragging out” of cave dwellers from their ordinary numbness (95, 111).

The key question here is what kind of liberation Heidegger has in mind. There is no doubt in *my* mind that reading Heidegger can be liberating and even edifying, as generations of readers from every continent can attest. If I understand Precht correctly, he may agree. Yet to read Heidegger for one’s own purposes—say, to sharpen our awareness of how “mortality makes us free,” or to find new layers of meaning in ancient authors—would be to miss what Heidegger really meant. This seems to be a key point for Precht. If we pay close attention to what Heidegger actually said over the decades, we will see just how much of it is “empty rambling” (10–11, 256). Indeed, this is also what Heidegger indicated: namely, the more radically a philosophy grounds itself, “the more purely it soars in turning about itself...press[ing] outward to the brink of nothingness.”²

Again, this is not a haphazard result, but the result of a decision Heidegger made. Philosophy had to create its own space without relying on inherited concepts (such as “reason” and “science”) or on borrowed problems (such as the human need for “worldviews” and for divine guidance). But in thus attempting to “disclose” a subject matter for philosophy that is ultimately *not* of this world—namely, Being as distinct from (actually existing) beings—Heidegger was bound to make philosophy circle about itself, becoming something like (bad) poetry. As he struggled to express “Being” in seemingly endless variations to arouse “the people” (*Volk*) out of their animal-like

² M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, trans. David F. Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 1:16.

“existence” (cf. 77)—and as he repeatedly failed to educate the youth to follow him (cf. 140)—he began to spew the monstrous claims described above, while completely surrendering his thought to Hitler’s cause (136).

The main lesson of Precht’s study seems to be the following. Heidegger made a radical decision to turn away from the world as it is experienced by ordinary men and women, that is, from the world of those who yearn for the right and the good, or who long for eternity, or who confront evil. This decision led him fatally astray. Blocking any other perspective on the world (beyond his own), he became wholly incapable of thinking politically and thus critically. Every attempt at a “self-grounding” philosophy that ignores the political dimension of human life is bound to fall prey (so to speak) to foreign powers, that is, to the “spirit of the times” or the prejudices of one’s milieu. By abstracting from the interests of humanity represented by the “class of philosophers” (Kant), Heidegger ultimately led his followers into a Platonic cave without an exit, and without a sun (cf. 267).

There is much else in this book that I cannot discuss here, including the central claim that Heidegger’s thought follows a hidden, systematic plan (186–87). Suffice it to say that anyone seriously interested in Heidegger will have to reckon with Precht’s careful and comprehensive study. The range of his approach covering philosophy, theology, politics, history, and poetry in virtually all of Heidegger’s writings (including secondary literature in many languages) is hard to surpass. As someone who has studied and taught Heidegger for several years, I must say that reading this work was disconcerting and even shocking, not least because of Precht’s discussion of the *Black Notebooks*, which were only recently published.

Precht’s critique is far more acute than that developed by Emmanuel Faye, according to which Heidegger’s philosophy is completely “contaminated” by his antisemitic and National Socialist convictions. Such claims, as Precht notes, end up denying that he had a “philosophy” worth discussing; more importantly perhaps, they also presuppose that there is such a thing as an “uncontaminated” philosophy, untouched by history and politics (cf. 25–26). By contrast, Precht attempts an immanent critique that shows how Heidegger’s dream of a self-grounding philosophy, which abstracts from the (human, political) world, reverted dialectically into its opposite, namely, a philosophy in the service of the most brutal regime in living memory.

George Steiner noted long ago that what crippled Heidegger’s humanity was his abstraction from the problem of evil, which in turn was rooted in a

renunciation of theology. Precht's argument seems to be analogous, while focusing more broadly on Heidegger's dismissal of the political dimension of human life. The great irony, of course, is that this dismissal was itself part of a political project to transform human existence on this earth. Whether Heidegger's thought as a whole—beginning with his 1915 dissertation! (cf. 86)—can be understood along these lines remains debatable. I am not convinced. As the author himself notes, the focus of Heidegger's early work is clearly aligned with the idea of science (85). This also suggests that his phenomenological analyses (and interpretations of ancient authors), which can be found in every stage of his thought, can hardly be dismissed as some kind of "disguise" or token "gesture" (*Geste*), unrelated to the core of his philosophy (cf. 103–6). But perhaps Heidegger did care little about practicing phenomenology or "mediative thinking." Perhaps his main "care" *was* to awaken us into recognizing his greatness while transforming our lives. The great merit of Precht's book is to have posed this problem in the starkest terms with the disquieting thesis that Heidegger's transformative project leads to a dead end.

Michael D. Breidenbach, *Our Dear-Bought Liberty: Catholics and Religious Toleration in Early America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021, 368 pp., \$45.00 (hardcover).

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The role of Catholics in shaping early American political thought is often overlooked. The practice of the Catholic faith was illegal most of the time in most of the British American colonies and nearly all of the Founders were Protestant. They were also heavily influenced by the ideas of Enlightenment thinkers, such as John Locke, who had little regard for Catholic thinking. The view that Catholics played at most an insignificant part in laying the foundations of American political life, therefore, long has seemed quite justifiable.

Michael Breidenbach's recent book asks us to seriously reconsider the common tale. True, Protestant and liberal ideas are crucially important to understanding America, but Breidenbach's history of American Catholics' "dear-bought liberty" shows the extent to which Catholic political thought, particularly among those influenced by French and English Jesuits, was not only consistent with the principles of the American Revolution and the US Constitution, but also did some of the intellectual heavy lifting to bring about their implementation. The principles of religious freedom enshrined in the First Amendment, for example, were anticipated by the toleration acts championed by George Claver and his son Cecil, the founders of Maryland. And it was the Catholic Daniel Carroll who joined the push at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 to ban religious tests for office. He was joined by his brother John Carroll, first Catholic bishop in the United States, and their second cousin Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the lone Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence, in defending the American constitutional order as largely consistent with Catholic doctrine.

As Breidenbach shows with great clarity, the Calverts' and Carrolls' defense of America was based on a conciliarist reading of the Church's magisterial authority. With roots in the thirteenth century, conciliarism predates the Protestant Reformation by nearly three centuries. Conciliarists held that the Church's Ecumenical Councils possess greater authority than papal teachings. Popes, conciliarists held, should be checked by a mixed constitutional order within the Church and their teaching power is limited to faith and morals, not temporal matters that are better dealt with by the reigning monarchs of nations. The Calverts, the Carrolls, and other Catholics in America accepted the conciliarist position while simultaneously aligning it with republican principles. Their comfort in America, then, was based not on tacit approval of Protestantism or liberalism, but on acceptance of Catholic conciliarism. They were indebted not to Calvin or Locke, but to John of Paris.

Briedenbach challenges at least two Catholic counter-narratives of the place of the Church in America. For some, the American Founding is quint-essentially Catholic, even if few recognized it at the time. Orestes Brownson, whose *The American Republic* is representative of this view, went so far as to suggest that America's mission was to revitalize the Church in the modern world. Others, however, hold that America's foundations are tied far too tightly to the ideology of liberalism for the Catholic Church to flourish in the United States. The doctrine of separation of church and state is seen in this view to be particularly pernicious, preventing a truly integrated society. For the first group, America cannot help but be Catholic; for the second, the American Founding must be rejected by Catholics as antithetical to the faith.

Breidenbach's history of Catholics in early America provides a much more nuanced and insightful treatment of the relationship between the American constitutional order and the Catholic faith as understood by prominent Catholics who took part in the Founding. The early chapters follow the efforts of the Calverts to establish an English colony in the New World that would tolerate Catholics. The Calverts had to walk a fine line between British law and Vatican decrees. The English were ready to accuse them of being traitors to the Crown while Ultramontane Catholics were critical of their opposition to the pope's power over temporal affairs. The trickiest business they faced was finding an oath of allegiance that would satisfy the demands of the law without violating the consciences of Catholics wishing to live in their new colony. Conciliarist thought proved a useful tool for moving forward. The Calverts' oath upheld royal prerogative over the affairs of state without committing allegiance to the Church of England. The religious toleration that was

opened by the unique oath of Maryland was later matched by the Maryland Toleration Act, which forbade the deliberate provoking of religious quarrels. Maryland thus “allowed [Anglo] Catholics to test arguments and arrangements about which other Catholics had theorized but that they were unable to implement fully in England” (42). And though these experiments were short-lived, they proved invaluable in helping the generation of Americans charged with building the new political edifice after the Revolution to do so with principles in favor of religious liberty.

As noted, among the members of the Founding generation are the Carrolls. The chapters of Breidenbach’s book that follow their careers are among the most penetrating exegeses of their thought to be found. Breidenbach chronicles their education at Saint Omer’s, a Jesuit college in France, which included heavy doses of conciliarist thinking that helped them make sense of their political circumstances. It simultaneously provided them with reasons to reject attempts at Parliamentary usurpation of colonial rights and papal claims to temporal power. Their education was among the finest that any American received in the mid-eighteenth century, and they were more than prepared to assist their Protestant brethren in responding to the escalating political tensions of the 1770s and the subsequent tasks of building a nation in the 1780s.

Among the highlights of the book is Breidenbach’s depiction of the debates in Congress over the language of what would become the First Amendment to the US Constitution. The proposal was James Madison’s but the account of the debates as recorded in the *Congressional Register* shows the leading role that Daniel Carroll played in supporting and defending the concept of religious freedom. In fact, Carroll’s efforts appear to be deliberately coordinated with Madison’s to preempt anticipated Anti-Federalist objections. This at least is the impression one gets from reading the *Congressional Register*, the author of which was Thomas Lloyd, a Catholic who had also attended school at Saint Omer’s. Breidenbach makes much of the fact that almost “all of what we know about the congressional debates, including the discussion of the First Amendment, comes from a Catholic” (181). That the Carrolls and Lloyd would support the two religious clauses of the amendment is not surprising. Having lived under an established church that was hostile to the practice of the Catholic faith, they had good reasons for supporting the Establishment Clause. Likewise, freedom from impediments to worship would have been attractive given the hostility that they had previously faced. The Catholic Church had much to gain from the First Amendment. And

American Catholics like the Carrolls and Lloyd saw this more clearly than many of their counterparts in Rome.

Reconciling the new situation of Catholics in the United States to promulgated policies of the Church of Rome fell on the shoulders of John Carroll, who quickly rose to a position of prominence after the Revolution. He both promoted the faith in his homeland and explained to Rome the delicate situation the Church faced in America. The potential for growth existed, but the way forward required a new approach. The persecution of heretics and schismatics would do little but confirm to Protestants the political ambitions of the Church. Carroll had to find a way to give the flock of the New World the full authenticity of the faith without being offensive to the republican presumptions of the people. Again, conciliarist ideas were helpful, but only to a point. Taken to an extreme, conciliarism undermines all apostolic authority. Carroll thus “sought a middle path between the radical periphery of conciliarist ecclesiology and the ultramontane vision of the Catholic Church” (201). This middle way proved effective. Rome agreed to create a diocese in the United States, the first to be established in a nonconfessional state since the Protestant Reformation. And Rome’s appointment of Carroll as the first bishop of the new See of Baltimore was made without any official recommendation of the United States government, though it did allow, as a one-time concession, the American clergy to elect Carroll. It was a happy coincidence that the clergy and Rome agreed on the desired outcome.

Breidenbach’s documentation of the Calverts and Carrolls in America is exceptional. The notes are full of primary source references, and one is left wondering why much of this material is not more widely known, such as the Maryland Toleration Act. The one disappointment in this regard, at least for me, is the relatively short shrift given to Suarez and Bellarmine, two Jesuit thinkers with whose works the Carrolls would have been familiar from their time at Saint Omer’s. They are mentioned in passing, but usually as foils for the conciliarist position. One gets the impression that the Carrolls would have rejected their ideas. My own reading of their works leads me to think that the Carrolls would have found much to like in the political thought of Suarez and Bellarmine. Indeed, the so-called middle path established by Bishop John Carroll seems to owe much to the relatively sober writings of the Spanish Scholastics. One can work out a case for religious toleration from their works that would not be as controversial as the more conciliarist positions.

But whether their debt is to Suarez and Bellarmine with the conciliarists or to the conciliarists alone, Breidenbach makes a strong case for showing that

the early American Catholics could celebrate the Revolution, Constitution, and First Amendment not in spite of their faith but because of it. Their arguments are drawn not from Protestant or liberal traditions, but from their own Catholic tradition. They made contributions, not concessions. Breidenbach has opened up a major channel for enlarging our understanding these contributions.

Hannes Kerber, *Die Aufklärung der Aufklärung: Lessing und die Herausforderung des Christentums*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2021, 286 pp., €34.00 (hardcover).

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Although the German writer, critic, and dramatist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781) occupies a major position in the canon of German literature, his philosophical significance is less frequently acknowledged. This is particularly true outside of Germany, since only very few authors took up suggestions, such as those by Leo Strauss and Karl Jaspers, that the study of Lessing could be of more than historical relevance. The diversity of literary forms which Lessing employed and the various constellations, from antiquarian research to theological controversies, in which he exercised his polemical talent can be intimidating. To understand them properly requires a lot of contextual knowledge about the relevant fields of knowledge in the eighteenth century as well as about their rhetorical practices. In addition, the fixed notions that ascribe to Lessing the status of one of the most important German *Aufklärer*—“enlighteners”—may well be misleading. For what makes Lessing relevant may in fact be what *distinguishes* him from the standard operating procedures of enlightenment thinking.

The study by Hannes Kerber, a careful analysis of key issues in the debate initiated by Lessing’s controversial publication of the so-called Wolfenbüttel fragments in the years from 1774 to 1778, takes up the challenge of clarifying how Lessing could be said to have served philosophy by defending theological (Protestant) orthodoxy. But before I sketch Kerber’s tightly knit argument, which is based on close readings of extremely subtle polemical interventions by Lessing, an all too brief summary of the relevant events seems to be in order.

After taking up his position as librarian at the ducal library of Wolfenbüttel, Lessing intensified his study of theology, which issued in the publication

of important texts such as the manuscript of Berengar of Tours, a medieval theologian, on the eucharist that he found in the library's holdings. When the well-known Hamburg professor and scholar Hermann Samuel Reimarus died in 1768, he left behind a lengthy manuscript of a book called *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes* (Apology or defense for the rational worshipers of God; first complete publication only in 1972). When Lessing gained access to this manuscript through Reimarus's children (the exact details of how he got to know the manuscript and the extent of his knowledge of it can no longer be reconstructed in a fully satisfactory way), he was in a rather comfortable position: the Duke of Brunswick had exempted him from censorship for all publications drawn from the library. Lessing, after failing to interest publishers like Friedrich Nicolai in printing Reimarus's clandestinely written book, was able to publish a first fragment of it while alleging that he had found it in the library and suggesting it could have been written by Johann Lorenz Schmidt, the famous Wolffian translator of the so-called Wertheim Bible (which had been the cause of one of the most important theological debates in eighteenth-century Germany). While the first fragment, published in 1774, dealt with the toleration of deists and did not receive a lot of attention, the second installment of fragments, dealing with more critical issues of revelation, immediately led to a widespread debate with numerous rebuttals addressed to both the author of the fragments, introduced by Lessing as "the Unnamed Man" (*der Ungenannte*), and to Lessing himself. The first response came from an otherwise obscure schoolmaster called Schumann, but the most persistent and polemical responses were penned by a Hamburg pastor, Johan Melchior Goeze (1717–1786), widely considered a prototypical representative of theological orthodoxy. But this is precisely an evaluation that Kerber duly presents as problematic, showing in the course of his argument that Goeze's version of orthodoxy had in fact moved away from positions once held by the theologians of the Reformation.

The whole quarrel concerning the "fragments" thus entails making sense not only of one man's writings, but of many, or of at least three, main contributors to the debate: Reimarus as the "Unknown Man," Lessing as a self-described "lover of theology, but not a theologian," and Goeze, the supposed "orthodoxist." The following key quotation highlights what is at stake here. Lessing suggests that the debate about Christianity has not yet been concluded:

It is not true that all the objections have already been stated. It is even less true that they have all been answered. A great many of them, at least, have been answered as deplorably as they were stated. To the superficiality and ridicule of the one side, the other has not

infrequently replied with pride and disdain. Great offence has been taken if one side has equated religion with superstition; but the other side has not scrupled to denounce doubt as irreligion, and belief in the sufficiency of reason as infamy. The one party has disparaged every clergyman as a scheming priest, while the other has disparaged every philosopher as an atheist. Thus each side has turned its adversary into a monster so that, if it cannot defeat him, it can pronounce him beyond the law.¹

This statement provoked Goeze to suggest that Lessing did in fact launch “indirect and direct hostile attacks” against Christianity; and this was seemingly implied in Lessing’s claim that so far there had been neither among the critics nor the apologists of religion anyone who had been attacking or defending Christianity in a way that was adequate to the matter at hand.

Kerber begins with a discussion of the intricacies of the so-called “proof of spirit and power” for revelation (chap. 1, “The Anamnesis of Apologetics”) and offers an extensive discussion of Lessing’s famous distinction between “accidental historical truths” and “necessary rational truths,” according to which the former can never become proofs for the latter (44). Schumann had objected to this argument by suggesting that Lessing thereby only wanted to force revealed religion to be judged by reason or philosophy.

The defense of Christianity against the criticism going back at least to Spinoza took a form encapsulated in the term *Evidenztheologie* (“evidentiary theology”). Whereas contemporary theology sought to support belief in revelation by putting forth certain proofs, including miracles, Lessing was well aware of the fact that earlier Protestant theology had done nothing of the kind. In fact, as Kerber shows, in an extremely subtle and sophisticated argument, Lessing pointed to what he regarded as the “last resort” of belief in revelation, namely the teaching of the *testimonium internum Spiritus sancti*, a teaching that can with equally good reason be regarded as the most secure and also as the weakest safeguard for revelation. Its strength consists in the inability of philosophy to refute its testimonial for revelation as long as theology keeps silent about it. As soon as theology begins to speak about it, however, it is in danger of laying itself open to attacks from philosophy. The question arises whether keeping silent had ever been a viable option for theology.

The second stage of the argument pertains to Lessing’s “restitution of orthodoxy,” whereas the third stage looks at the “reduction of theology.” Since

¹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, ed. and trans. Hugh Barr Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 63–64.

the debate could not be concluded in the form of a scholarly exchange—for the Duke of Brunswick had rescinded Lessing’s privilege of freedom from censorship and expressly forbidden any further publications on the issue without official permission—Lessing had to change tack if he wanted to continue his argument. He therefore reverted to his “old pulpit,” as he called it, namely, the theater, and proceeded to write *Nathan der Weise* as an “epilogue” to the debate.

The most complicated part of Lessing’s procedure may well be the restitution of the old orthodoxy, because it differs markedly from the then current orthodoxy prominently represented by the likes of Goeze. In fact, the Protestant theologian Goeze seems to have been unable to muster the necessary knowledge about church history to understand what Lessing’s point ultimately was. It should be stressed that not a few of Lessing’s contemporaries found it exceedingly difficult to follow his arguments, as they could not fathom the reason why Lessing argued in a more orthodox manner than the orthodoxy of his own day. This kind of irritation would persist through the long reception history of Lessing’s engagement with theology.

In addition to Lessing’s attempts at the restitution of an older form of orthodoxy, he even made use of a key concept derived from Catholic theologians, and especially the Fathers of the church. This was the *regula fidei*, a way of interpreting and presenting the Christian faith that pointed towards something beyond the Bible. The background for Lessing’s provocative move was politically complex. He not only had to keep in mind the legal situation concerning critiques of religion in the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation in which both Protestant and Catholic princes had their own interests at heart. He also had to counter Goeze’s very emphatically formulated notion that Christianity was firmly grounded on the Bible as the word of God in which every letter counted. Lessing, by contrast, was seemingly arguing from a Catholic position when he maintained that the church or Christianity could very well exist and live on even without the written word of God—the letter—that is, the Bible. For, as he argued, the church had already existed before the written texts of the canon, and for this very reason the notion that the spirit is the word, that the Bible is the foundation of Christianity, was untrue and untenable. Lessing thus attacked a principle that Goeze had to defend, namely, the verbal inspiration of the Bible. For on the basis of the dogma of verbal inspiration it was clear that historical Bible criticism in the manner of Spinoza could not be refuted. Only by firmly maintaining the notion of the inscrutability of God would it be

possible to defend revelation against the enlightenment versions of theology which tend to equate Christianity and reasonableness.

Lessing's position, in Kerber's thoughtful interpretation, is at the same time that of a philosopher and of a "lover of theology," not, however, that of a theologian. When Lessing musters his astonishing theological scholarship, he does so in order to strengthen belief against the enlightenment theologians' erroneous notion of theology as a foundational science of belief based on "evidence." Kerber has presented us with the most subtle reading yet of Lessing's contributions to the so-called *Fragmentenstreit*. And while following Lessing's attempts at the restitution of belief in the orthodox manner, Kerber has also offered us the most forceful restitution of Lessing as a philosopher since at least Leo Strauss's abortive attempts to write a book called *Eine Erinnerung an Lessing*.²

² See Leo Strauss, "Eine Erinnerung an Lessing," in *Philosophie und Gesetz: Frühe Schriften*, ed. Heinrich Meier with Wiebke Meier (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1997), 607–8.

Charlotte C. S. Thomas, *The Female Drama*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2020, 310 pp., \$35.00 (hardback).

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Charlotte Thomas sets out in *The Female Drama* to make the case that “the real power and relevance of the *Republic*...is always psychological” (274). The preliminary challenge of the dialogue Socrates recounts in the *Republic* is to persuade Glaucon that justice is truly good for the individual and worthy of any necessary sacrifice to ensure that he rejects the siren call of Thrasymachean justice, the argument that justice is only a word that the strong and ambitious use to manipulate and rule the weak for their own advantage. What matters in Thrasymachus’s worldview is power. Ultimately, Thomas contends, Socrates seeks to persuade Glaucon that it is knowledge of the idea of the good, external to the individual, that should serve as a standard for justice and the best life for the city and the individual. Thomas argues that when Socrates asks Glaucon to permit him to investigate justice in the city, the larger entity, first, and, then, find it by analogy in the smaller unit of the soul, Socrates very logically begins by addressing the male drama most pressing to the politically ambitious Glaucon and his companions in the *Republic*. The male drama is the political drama, the one in which the standard for justice is the proper ordering of the factions and classes that usually contend for power in any city, with the calculative rational element leading the spirited to rule the appetitive part of the city (33–40). In Book IV of the *Republic*, Socrates turns to draw the promised analogy to the soul to demonstrate that the moral efficiency and harmony of the just city has its parallel in the internal psychology of the individual when there is a harmony of the parts of the soul with logos or reason, which Thomas identifies as calculation, harnessing spiritedness to channel and manage appetite or desire in

each individual. This story is familiar to students of the *Republic*. Thomas's argument is, however, that the male drama, the political case for justice in the city and the soul, is preliminary, and fails to explain the real power and relevance of Socrates's argument for the good of justice, which occurs chiefly on the psychological level of the account, and of which Socrates hopes to persuade Glaucon, if not the other interlocutors. The narrative of the male drama of Books II–IV is sufficient, Thomas argues, for explaining the nature of justice for the city and the soul, but “it was insufficient for an inquiry into the nature of the best life for an individual (philosophy) or the ideal constitution (philosophic rule)” (188). The only truly good and hence fully just political arrangement for a city is the one that is governed by philosophers, who have the capacity to generate, nurture, and educate the philosophic soul, and hence perpetuate the good city. The city/soul model could in theory produce harmony or justice internal to the city and the soul but, Thomas argues, it could not train and educate the individuals who could “generate ideas external to oneself,” and thus be in a position to give an explanation of “the ideal constitution.” In other words, the just city in speech of Books II–IV does not generate and nurture the philosophers who have knowledge of the good and so could give an account of what makes the just city good and worthy of perpetuation (188).

In Books V–VII, Thomas contends, we move from the male or political drama to the female drama. It is the female drama, she argues, because in Book V, Socrates is compelled to address the way in which women and children will be incorporated into the just city, but chiefly because this introduction addresses “potentiality” (211), the genesis or creation of the just soul, how the just soul will come into being. The generative quality of the psychological level of the dialogue that the female drama represents is particularly important if the conditions necessary for the just city turn out to be unachievable. The proposals of Book V are often referred to as the three waves because Socrates contends each proposal would be met by a wave of laughter or resistance, each greater than the last, which would threaten to drown or destroy the proposal and hence to destroy the possibility of the just city in speech. The three waves are the necessary (waves 1 and 2) and sufficient (wave 3) conditions for producing this perfectly good and just city or soul. The three proposals address the characteristics in human nature that pose challenges to the achievement of the perfectly just city in speech. Thomas explains that the first wave suggests that if *logos* or reason cannot persuade the city that men and women should be equal and perform the same roles in the city, then the city will be unable to transcend the conventional morality

that imposes differences between women and men and manages erotic longing. The second wave proposes the improbable complete elimination of the private interests that cause faction and discord, in order to establish perfect unanimity with regard to the choices and priorities among the parts of the city. And when Glaucon, having agreed to the conditions of waves 1 and 2, demands that Socrates explain how this city can come into being, Socrates admits in the third proposal, or wave, that the only means for putting the just city into practice is through the unlikely rule of philosophers as kings. Only the philosophers could know and then rule with a view to the external idea of what is just and good for human beings. Thomas thus shows us that Socrates lets Glaucon down gently by offering the female drama as an alternative to perfect political justice. The female drama, as Thomas explains it, is ultimately the psychological story of the potentiality and becoming of the individual philosophic soul. It is the explanation on the level of the psychological that is necessary to explain to Glaucon that the good life, the truly just life he seeks, *is* available to him, if not as a ruler in the just city, then internally, as an individual, through philosophic training and education. Thus, it is not a matter of mere convenience that leads Socrates to introduce the model of the just city as a foundation for understanding the proper order of the just soul. Instead, Socrates intentionally builds the argument from the city to the individual to demonstrate the relationship between the male and the female drama. Thomas identifies the proposals of Books V–VII as the female drama because they show us that the just city can exist only when it dedicates every facet of its becoming and its being entirely to the genesis, training, and education of the philosophers whose reason will rule the passions of their own souls and regulate the appetites and spiritedness of the city in order to perpetuate it as a good regime in light of what is good *per se*.

In part 4, Thomas turns to describe why the education of the philosopher is central to the success of the project of the *Republic*. At the beginning of the dialogue, both Glaucon and Adeimantus believe that if they understand what justice is, they will be qualified to lead a good life and rule the city well. Thomas explains that Socrates articulates the images of the Sun, Divided Line, and Cave to show his interlocutors that there is a higher knowledge of the good itself, attainable through philosophic education, the ascent from imagination to belief, hypothesis, or theory, and finally to intelligibility, or what she calls “noetic insight,” that informs our standards for justice. And this education, Thomas argues, essentially requires the ascent from the conventional or political male drama through the three waves of the female drama, towards knowledge of truth and virtue. Theoretically, it is still the

case that this education must also inculcate a responsible condescension, the willingness to apply the highest understanding of the good achieved by the hypothetical philosopher kings to political rule of the just city. Given the improbability of such a perfectly just city ruled by the wise philosopher kings, however, Thomas concludes that the teaching might instead point us towards the possibility of the sort of philosophic friendship that summons, on the psychological level, those with philosophic potential to reach for knowledge and truth beyond the conventional teachings of any particular city or cave.

Thomas concludes her account of the power of the female drama with two arguments, one of contemporary relevance and one more permanent. The contemporary argument addresses the relevance of Socrates's psychological argument to the political. The truth is that we are more often than not left to contend in political life against the threatened tyranny of the one, the few, and even the many. Thomas suggests that in the absence of a regime governed by the philosophic nature—a highly unlikely prospect—Socrates might be pointing towards the possibility that the best political order is one that privileges the liberty of the individual, which gives those so inclined and educated sufficient space to pursue wisdom privately. Thomas explicitly identifies this option as libertarian. And it is certainly worth speculating whether in the predictable absence of the perfectly good and just political order, one that would recognize and allow wise human beings to rule, Socrates might have settled for the political order that allows the greatest degree of individual freedom of thought and study. In fact, when Socrates introduces democracy in Book VIII of the *Republic*, he concedes that it would be the “fairest” of the regimes; like “a many-colored cloak decorated in all hues,” it would contain all the different kinds of human dispositions (557c–d, Bloom translation). Perhaps such a regime would permit the philosopher to think freely and pursue wisdom. Of course, Athens did not ultimately allow Socrates such freedom. So, perhaps the life of the philosopher will always be most akin to Socrates's image in Book VI (496d–e), that is, the account of the small group of human beings who seek a place where they can lead quiet, just lives in pursuit of wisdom, away from the noise of politics and the city. This image is consistent with Thomas's final reflection that, in the end and regardless of the regime or the times, the *Republic* teaches its students the psychological lesson about how to follow a path that engages with philosophy, so that they can pursue the truest individual freedom and access the full diversity of ideas and knowledge available to human beings.

Let me conclude by saying what a pleasure it is to read Thomas's account of the *Republic*. Reading *The Female Drama* is like taking a small seminar course with the best of teachers, one who has thought through and taught the *Republic* repeatedly for years, as Charlotte Thomas has undoubtedly done. Her study works through the *Republic* in a way that is both familiar and challenging—a way that invites discussion, probably some disagreement about the details and arguments, but one that most of all aims to engage her readers in a conversation about the possibility of a philosophic life.

Michael Platt, *Mighty Opposites: Machiavelli and Shakespeare Match Wits*. Privately published, 2021, 118 pp., \$20.00 (paper).

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What if playwrights Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) and William Shakespeare (1564–1616) had met, corresponded, even conversed, thanks to the Florentine’s acquisition of the Makropulos Elixir, mixed by the court alchemist of Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II—a potion imagined by still another playwright, Karel Čapek (1890–1938), granting those who drink it a long-extended life? And what if Shakespeare wrote an unfinished dialogue based on the encounter, completed by his fellow player and trusted friend, Nicholas Tooley? (After all, did not a promising young Plato scholar named Seth Benardete once muse, “Shakespeare could have written dialogues,” to the delight of his teacher, Leo Strauss?) Michael Platt has imagined it so, bringing together “the founder of modern political philosophy” with “the greatest modern poet” in a book animated by the question, can there be a Christian prince?

The year is 1598. Machiavelli is secretary of state for the “Right, Risen, Roman Republic,” having inspired the unification of northern Italy under a regime that has built itself into a naval power in the Mediterranean. He is on a diplomatic mission in England, perhaps to counter Spain, which still controls the Kingdom of Naples. Always looking to enlist “new captains in his unarmed army,” he also seeks an alliance with Shakespeare, whose writings surpass Machiavelli’s own works (Machiavelli admits to himself) in beauty. “In spiritual warfare nothing is more effectual,” and in his declared war on the regnant form of spirituality, Christianity, “the greatest calumny on life,” Machiavelli can use all the allies he can get. Having read Shakespeare’s Roman plays, he detects, or supposes he detects, a potential officer.

Shakespeare replies to Machiavelli's self-written letter of introduction, pleased with the Florentine's flattering but true observation that Shakespeare writes both tragedy and comedy. He invites Machiavelli to attend performances of his *Richard III* and his three plays on Henry VI. He also recommends that Machiavelli read and reread them.

In due course, Machiavelli replies, observing that the English plays complement the Roman plays, with their shared themes of honor and calumny, the violence of political founding, and civil disorder. He is quick to spot a new source of controversy in modern England, "the new division of Christianity" between Catholics and Protestants. He criticizes monarchic regimes because they are dynastic: since "most families are awful to grow up in," "why give rule of public things to a family," which only "magnifies vices more than virtues"? It may be that he brings these themes together, with an eye on the "family" seen in the Trinity. "I do see, howbeit faintly, the coming of a better regime," as the English people exhibit the capacity to discern virtue in their rulers and demand justice when those rulers commit crimes. "Would that their common sense were instituted in a stronger Commons, and if a ruling circle sprang up in it."

Shakespeare concurs with some of this. "How could I not study disorder? After all, there is so much of it. And it is always waiting to rush in. All it takes is one generation to lose the good times, and then slide on to worse," although "in the worst of times, when all seems lost, a rebound occurs," often beginning, as Machiavelli hopes, "with the people." As to Shakespeare's downplaying of Parliament, he calls Machiavelli's attention to the theater in which he puts on his plays. It "give[s] the audience the experience of an ideal Parliament in eternal session, in which all the important features of a political situation, together with their connection to everything above and below politics, are brought into speech, so that deliberation about the nation, sometimes even about the world, goes on in the mind of the audience, as it should in Parliament, in the Privy Council, in the Monarch, and in the soul of every English man facing his public choices"—more than only a Parliament but a mixed regime, consisting of both aristocrats and commoners, "all drawn together in our Theatre, and by my theatre, all made into one audience, all laughing, weeping, trembling, cheering together, and accordingly understanding," in what is now nearly a modern commercial "nation-state." He concludes by wondering if, even with a commercial way of life, men "can live together who do not worship together, as Jew and Christian do not, or at least look up to something beautiful and lofty together?" Where Machiavelli

envied the beauty of Shakespeare's literary style, his art, Shakespeare himself considers beauty in nature, and perhaps in God.

In their next exchange of letters, Machiavelli begins by condemning the conspicuously Christian Henry VI, who "wishes to be loved not feared" and is rewarded only with contempt. Indeed, on further consideration, Machiavelli concludes that Henry wants to be loved only by God, remaining indifferent to the love, the hate, and even the contempt of his fellow men, a ruler who "puts himself above politics" even to the extent of restoring titles and estates to his dynastic enemy, Richard Plantagenet. Unfitted for war, Henry never played sports, practiced with weapons, or learned horsemanship; for Machiavelli, "horse" means warfare and, given Richard's famous battlefield cry, "My kingdom for a horse!"—a line that will reappear for further discussion later—Machiavelli is rehearsing his theme from *The Prince*, that princes of war must replace princes of peace. With "reviling relish," Machiavelli lists Henry's many "sins of political omission," from his failure to defend his (few) political friends (especially his failure to protect his Lord Protector, Duke Humphrey) to his failure as a royal husband to punish his foreign-born queen for her infidelity. "All these omissions add up to omitting to rule," to leaving rule of human things to the wisdom and power of God and His providence.

Shakespeare largely concurs with this analysis, while cautioning against taking it too far. "I have qualified our contempt" for Henry. He may not know horses, "but, surprise, he knows hawking," a sport that figures in his comedy *The Taming of the Shrew*, in which "my hawker Petruchio gentles a mature wild female, named Kate, and with the same means" a falconer would use, "deprivation of sleep and meat." Moreover, Henry "never had the benefit of a father," only "the image of his great father," Henry V—"in everyone's mind for comparison"—and a "nefarious uncle" as his tutor. The "ever-widening span" between young Henry's "sight and his might makes him something like a Fool in court," seeing and saying things impermissible to others but unable to act, "or even to take care of himself." Rulers do need toughness—"not all the anointment in Christendom can change a soul never born to rule"—but Henry does have compassion for his people, and this is what leads to his "one political success," his quelling of a popular rebellion "through clemency and through the recollection of his father." Shakespeare adds, tellingly, "No wonder you missed it; clemency is not a trick of the fox." More, we see that while Machiavelli blames Henry's incapacity on Christianity, Shakespeare attributes that incapacity to the king's nature. This allows Shakespeare to judge him with clemency, as Machiavelli does not and will not.

That last rapier thrust induces Machiavelli to pull back, offering a qualification of his own. "Not that too much vice is virtuous," he cautions, criticizing Henry's queen, Margaret, for her excessive "spirit of revenge." After all, "murder must have a purpose," a political purpose; "she is all fury, no cunning." But here, too, Shakespeare points to a certain subtlety Machiavelli overlooks. Margaret is "not all revenge." When Henry banishes her lover, "we see some tenderness in her, howsoever adulterous," and when her son is stabbed in front of her, "we feel as she feels," never having "expected to suffer with her." "Often that happens in my works. Suddenly someone who could have hardened into a profile, even a cartoon, shows another side or feature, or a downright about-face. As you get to know human beings that happens. As you get to know yourself, that happens." Platt follows Shakespeare's lead here, even as he has Shakespeare deliver that lesson; just when it seemed that the exchange between the two men might turn into a simple battle of wits, he has Shakespeare offer the childless older man some fatherly advice.

There is a larger moral and political problem that Machiavelli also does not see. If Duke Humphrey attempted to overthrow Henry, "as his wife and you urge," he would no longer be himself, no longer "the man we rightly... think most fit of all the magnates to be a king." That is, "he would lose his eligibility in our eyes, and as important, his worthiness in his own eyes." As Plato's Socrates argues, "the same virtue that makes a man best for an office excludes him," the one "most worthy to rule, the philosopher, is least interested in doing so." A ruler by the apparently natural but actually conventional right of heredity may therefore be preferable to the ruler by the natural right of virtue. After all, so many persons suppose themselves naturally fitter to rule than whoever it is that wears the crown. To make partly invisible, counterfeitable virtue the criterion for ruling in practice would be to invite endless civil disorder. Better that the wise man advise the king, serve as Lord Protector, guarding him against such enemies as Humphrey's ambitious wife and the ever-conniving Cardinal Winchester. "It is ambition within bound and in service of the good that is to be lauded, not the over-reaching acquisitiveness you urge in recommending Humphrey seize the Crown, or the infinity of it you desire. That way madness in the soul lies, and chaos in the state."

After Richard Plantagenet's son Edward kills Henry's capable son, also named Edward, on the battlefield, and his ally Gloucester murders Henry (by then Edward's prisoner in the Tower of London), England is left with a king whose sexual desires lead him into an injudicious marriage. Machiavelli sniffs, "The lust of Edward IV unfitted him to be a prince." More politic

choices had been available. Upon reading this, Shakespeare thinks, “Though in your *Prince* you warn not to touch the women, in your plays you teach every man to ‘touch’ all he can.” For you, Machiavelli, “neither fortune nor woman can resist man,” but in the world you envision there can be no stable families to uphold the city. “Families start with sight not touch, with the ardent looks of the young, of Romeo and Juliet.” “Machiavelli in love, impossible.” And so Machiavelli makes the first genuinely political relationship, the reciprocal rule of husband and wife, also impossible. If Machiavelli were ever to watch *Romeo and Juliet*, “I’m afraid he’d set himself to teach one lover to murder the other, and thus effectually prove that love does not, cannot exist, just as he would prove ideal republics are no guide to better states, and even no measure of extant ones.”

Shakespeare keeps most of these thoughts to himself. In his answering letter, he contents himself with making a different remark, one aimed at moderating his correspondent’s claims. “One consequence of the free will my characters manage to exercise...is that others cannot predict it; even the sagacity of the sage is limited by that reality; that’s a hard fact those who are proud of penetrating hard things do not like to acknowledge.” The news of his Lord Protector’s death first makes King Henry faint. But then his realization of his unintentional responsibility for that death “fills him, for once, with spirit,” a possibility neither his enemies nor the play’s audience anticipate. “My characters are always doing something a bit ‘out of character,’ very much like the men and women I know, like myself.” His point to Machiavelli: conscience does not invariably make cowards of us all. Sometimes it makes some of us courageous. “A sense of guilt is not always a disadvantage, and its absence not always an advantage.” Character matters, but it is not quite fate. Equally, the attempt to conquer fate, Fortuna, to satisfy an unlimited desire to acquire by somehow getting “behind” one’s character, manipulating it, “using” one’s virtues and vices, makes too much of freedom.

Shakespeare thus agrees that Henry and Edward are no fit kings, although for different reasons. What of the tyrant who succeeds them, Edward’s father, Richard III? Machiavelli applauds. “In these *Histories* so far, I most esteem this man most,” he exclaims, with redundant emphasis. “I positively exult in Richard’s politic employment of Christian scripture and sentiments,” seen in his seduction of Lady Anne, widow of Henry’s son—“right beside her husband’s coffin,” no less. Machiavelli delights in Richard’s “witty expression” of his prideful contempt for his inferiors, phrases Shakespeare turns that are even better than his own clever formulations in *The Prince*. Still, he faults

Richard for being a bit too open in his blasphemies, a mistake symptomatic of an overall lack of prudence. What is more, “other than gaining the crown, he has no purpose, no plan.” In this, his anti-Christian stance apes the Christian’s inclination to gaze at the lilies of the field, which neither toil nor spin because the joys of the day suffice to him who expects still greater, permanent joys in eternity, needing no plan for that future time, already prepared for him by his Savior. By contrast, Machiavelli does have a plan. While hoping to rid the world of the “moderns” or Christians while radically revising the teachings of the “ancients,” Machiavelli himself would take care to salvage pieces of ancient wisdom, including prudential wisdom, even as he directs them to purposes the ancients did not regard.

Shakespeare takes up the theme of the ancients—specifically, the Romans. “Between us, I do not see Rome, either republic or empire, as wholly superior to our modern Christendom.” Because “the deepest desire of a Roman is to become a statue of himself,” Rome undertook the monumental task of world conquest. Having achieved this, Julius Caesar did indeed “achieve a statuesque immortality.” But “in becoming a god” he lost his humanity. To “despise human life” leads to a reduction of the man to a slab of granite or, if still living, a beast. Caesar’s idolatrous divinity contrasts with Christ’s everlasting life, whereby God became human, died, but continued to live and even to rule. Why is this not the superior ideal?

Ideal it may be, but is it true? Machiavelli replies that the reasoning behind the Earl of Warwick’s autopsy of Duke Humphrey, proving that the Lord Protector was murdered (2 *Henry VI* 3.2.168ff.), should be extended to consideration of claims based on “the body of Christ allegedly crucified and allegedly risen from the dead.” Christians point to miraculous stigmata on their hands, where painters depict nails driven into Jesus’s hands, attaching Him to the Cross. But “only nails through the wrists will hold a body to a cross—unless you believe in miracles. So much for all later stigmata! I and Leonardo know if anatomy were queen of the sciences there would be no theology.” Morally, too, Christianity hangs on dubious assumptions. “What a terrible idea, of a God who would punish whole innocent generations for the deeds of their grandfathers, but this God does not exist.” Fortuna, on the other hand, “hard but not interested in retribution,” shows that men “need princes not saviors,” as “men punish themselves” with their crimes of ignorance and the mental weakness induced by false religion. Shakespeare, Machiavelli confidently or perhaps wishfully asserts, rightly teaches the English to “abhor infamy, dare to reason, and be a man.”

“You say things that other men do not say, only do,” Shakespeare observes. Yet what you say is only “part of knowledge.” “Sometimes, even in politics, men do good things, and sometimes, if rarely, they aspire, even in political life, to the lofty good above them, and thus deserve to be remembered, as Good Duke Humphrey, a statesman though he failed, should be.” Your *Prince* amounts to “the unintended exhibition of your noble soul,” inasmuch as “you aspire to lasting glory, but you do not know yourself”: “I see all your desires in strife, the desire to know the truth, the desire to effect something, and the desire to win immortal fame, all there struggling in you.” Reread your own book, and if by that “you come to understand yourself, you would soon be able to order yourself.”

As for the way you would order the world, into large, centralized states, this too will lead to human self-contradiction. Before Henry VIII and his successful instantiation of your kind of state in England, a rich man gave to a poor man out of charity, a poor man felt gratitude in return. Now, “those taxed to provide will always feel it is too much, and the poor receiving it will feel it is too little”; with such “resentment in both and humiliation of the receiving poor,” will not your strong state weaken? When Machiavelli pointedly ignores this “challenge to self-examination,” he indignantly writes that the teacher of evil lives on, all right, but in the malign effects of his teachings. Scoundrels “will cite your authority for their low crimes, their base betrayals, and even their savage atrocities.” Exercising his own virtue of prudence, however, he decides to wait for a better opportunity to engage Machiavelli at his core, so to speak, “perhaps face to face, on a visit to Stratford.”

He instead more cautiously writes to “suggest that much escapes you.” In “grasping for the effectual,” you blind yourself to “noble failures, and complain of fortune, yours and Cesare Borgia’s and you do not know who to marry”—a theme of the *Odyssey*—“and I doubt you know how to die”—a theme of the *Iliad*. That is, although Machiavelli writes comedies, tragedies and epics remain beyond his reach. And even his most famous comedy, *Mandragola*, is “devoid of merriment,” more smutty than funny.

One of the things Machiavelli admits has escaped him is the reason why crafty Richard III lost his crown so soon after he took it. Shakespeare explains. Having murdered the two young princes in the Tower, Richard seeks an heir; hence his intention to marry Edward’s widow. He can conceive only of a father who will guard his heir, perpetuate his family on the throne, not one who might risk his son for the good of his country. But this is what his enemy, Lord Stanley, does, “risk[ing] his own son for the greater good of

England,” as “one of those Romans you admire” would do. Richard dies in the battle that ensues.

More profoundly, Richard fails as a man. “Feared not loved you say. Well, the truth is Richard like every man wishes to be loved.” But “he finds he cannot love himself, only fear himself.” He grew up “with everyone around him, including his mother, interpreting his shape”—his hunchback—as “a mark of God and expecting evil of him, until he does too.” Despite his ridicule of Christianity, he “swears by St. Paul five or six times,” a sign of misery beneath the mockery. He “thinks himself unloved by God, brought into existence to do evil, to be God’s scourge and minister, and yet notwithstanding, damned for being so, damned from birth exactly as some Protestants hold omniscient God to providentially rule this world, electing few, damning the many.” You, Machiavelli, “share his hatred of God, but not how it began in him. He thought God hated him. He hated God for that” and came to “hate himself.” In his last battle “he was seeking death, as an end to his wretched life.” Is your life any less miserable, Machiavelli?

But to send such a letter would be to go too far, too soon. Shakespeare “sends only a trim draft of the letter he’s rushed into.”

In his reply, Machiavelli denies that he recognizes no noble failures. “I recognized Cesare Borgia.” “His failure to unite Italy, at least Northern Italy and Rome, and drive out the barbarians, was the noblest failure of modern times.” It is this failure that I now seek to expunge, as secretary of state of the Right, Re-Risen Roman Republic. As for the devotees of the Risen God, “No fools are more senseless than those who burn with Christian piety; they make no distinction between friend and foe, allow themselves to be deceived, and ignore injuries; they shudder at pleasure, actually find it in fasts, vigils, penances, scourges, and ordeals; in short, they shrink from life, and prefer death. This is insane.” I admire your works, Will, because I find “no good Christians in them,” except for Henry VI, “an utter disaster.” “He who would not hurt a fly, destroys a kingdom.” As for Richard, his pangs of conscience do indeed bring him down, and that is precisely the problem. If he hates himself, who is responsible for that other than his God? Or rather himself, for believing in that God. “Christianity is the cause of a tyranny as never before on earth,” of tyrants who “must hate every well-formed human being and even hate human life itself. No previous tyrants, wicked as their deeds were, ever did so.” The ancients knew nature; the Christians deny it and in that denial ruin everything they touch.

Shakespeare continues to find Machiavelli's interpretation of his plays too narrow. It is as if Machiavelli were a latter-day Xenophon, but one who never wrote Socratic dialogues. "Xenophon knew Socrates, Xenophon looked up to Socrates. You're no Xenophon." If you were, you would see that Richard's restless night before his last battle, when he is visited in his dreams by the ghosts of all those he's murdered, amounts to "a Socratic self-examination." Machiavelli does not imagine "how a poet might oppose tyranny, working from within, getting the tyrant to confess his misery," as I hope to do "in a play about the Scottish usurper Macbeth." Steeling himself to murder the king, Macbeth will tell himself, "To do this deed, I must not know myself." Do you, Machiavelli, in your intention to murder God, really know yourself? "In hating God you are in some danger of hating the good." If you have concluded from reading *Richard III* that I therein prove the lethality of Christian belief, wait until you have read my second English history tetralogy, the one in which I portray Henry IV, Henry V, and Falstaff. I send you the manuscripts and I also invite you to "resume our conversation, but face to face, in Stratford."

Upon receiving the manuscript, Machiavelli is only the more convinced that he needs to enlist "this vivacious English captain to my cause." Had Henry V "lived only ten years more," he writes, "his reputation would have been glorified by additional conquests, his realm enlarged, his hold on it firmer, his son better educated, and the prospect of his son's rule fairer." Henry's very statements against my teachings and my disciples merely indicate his adherence to those teachings and his status among my disciples, since "those who declare themselves Machiavels have not understood the first thing about my teaching." He is happy to accept Shakespeare's invitation to dine.

In their dialogue over dinner, speaking of the second Henriad, Machiavelli continues his complaints about Christianity. When Shakespeare observes that Richard II is the only king in his Histories to compare himself to Christ, Machiavelli replies, again, that that is exactly the problem with him. "Christ was no ruler. All he teaches is how to lose and then be pitiful, passionate, and poetical about it." This is true of Richard, Shakespeare agrees, "but the question who should rule is not as deep or as deeply engaging as how should we die and dying, live"—the question addressed by Jesus in His crucifixion and resurrection. In his attempt to come to terms with that issue, Richard wins and deserves the audience's sympathy. Having effectively dismissed both Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection as myths, and so passionately that he never notices that the question of death remains real even if Jesus is not, Machiavelli ignores this argument and continues to speak about ruling. In

ruling, “only effectual truths yield benefits,” not poetic images. Richard’s belated Christian maunderings leave the English no choice but to side with Henry Bolingbroke, the future Henry IV, who replaces the Plantagenet line with his own.

He does it by what Shakespeare calls “the deliberately accidental murder of Richard,” an act “inseparable from the justice of the monarchy,” even as Elizabeth I’s beheading of Mary Queen of Scots was inseparable from the justice of her monarchy. Although Richard himself posed no threat to the new dynasty, his adherents did. There are “two goods” which must “be held together, justice and peace,” and “two principles that all rulers must keep together, and all monarchs must keep together, namely, inheritance and virtue.” Shakespeare disagrees with Machiavelli in denying that legitimacy and the authority it lends to power serve merely as covering for power, a fraud that veils force. “Some will remember the piteous and yet desirable passing of the Crown” from Richard to Henry “as an impeachment and removal, some will remember it as an abdication that left the throne unoccupied, and others will remember it as a simple gift from one cousin to another, but all will remember that Richard did participate in it. And that makes it somewhat legitimate and will somewhat obstruct any later claims of wrongful usurpation. Ceremonies matter. One might even call them effectual.” As for Richard’s murder, whereas Machiavelli considers Henry responsible for it (the new king complained about the former king in front of a courtier who took the complaint as a command issued in the form of a hint), Shakespeare reminds him that Henry does not “admire himself [for his cousin’s death], as you do him.”

This brings them to the next, great, Henry. They agree that while spirited Hotspur is a lion, sly Falstaff a fox, Prince Hal is both. By (as Shakespeare puts it, in Machiavelli’s phrase) using the lion and the fox, Hal proves himself the true prince. Yet Shakespeare sees virtues rather than *virtù* in this: “prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice.” That “smells of Socrates,” Machiavelli sneers, the man whose imagining of republics disabled him from founding a real one. “I hope you don’t carry hemlock with you” to our dinner, Shakespeare replies, in mock alarm. Machiavelli zeroes in: Your Henry is not “quite enough of a lion and a fox. He was not cruel enough.” Had he allowed his father to be killed on the battlefield instead of rescuing him, Prince Hal could have been king five years earlier, “started for France five years earlier,” and then, having conquered and absorbed it, set out for Italy, uniting Europe and ruining the papacy for good.

No, Shakespeare replies. “I can hear” Henry V replying to such a suggestion: “What, are we turned Turk, that for our advantage we would see our fathers murdered by our committing omission?” Indeed we should, Machiavelli insists, “for greatness.” No, again, Shakespeare’s Henry answers: “We doubt that greatness comes without some goodness. We know that it does not come from such evil.” Seeing his father in deadly peril, he defends him without hesitation, rightly winning his father’s confidence in his loyalty, at least in the aftermath of the moment. Then and subsequently, Prince Hal proves he can “wait to become king,” although his father begins to doubt it. “Son Hal knows his father better than father *Henry IV* knows him, his own son.” But this makes your second Henry IV play a bit boring, Machiavelli complains. You are right, Shakespeare concedes. The play is about tired old age, undramatic but natural, a condition sons must eventually deal with, as they consider their fathers. Prince Hal will not force nature.

Machiavelli (and his true English captain, Francis Bacon) would. They look for physical means of prolonging physical life—Bacon with his experiments involving the refrigeration of chickens, Machiavelli with his Makropulos potion. Machiavelli tempts Shakespeare by offering him a dose, which Shakespeare declines, saying, “Life would not be better without death. Truly, it would no longer be life.” Perpetual life is what would be tiresome. Machiavelli seems not to appreciate the implications of his own atheism; he denies the God Who offers eternal life while still yearning for such a life. To Machiavelli’s temptation, Shakespeare effectively answers with a counter-temptation: Have the courage of your own convictions, if those really are your own convictions.

The dialogue ends with a consideration of Henry V, a man who overcame temptations. Shakespeare cites Henry’s first soliloquy, which begins with the claim, “I know you all”—Falstaff, Poins, and the rest of his drinking buddies (*1 Henry IV*, 1.2.188–209). This is “plain truth not juvenile excuses.” Henry has “learn[ed] nothing from Falstaff”; he spent time with him because he was biding his own time, waiting to enter the public realm with *éclat*. Indeed, the marshall of France and Welsh Fluellen “have some inkling of what Henry of England is up to.” And Henry knows something even they, even Machiavelli himself, do not: that “the spirit of the men” wins wars, a spirit animated “not so much by their fear of the prince, but their love of him.” To be sure, like founding, war means blood; there will be winners and losers, and that is not simply a matter of power but of the good in the real world, wherein “seeking some good always sacrifices some other.” If “the beautiful, the true and the

good seldom coincide,” then Machiavelli’s attempted use of Shakespeare as a means of lending beauty to his ugly (half) truth amounts to a highly unlikely project, even if, perhaps especially if, Shakespeare were to play along with it.

“Yes,” Machiavelli remarks, “we need to talk of good war, not just war.” Henry, Shakespeare explains, wants to retake France not as a means of reuniting the shards of the Roman Empire but to avoid the evil of civil war in England by redirecting the thoughts and actions of England’s restive aristocrats overseas and to render his foot soldiers obedient. Machiavelli claims that that, too, is Machiavellian, but Shakespeare rejoins that civil war is an evil greatly to be avoided, and that steadying troops “in the face of a fearful adversary”—a danger he faces with them—hardly qualifies as cynicism. Neither “poetic and deluded like Richard II,” nor “malicious and deluded like Richard III,” nor “provoked by injustice like his father, nor by love of fame like Hotspur” (nor, one might add, love of sack like Falstaff), and above all not by acquisition, like you, Machiavelli; Henry’s only possible motivation is duty.

In that case, Machiavelli says, “I don’t understand him.” “Not even Socrates might,” Shakespeare suggests, because Socrates associates political life with convention, mere opinion, which potential philosophers ought to put their strength into overcoming in rational ascent from those borrowed lights. “According to Socrates there is no reason for a philosopher to rule,” and no obligation, either. “To become who you are, you had to fight all opinions.” But Henry is no “ancient,” any more than he is a “modern” in Machiavelli’s sense. “He is the inheritor of a potent model of nobility, one unknown to the ancients, princes and philosophers, of the highest serving the low, of an immortal who not only seeks the good of mortals, like Prometheus, but who suffers for them, even unto joining them in death.”

Machiavelli does not like the sound of that. It sounds like Christ to him, and Shakespeare readily admits it, and with a proto-Nietzschean turn, at that. “Though Christ refused to rule, and even seemed to leave ruling to the Caesars, still he provided a pattern for rulers. Let them be Caesars, but Caesars with something of the soul of suffering Christ.” Ready to sacrifice themselves for the good of their people. Henry is “the greatest man of deeds I can imagine”; “though I love others more, I admire none more than him”—a “great Prince, which we are not, and what is more, he was a greater man” superior to me not in writing, in wit, or in thinking but in the “single-minded active pursuit of the good.”

Shakespeare thus denies Machiavelli's central claim about Christianity, that it unfits men for rule. Shakespeare claims instead that Christianity can make politics better and politicians more effective. Against this, Machiavelli has one last temptation up his antitheological sleeve. "Shakespeare, you are a great prince, but of shadows. You could be one of nations, peoples, and states, indeed the world." "No, it is not for me," Shakespeare quickly answers. It is not my nature. Unlike Henry VI, Shakespeare can choose what to do with his life. No royal inheritance burdens him. He bears only a natural inheritance, to which he intends to give full scope. He has chosen a life of inquiry undertaken through observing men and women and writing plays about them. Many of those persons say not only true and false things but true things at odds with one another. In this, his plays resemble the Gospel: "Everyone who arrives sure of something will find something to keep him sure," as Machiavelli has done, but "only by being alert to contrary truths, might you ever later make your way to unity" by "wrestl[ing] like Jacob with the angel." In the Gospel, "Christ himself is responsible for his bounty and the difficulty arising from it," with some aphorisms saying one thing—"it is harder for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle" to get into heaven—and others saying the opposite—become like a trusting child, and you will be on the way there. Jesus leaves it to His listeners to bring such things together. Jesus poses His own version of the Socratic challenge to undertake philosophizing. To pose such difficulties to his audience is Shakespeare's vocation, his *imitatio Christi*.

Shakespeare has withheld something from the manuscript of *Henry V* he gave Machiavelli to read. It is Henry's prayer on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt, where he prays first to "the God of Battles" to "steel my soldiers' hearts" but then to the Lord, asking forgiveness for his father's part in Richard II's death ("I have built / Two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests / Sing still for Richard's soul" [*Henry V*, 4.1.285–301]). Reading this, Machiavelli storms out, "losing forever the chance not only to enjoy lofty things, but from that coign of vantage, come to know all the low things, which he thought he already knew."

Matthew Linck, *Wakefulness and World: An Invitation to Philosophy*.
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In *Wakefulness and World: An Invitation to Philosophy*, Matthew Linck provides chapter-length engagements of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel. Each chapter could serve well as a stand-alone introduction to the philosopher whose work it engages, but the chapters also build on one another to tell the counterintuitive story that the intelligibility of the world, while seemingly obvious at first glance, is not so obvious at first thought, and perhaps not even on second thought. And yet, while the book's thesis poses serious questions about the supposed obviousness of the world's intelligibility, Linck does not take the reader on an obscurantist's journey. Questions arise because reasoning leads to them logically, and reasoning answers these questions as reason is able, understanding that these answers may lead to the posing of further questions. In this way the book reads like a detective story, with the protagonist moving from one clue to the next, because while each clue does not contain the fullness of truth that is sought—and so the pursuit must continue—nonetheless each clue has sufficient significance to point one toward the ultimate sought-after end, an understanding of the intelligibility of the world. Indeed, this book could be used as a treatment for misology, as the inquiry modeled in this book is that of one who wants to know truth, and who also knows how to pursue it, because one is a lover of wisdom.

Reading *Wakefulness and World* gives one the experience of taking an independent study with a master teacher. Focusing for a moment on its form, this book is “about” how to read primary sources and how to philosophize. The first chapter starts *in media res*, with the author acting as a guide bringing the reader quickly up to speed, briefly summarizing a bit of Socrates's and

Glaucon's discussion at the midpoint of Plato's *Republic* (1). Immediately following this opening summary, Linck's authorial voice switches seamlessly to that of a fellow companion on a shared intellectual journey: "Let's listen in to their next bit of conversation" (1). For the rest of the chapter, Linck succeeds in moving back and forth between the two modes fairly seamlessly. (He does something similar in the subsequent chapters on Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel, *mutatis mutandis*, as the other philosophers did not write in dialogue form.) The overall effect is teacherly in the best sense, where the reader has the sensation of thinking along with the author as he is simultaneously being guided.

Turning attention to the book's content—assuming (mistakenly but conveniently) for the moment it can be cleanly separated from the book's form—Linck explains high-level concepts and arguments from all the thinkers he engages in a clear, conversational style, relatively free of jargon, while avoiding oversimplification and maintaining a high degree of precision and rigor. In Linck's own concluding summarizing terms: chapter 1 engaging Plato, "Wakefulness," is about "the apprehension of intelligible forms" and "the waking to eidetic sight"; chapter 2 engaging Aristotle, "World," is about "the delineation of the determinate world" and "the deepening of worldly intelligibility in the quest for principles"; chapter 3 engaging Kant, "Sum," is about "the experience of counting" and the unfolding of mathematical thought into the grounds of conscious experience"; and chapter 4 engaging Hegel, "Thought/Being," is about "common sense" and "the overcoming of common sense" (173).

In addition to its other virtues, chapter 1 serves as a kind of corrective or apologetic against reductionist and anti-Platonist strains typical in much of philosophy today. A number of common errors in reading and interpretation plague not only the generally educated reader of Plato, but also, tragically, many trained philosophers and philosophy professors who presumably should know better. One error is to attribute to Plato everything that the character Socrates says in Plato's dialogues. This error is so ubiquitous as to have a name: "the mouthpiece fallacy." Another error is for a reader to engage Plato not directly, but through a secondhand invention—like one of the so-called Platonic theories ("Plato's theory of ideas," "Plato's theory of recollection," etc.)—and then form the impression that one "knows what Plato thinks." Such impressions often make a reader incapable of fruitfully reading a Platonic dialogue (if one ever gets around to doing so). Never mind the fact that most of these so-called Platonic theories are actually Neoplatonic

theories being used anachronistically¹ (though at some level understandably) to reduce the complex cluster of philosophical activity, arguments, and claims present in any given Platonic dialogue down to a ready-at-hand “theory.”

Linck commits none of these fallacies. On the contrary, he models how one *should* engage Plato’s dialogues without reductionism and yet with brevity and clarity. He manages to penetrate quickly to the heart of pivotal themes, claims, and arguments from Plato’s dialogues, and he does so without warping or inaccurately glossing the original material. With tact, and perhaps even invisibly to the neophyte, he even manages to call to task philosophers who think that argumentatively establishing or denying the existence of the forms is the most appropriate initial, persistent, and final response to Glaucon’s² first mentioning them. Linck is sympathetic to the reasonableness of such a response, saying “the presumption that there *are* forms to begin with” is something that “we would want to question” (3). But that is a fish to fry for another time. Linck makes clear that the conversation between Socrates and Glaucon, at this point, is really about something else, namely, what to do or conclude in the light of forms being a given. They are a starting point, not a bone of contention. The philosopher is someone who sees forms, and delights in the seeing (2). This is the *definition* of a philosopher (4). Linck summarizes the point as follows: “Understood in this way, philosophy is not premised on proving that there are forms. Philosophy begins with seeing the forms” (4).

Chapter 2, focusing on Aristotle, is just as careful, edifying, and delightful as the chapter on Plato. Linck walks through select passages from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and *Physics* to describe what the world is and what things are in the world by focusing on “nature,” without relying on—and thus, without having to spend time clarifying the meaning of—most of the other typical Aristotelian jargon of substance, accident, actuality, potentiality, and so forth. Part of his method in explaining Aristotle’s account of nature is juxtaposing it with a “fable” Descartes describes in his *Le monde* (51–52). In the Cartesian fable, nature is construed to be “both the moving matter and the laws which such motions obey”; but because of this, “if the world is an aggregate

¹ An anachronistic interpretation is not necessarily an unhelpful one, or even an inaccurate one. Nor is it necessarily the case that Plotinus is mistaken in any given claim he may make, as far as it goes. Nevertheless, neither is it necessarily the case that Plato means all and only what Plotinus says he learned from Plato, nor that Plato is doing all and only what Plotinus thinks Plato is doing in writing his dialogues.

² Linck takes care to note that it is not Socrates, but rather “Glaucon” who “is the first person to utter the word [‘form,’ *eidōs*] in the *Republic* and he uses it in this sense [as ‘indicating a class or kind of thing’]” (2).

of colliding bodies, there can be no conception of a principle of rest” (52). On the other hand, in Aristotle’s account, “nature is not understood here [192b21–23] as the totality of moving things (and their laws). Rather, nature here is distinct from the things that move and rest. Nature is what is responsible for their motion and rest” (53). Motion and rest are defined in terms of becoming and fully being, respectively. “The motions that begin in the acorn and the egg come to rest in the active lives of an oak tree and a sparrow” (55). When the oak tree grows or the sparrow flies, what Descartes calls instances of motion, Aristotle instead calls aspects of the activity of being an oak tree or sparrow, because “to be a sparrow means to act—to live—in certain ways. Such activity—activity as the being of a certain (kind of) thing—must be distinguished from motion” (54).

Once more Linck is to be lauded for avoiding ham-fisted and misleading characterizations of a thinker and his work. He does not portray Aristotle as a hard-nosed empiricist protesting the rationalist idealism of his teacher Plato (a common cliché which does disservice to both Aristotle and Plato). When concluding his discussion of being and nature, after recapitulating the differences between artifacts and living beings (88), Linck points out that forms have appeared once again in the course of our inquiry, that “the turn to forms is a second beginning for the philosopher,” and that “this second beginning is the first beginning played in a different key” (89). Because Linck does not advert to facile reflections on similarities or differences between the philosophers he is engaging, he succeeds in writing chapters that can be read as stand-alone treatments that also build on one another when read together.

Linck’s treatment of Kant in chapter 3 is a slight departure from his usual mode of explanation, only insofar as he utilizes (and thus must spend time explaining) Kantian jargon, but Linck is aware of this anomaly, stating later in the introduction to his glossary that Kant is an “outlier...who makes extensive use of philosophical terms inherited from his predecessors” (177). Otherwise the method and approach is the same: engaging a passage from a primary text, considering it carefully, reasoning about it methodically but in a conversational style. This chapter begins with a quotation from Kant about the simple act of counting on one’s fingers (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B15–16), and the bulk of the chapter is taken up with explaining how the possibility of such a simple action relies on *intuition* and *concepts*, and involves necessity (91–92). This chapter, along with the next on Hegel, contains dense argumentation that may strike the more casual reader as discursions that are sometimes harder to follow, but Linck is aware of this, and attempts to assuage

this difficulty with frequent section breaks, with reviews and reminders of covered ground, and, in chapter 4, with narrative reversions—or attempted reversions—to “common sense.” At one point he writes: “Maybe, though, the problem is with us. Maybe we shouldn’t be asking these questions. Maybe the questions themselves create the illusion of a problem about giving a true explanation of knowing” (144). Such comments encourage the reader to persist in places where many readers are probably posing those very questions to themselves. Again, Linck’s teacherly manner is apparent, and appreciated.

Before I began reading *Wakefulness and World*, based on the publisher summary I thought the book might be a good text for an introductory philosophy course. After reading the prefatory pages, that expectation shifted into a higher gear; I thought it might be a good book for sharing with people who want to know what philosophy is, or to demonstrate to friends what it is that philosophers do. Once I had finished the book, I had become convinced that this is a book for audiences of nearly every level of philosophical training—from beginners to specialists—as well as for those with no training at all. To speak to its pedagogical virtues for a moment, being edified by the book myself I saw that its potential uses go beyond introductory courses. I assigned it as one of the texts for a junior-level metaphysics course last semester, for example, and it served well.

When interviewed and asked why the book was subtitled *An Invitation to Philosophy* rather than *An Introduction to Philosophy*, Linck said, “I wanted to avoid the term ‘introduction’ because usually the books that have that heading lay out the fundamental concepts, the basic areas of inquiry that philosophy delves into, and I wasn’t doing that. I didn’t want to do that. Instead, it’s an invitation to participate in the activity of philosophizing and reading philosophical books.”³ From my reading and use, and from what I have seen among my students, Linck’s book accomplishes its desired end.

³ <https://www.sjc.edu/news/tutors-talk-books-matthew-linck-his-new-book-wakefulness-and-world>.

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