

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Recent Catholic Philosophy: The Twentieth Century.* By Alan Vincelette. Pp. 447, Milwaukee, WI, Marquette University Press, 2011, \$42.00.

This volume accompanies a similar one by the author on Catholic philosophy in the nineteenth century [reviewed in *HJ* 52 (1), 151-2]. In between the Introduction and Conclusion (both very brief) there are seven chapters. These deal with phenomenology, neo-Thomism, transcendental Thomism, personalism, existentialism, analytical philosophy, and post-modernism. In each chapter the work of three representative thinkers is examined, in each case preceded by short biographies. The focus is on Western European and North American thought and topics treated include metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and the philosophy of religion. The phenomenologists here are Edith Stein, Dietrich Von Hildebrand and Enrique Dussel. The neo-Thomists are Étienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain and Karol Wojtyła [John Paul II]. The transcendental Thomists are Pierre Rousselot, Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan. The personalists are Ferdinand Ebner, Emmanuel Mounier and Maurice Nédoncelle. The existentialists are Louis Lavelle, Gabriel Marcel and Xavier Zubiri. The analytical philosophers are Elizabeth Anscombe, Charles Taylor and Francis Jacques. The postmodernists are Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Yves Lacoste and William Desmond. The Introduction provides readers with the percentage of Catholic philosophers who worked in each category. Twelve focal principles of Catholic philosophy are summarised in the Conclusion.

Each chapter traces the principal sources of and the major influences exerted by the philosophers under scrutiny and an indication of the schools of thought associated with their work. The information provided is accessible to those quite unfamiliar with the thinkers, with clear categorisation, helpful translations, judicious quotations and exemplary summaries. There are extensive notes (160 pages of these) which offer further clarification and commentary and exhaustive bibliographies for each person whose work is analysed. These bibliographies, while being intimidatingly lengthy, facilitate follow-up research and should prove invaluable for scholars and more advanced level students.

This book provides valuable support for university and seminary courses in Catholic philosophy. However, as a tool in aid of learning, there were some features that I would have hoped to see provided, even if these were at the cost of reducing the number of philosophers examined and cutting back on the bibliographies and notes. If the book is to be used as more than an encyclopaedia to dip into to find information, it would have helped coherence if there had been a set of questions that were consistently posed in relation to the thinkers under review. As a support for classroom study, it would also be useful to include criteria for assessment, interpretative keys, attempts to draw out similarities and differences between thinkers, and if bridges had been constructed between the ideas that are so succinctly presented and the daily lives of students and other readers. Some pages appear dense and unattractive with the text broken up by too many references or very long lists of (sometimes relatively obscure) thinkers (e.g., pp.297 - 304; 308 - 310; 332 - 333). I am not convinced that students need to be given the names and dates of hundreds of twentieth century Thomists from many different countries.

Despite these limitations, this book constitutes a valuable guide for university students and it also serves as a helpful research tool for scholars. Each reader will have their own preferences with regard to the philosophers presented, depending on their past reading and their current interests. I particularly enjoyed and was stimulated by Vincelette's analyses of three French writers. Lavelle (1883 - 1951) has some wonderful insights on vocation, self-realisation and responsible action. One is quoted by Vincelette: 'The whole art of living consists in preventing our intermittent good impulses from going to waste and withering away. We must take hold of them, set them to work, and make them bear fruit' (p.149). Jacques (1934 -) is illuminating on three poles of communication and how these contribute to relationship and identity: 'locution (utterance) - 1) speaking to others while calling myself an 'I'; 2) allocution - being spoken to by others as a 'you'; and 3) delocution - being spoken about by others as a 'him' or 'her' (p.207).

event', as understood by these thinkers, is precisely that which escapes the principle of sufficient reason, and therefore escapes ontotheology. When VDH claims that 'contingency is the secret of the event' (17) he means that the event evades the principle of sufficient reason. So, even if these philosophers overly privilege the event, ontologies of the event nonetheless provide us with a model of ontology without ontotheology.

In any case, following his introduction, VDH's work begins in earnest with a succession of readings of the above named philosophers. Insofar as VDH is dealing with so many thinkers, I won't attempt to summarize his discussion of each one separately; instead, I will content myself with some general remarks. Not surprisingly, VDH's approach to each thinker is guided by his account of ontology without ontotheology and each reading endeavors to show that Badiou, Romano, whoever, offers a different iteration on the theme. Along the way there are also comparisons between the figures, as when he contrasts Badiou's reading of Plato with that of Nancy. Indeed, Plato – and to a lesser extent Aristotle – is a constant presence in the book. The historical conversation that VDH engages in is one of the highlights of this book both for its own sake and insofar as it serves as a reminder that the attempt to do ontology without ontotheology is in constant dialogue with the 'ontotheological' tradition of Western metaphysics.

The above summary suggests three questions that any evaluation of the book should address. First, is VDH's presentation of ontotheology accurate? Second, is his reading of each philosopher accurate? Third, is his argument for the claim that contingency is the secret of the event plausible; must we equate a sufficient reason with a necessary one, or in other words, could not one adduce sufficient reason for a contingent event? I will leave those questions for the reader to answer on their own: each question opens up a barrel of monkeys that could not be contained in a brief book review. This is to VDH's credit: any disagreements one may want to register with his readings and analysis would be sufficiently technical that airing them would require more space than a review allows.

*Barbarism*. By Michel Henry, translated by Scott Davidson. Pp. xxviii, 148, London/NY, Continuum, 2012, £13.89.

'We are entering into barbarism' is the first line of Michel Henry's incisive critique of late modern culture recently translated into English, entitled simply as *Barbarism*. The book itself reads more like a manifesto, both in size and tone, than a rig-

Overall, the book is successful in prosecuting VDH's major thesis, and introduces a helpful way of thinking about the philosophers with which he is concerned. That said, one should not assume that the chapters in this book could function as summaries or introduction to the philosophers they address. The arguments and readings are much too subtle for that purpose and VDH's goals go far beyond the provision of an introductory survey of contemporary philosophy. Whence, the book is both expository and argumentative.

While the book succeeds admirably at what it attempts to do, throughout my reading of the text, I found myself wondering what was at stake in ontology after onto-theology. Both Badiou and Agamben supplement their work in ontology with political philosophy, broadly construed. Likewise, Romano offers a reconfigured notion of subjectivity that is, presumably, more amicable to religious experience than the autonomous subject of modern onto-theology. Does VDH's critique of Badiou's ontology suggest lines for a critique of his political works? Likewise, what is the relationship between Agamben's account of the event and his project for a genealogy of western politics? Does Romano's new notion of subjectivity have any practical implications? To be sure, it is churlish to chide a work on ontology for not addressing questions only tangential to the topic, but at the same time, addressing these questions might help the reader see why these fairly arcane topics are worth disputing at all. The last chapter, entitled 'An Ethos of Contingency,' suggested that these questions, or similar ones, might be addressed but it doesn't quite do that; instead it admirably summarizes the results and veers into an interesting reading of Plato's myth of Er. The reading of the myth of Er is, as I said, interesting, as are the accounts of Plato strewn throughout the book. If VDH had organized his text slightly differently, around the different readings of Plato offered by the philosophers in question, it might have had a wider readership. In any case, specialists in continental metaphysics will profit from a careful study of this book.

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orous academic treatise. But those familiar with Henry's many publications will find much here to enjoy. What is typical of every theme Henry takes up is his uncompromising critique of naturalism, biologism, mechanistic metaphysics and modern

technology, each of which designates one of the ever novel avatars of what Henry names the ‘Galilean apriori’ (i.e. Galileo’s scientific revolution). *La barbarie*, first released in 1987, is a timely translation because it continues to resonate with us today. In Henry’s mind nothing has really changed since 1987, except that the pernicious discourse of the ‘science of mastery and conquest’ that lives within the the environs of the event of modernity has continued to give increase to technology’s dehumanizing power; science is more capable now than ever of permitting technology the capacity to reduce the human being to a thing—this he indicates in a 2000 preface to the second edition. With every year that passes, his book is ever more relevant, indeed.

The adjective ‘apocalyptic’ can best capture the essence of Henry’s project in this slim volume of some 130 pages. Among the many apocalyptic theologies that enjoy a wider readership, from Moltmann to Balthasar to Caputo and Derrida, the version found in *La barbarie* is decidedly more condemnatory of the present age, and its idols of technology and science. Even television comes under the knife of Henry’s sharp and critical analysis (it is sophistry; even often ‘idiotic,’ which is a rather generous translation of the French word *null*, p.141). Henry’s work will, of course, enter into explicit theological terrain in the 1990s, and so the reader shall have to wait a few years to see how the Johannine apocalypse is on full display there, in Henry’s impressive theological vision of the ‘world.’

But here, under the way of life that is the crisis of Galilean modernity, what is at stake is the living ‘underground’ each of us possesses as our innermost essence. The underground force each of us feels when it tugs at our hearts from deep within, even though we cannot see it, is our subjectivity: my feeling of myself as I crush against myself, all the while never being able to escape myself in that auto-affectation. This inner disclosure of myself to myself is invisible, nocturnal and thus, as the conclusion indicates, is an indestructible, if incognito, feeling of life that gives rise to any cultural accomplishment at all, whether it is art, religion, economics, media or scientific discovery itself.

But modernity is a menace to humanity precisely because it seeks to eliminate the subjectivity of the subject. It is for this very reason that the revolution of science ‘is also a revolution of the human being’ insofar as it eliminates humanity therein (p. 2). Henry’s project is ambitious because it is both a critique of contemporary incarnations of barbarism and a genealogy of its inception; it is none other than Galileo himself who is chiefly responsible for the age of science, for we inhabit a world that is

thoroughly in his shadow. This is especially true of the university, an institution to which Henry devotes the last chapter, where the ‘destruction of the university’ continues in proportion to the degree science, and especially technology, are prioritized at the expense of the acquisition of knowledge carried out in the idiom of the humanities. But just as important was the effort on the part of university Presidents and administration to reduce the role of the professor by increasing his hours (workload), to suppress his voice in university councils and to hire unqualified professors; above all, the destruction of the university comes at the hands of administrators who burden faculty with too many work hours and course loads, so now many faculty now have no time to think and write (p. 124). And the humanities themselves are dissolving into sub-topics of scientific analysis; the worst case is that of philosophy, in which it is being replaced slowly but surely by scientific psychology and positivism (p. 131).

The principally disastrous problem of science, outlined most basically in chapter 3, is that it detaches the objective from the subjective. Take the analysis of colours. Scientific method aims to look at colours entirely apart from the subjective experience of them. The sense of ‘red,’ from the perspective of science, descends into the complex web of material processes and causation theory. What science accomplishes, therefore, is the now *de rigueur* reduction of all knowledge to the objective sphere, to the neglect of the subjective life in which all knowledge is in fact rooted. This scientific process belongs to the more basic process of abstraction. Hence, ‘the scientific attempt to reduce the lifeworld to a world of idealities and physical-mathematical abstractions is based on the prior illusion that the sensible properties of the world are its own and belong to it and that, since colour is in nature and not in the mind, its natural being can be grasped by a more refined analysis than that of perception, by a physical analysis’ (p. 40). There are thus two worlds: the lifeworld of my subjectivity and the world of science that belongs wholly to the sphere of objectivity. The two never meet, for the subject is the unthematizable transcendental foundation for the latter. But the crisis of modernity is that it does away with this duality in that it privileges the latter at the utter expense of the former. This is the ‘sickness of life’ insofar as life sometimes succumbs to self-contradiction; it gives birth to that which tries to eliminate it (pp. 60-3).

Henry would like to drive the world of science back to its source, the subjectivity of the lifeworld, whereas science would like to proceed from the lifeworld to its own world of objective analysis

and neutral knowledge—and with that movement abandon the lifeworld altogether. This is the ideology barbarism, and the two great ideologies are the materialisms of Freud and Marx (pp. 90-3). Of further interest to the reader, in this regard, is Henry's constant retrieval of the 'growth' and 'praxis' of the subjective ground of the body that lies outside of all naturalistic materialism. Too often the ideologies of barbarism reduce the body to its various parts and molecular structures. But the body, for Henry, is never void of a basic drive or feeling (here Nietzsche and Descartes' work on the pas-

sions of the soul would be in the background, not least Husserl's emphasis on flesh, *Leib*). This expression, *Corpsappropriation* is translated by Scott Davidson as 'Bodily-ownness,' which is smooth enough for a difficult French conception of the subjective body that Henry prioritizes (especially in chapter 2). There is much to learn here from Henry and the book should be read by philosophers and theologians alike, especially as Henry's reputation continues to grow in Anglophone destinations.

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*Between the Canon and the Messiah: The Structure of Faith in Contemporary Continental Thought.* By Colby Dickinson. Pp. 266, London: Bloomsbury, 2013, \$37.95.

Despite what the title suggests, the book is about neither the canon nor the Messiah but about abstract and formal structures of *canonicity* and the *messianic*. The key phrase of the book's title is found in the subtitle: 'The Structure of Faith in Contemporary Continental Thought.' One should not expect to find detailed discussions of competing canons (e.g. Septuagint vs Masoretic canons) or how these canons influence (or were influenced by) understandings of who is – or isn't – the Messiah. Our author tells us that his goal is to articulate the 'oscillation between normative, institutional structures of tradition [the canonic] and those accompanying forces that seek to undo their dominant narrative [the messianic]' (2). While not true of all philosophers working in the continental tradition, it seems fairly uncontroversial to say that variations on this theme (i.e. the interruption of totalizing structures – be they metaphysical, epistemic, political or what have you—by something that undermines, overcomes or escapes them) have animated continental philosophy since Kierkegaard sat down to critique Hegel. Indeed, resistance to totalizing structures is perhaps the default position of continental philosophy: once you are on the look-out for this theme, you find versions of it all over the place. This text is particularly helpful as an exposition of how this general theme develops in the work of scholars and topics of contemporary interest: Agamben, Assmann, Benjamin, Butler, Derrida, Ricoeur, Scholem, and Taubes.

The book is divided into two parts, with two chapters in each part; the body of the text is framed by a general introduction and conclusion. The first part is entitled 'Between Theology and Philosophy'; the second part is entitled 'The Radical Hermeneutics of Theology.' In general, the first part is concerned with showing how some concepts generally thought of as being theological (messian-

ism, for example) migrated into philosophy or vice versa. This is a story with a long history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the names Löwith and Blumenberg should suffice to indicate what I have in mind) that our author doesn't discuss; the reader can decide for themselves the merits of this omission. The second part seeks to develop a 'radical hermeneutics' that would answer some questions raised by this kind of political theology. Here we are introduced to the work of Jan Assmann and given a more detailed reading of Walter Benjamin. As part two develops, Judith Butler and Paul Ricoeur are added to the mix.

The first chapter of the book introduces the central concepts of the canonic and the messianic through a discussion of Jacob Taube's account of St. Paul's antinomianism. From there, the author moves to a discussion of first Derrida and then Agamben. Not surprisingly, he finds that major parts of Derrida's thought can be described in terms of the interruption of canonic by the messianic. Over all, the reading of Derrida on offer here doesn't break new ground: while presenting the major outlines of Derrida's thinking on the relevant points, it doesn't dig deep or offer much in the way of a new reading of Derrida. When our author turns to Agamben, however, things get a little more interesting. If for Derrida there are only representations, nothing outside the text, Agamben argues for the possibility of experiencing a presence beyond representation (84). While referring to this as an 'irresolvable tension' between Derrida and Agamben, I don't think that this phrasing does full justice to the seriousness of the disagreement; Agamben's position can easily be interpreted as lapsing into exactly the kind of metaphysics of presence Derrida spent his career critiquing. This is less a tension than it is an exclusive disjunction: they cannot both be right. The tension between