

Church's ambitious book succeeds along several metrics. First, although the notion of the liberal individual as a historical construct rather than a natural fact is not news, thanks to thinkers like Michel Foucault and Marx, Church's schematic is helpful, challenging the tired assumptions of both Hobbesian and neo-Kantian liberalism while avoiding the occasionally aimless deconstructions of poststructuralism. Second, while Hegel and Nietzsche share a continental philosophical tradition—and while attempts to marshal Hegel and Nietzsche, individually, in defense of liberal democracy are not new—Church's efforts to depict them not as antagonists but as brothers-in-arms in a common project to rescue the individual is a novel contribution both to continental political thought and to democratic/liberal theory. Finally, Church's full-throated defense of the individual even in an anti-foundational and antiessentialist—and, according to some, antihuman—age is appreciated. That he manages to wage his campaign, articulating an individualism compatible with Nietzsche's (and our own) postfoundationalism, without resorting to the cynical irony of theorists like Rorty is admirable.

Nonetheless, certain questions remain unanswered in the book. First, although Church can convince readers that Hegel is not an unabashed statist and that Nietzsche avoids crass individualism, the consensus between the two thinkers that emerges from these interpretations is rather thin. The terms of the consensus especially manage to weaken Nietzsche's ethical project. In short, liberalism can certainly profit from the notion that certain "communal practices" are essential for individual flourishing. But in his effort to sublimate Nietzsche's explicit departure from Hegel, Church does not sufficiently elaborate what these institutions and practices might look like. Yet when Church does offer specific prescriptions—most notably when outlining Hegel's taste for mediating institutions like guilds and unions—he does not differentiate these proposals from similar ones made by a rich tradition of thinkers, often in much greater detail, that *also* remained explicitly comfortable with liberalism. If thinkers like Tocqueville are willing to embrace liberalism and associational life along with a rich account of the goods both yield, why is it necessary to enlist the theoretical support of two thinkers whose allegiance to liberalism is dubious at best? If Church's project aimed merely to show how Hegel and Nietzsche are actually misunderstood advocates of liberal individualism, it would be completely successful. In his ambition to prove that these thinkers offer unique contributions to liberalism, however, he neglects to differentiate them from other liberals who have trod this ground before. Most significantly, his "dependent variable" is unclear. It is obvious that Church defends both liberalism and individualism. But while the book begins as a defense of the individual, the relationship between these two

goods becomes increasingly complicated as Church commences his interpretation of Nietzsche. Is it the case that liberalism yields authentic self-creation, or is it self-creation that yields liberalism? In other words, is the good toward which Church orients himself individualism or liberalism?

Ultimately, the author confronts the same challenge that faces other projects with his ambitious scope. It may be that he set before himself an impossible task. It is difficult not only to negotiate a detente between two philosophical antagonists, not only to show that two purported antagonists of liberalism are in fact among its most promising advocates, but also to attempt reconciliation between the goods of the individual and the common good in a way that satisfies both parties and renders both essential preconditions for the other. Just as many of the tensions between Nietzsche and Hegel remain richly unresolved, Church succeeds in demonstrating that political life in the West retains its vibrancy through the unending navigation of the tension between individual and community. Conversely, he shows that both liberalism and the autonomous individual are fragile gifts, subject to the whims of history. He thereby shows that contemporary liberals ought to exert the utmost effort to preserve the communal conditions necessary for individual flourishing. Perhaps this message, after all, is something first articulated in German. As such, although scholars interested in Nietzsche, Hegel, and continental thought in general will naturally find this erudite book worthwhile, it will be read most profitably by those who, like Tocqueville, are concerned for the fate of the individual in an illiberal age.

**Arts of the Political: New Openings for the Left.** By Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013. 240p. \$79.95 cloth, \$22.95 paper.

**In the Spirit of Critique: Thinking Politically in the Dialectical Tradition.** By Andrew J. Douglas. Albany: SUNY Press, 2013. 183p. \$80.  
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— Nicholas Tampio, *Fordham University*

What is it going to take to make the Left a vibrant political force again? On the one hand, the Left still feels the aftershocks of the collapse of the Soviet Union and affiliated regimes. Few leftists yearn for another Lenin or vanguard political party. On the other hand, advanced industrial democracies may be entering a new Gilded Age where 1% of the population owns more than 70% of the total wealth. Many people resent the situation whereby some people are born to rags and others are born to riches. How is it possible to channel that resentment in a positive direction, to create a more just and egalitarian

future? In *In the Spirit of Critique*, Andrew J. Douglas proposes the cultivation of a critical ethos that draws upon the dialectical tradition; in *Arts of the Political*, Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift suggest that leftists should use institutions to turn progressive ideals into public policy. Read together, these books bring into stark relief the Left's current dilemma whether to emphasize either democracy or technocracy.

*In the Spirit of Critique* provides a masterful overview of the dialectical tradition that runs from Kant and Hegel through Marx and up to Sartre, Theodor Adorno, and the Trinidadian Marxist C. L. R. James. On one definition, the dialectical tradition offers a teleological account of the ways in which historical clashes lead to the individual and communal realization of autonomy. And yet this account of the dialectic seems discredited, both by the fact that a communist revolution did not happen in many advanced industrial societies and that where a revolution did occur, autonomy did not blossom. Douglas seeks to recover a chastened conception of the dialectic. Human beings face many struggles in life, and dialectical thinking "emerges as part of a theoretical account, both descriptive and diagnostic, of our human effort to move through the world and to carve out a more self-satisfying and sustainable existence" (p. 4). The dialectic does not need to be a key to unlock history's mystery to give clarity and purpose to our struggles. Whereas the early dialecticians had a comic sensibility, confident that history would justify all suffering and strife, Douglas' twentieth-century protagonists were more attuned to the tragic dimension of the dialectic, where moments of grief need acknowledging and there is little confidence in all of society's contradictions being sublated (*Aufhebung*).

How can the dialectical tradition sustain the critical imagination today? The bulk of *In the Spirit of Critique* is an explication of Sartre's, Adorno's, and James's answers to that question. According to Sartre, the dialectical tradition spotlights the irreducible conflicts in modern societies. Sartre's contribution to that tradition is to explain that the dialectical tradition cannot overcome the tragedies of lived experience. His conception of the "milieu of scarcity" demands "an inspired and sustained attentiveness to the material and psychic constraints that often delimit the very possibilities we may imagine" (p. 62). According to Adorno, the power of the dialectic is that it offers an account of transcendence that inspires our fight for autonomy even when capitalistic norms penetrate our lives. Douglas shows that Adorno's redemptive criticism weaves theological motifs into a materialist critique of society. The hero of the book, arguably, is James, who translates and tempers dialectical claims to empower working-class people, specifically but not exclusively African Americans. For James, dialectical thinking is an "ethos of reflective engagement, a way of 'sharpening' our instinctive

frustrations into politically incisive contradictions that as such can help move the struggle for autonomy in a practical way" (p. 13). One of the key themes for each author is that the dialectical tradition is rhetorical as much as philosophical, that it provides an inspiring narrative as much as a social scientific framework.

How much of the dialectical tradition survives, however, if leftists view it as a just-so story rather than an objective account of history's movement? Douglas shows how Sartre, Adorno, and James temper the dialectical tradition, or chastise the grandiose claims sometimes made by Hegel or Marx, but Douglas does not elaborate why leftists should situate themselves in this tradition in the first place. If the "Lord and Bondsman" chapter in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is just a yarn, why should leftists not promote more accessible and motivating stories of human struggle and empowerment, such as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*? In the last paragraph of his book, Douglas states: "[U]ltimately for our purposes a fuller and more affirmative vision of a renewed political would require a conversation with a different cadre of interlocutors" (p. 117). Critical theorists who need an energy boost in dark times should look forward to this next project.

*Arts of the Political* makes a more direct contribution to the debate over how to rejuvenate the Left. Amin and Thrift assign leftists three activities for achieving the same kinds of successes as those of the nineteenth-century American progressives, British feminists, German Marxists, and Swedish social democrats: 1) Formulate inspiring visions that recast the Left's historical commitment to contest oppression and achieve justice. 2) Embrace the task of working within institutions. And 3) acknowledge the affective dimension of politics so that leftist politics appeals to hearts as well as minds.

The boldness of this book also poses problems, however, as certain topics are discussed briefly and unsatisfactorily. Take ontology: Amin and Thrift claim that their political theory is "resolutely materialist" and that the Left needs an "ability to stand outside the given to disclose and make way for a new world" (pp. 8, 35), but they do not explain how a resolutely materialist political theory may stand outside the given. Or consider the issue of pluralism. The authors are not "interested in the Left as simply an eclectic mélange of different communities, although we doubt that it can ever be more than a set of sympathetic acquaintances united by common feelings" (p. xiii). What is the difference between an eclectic mélange and a set of sympathetic acquaintances? Amin and Thrift's view of pluralism might have been enriched if they had engaged other leading theorists of pluralism, such as Charles Taylor, Martha Nussbaum, or John Rawls. Finally, the chapter on affect begins, "It is generally assumed by students of politics that political judgments

are—or should be—made in a rational or deliberative manner” (p. 157). The chapter thus attacks a position that no major political theorist, to my knowledge, defends, rather than engages or advances the cutting edge of research on affect.

Perhaps I may focus on the central chapters of the book that are the most detailed and impassioned. In Chapter 5 (“Organizing Politics”) and Chapter 6 (“Eurocracy and its Publics”), Amin and Thrift call upon the Foucaultian Left to relax its suspicion of institutions, particularly bureaucracy. Bureaucracies are powerful entities that can initiate and shape public policy. A well-designed bureaucracy can reconcile certainty and compromise, expert and lay interests, democracy and technocracy. The paradigm is the European Union, “a new type of formally constituted political entity—neither state nor nation—experimenting with multiple and overlapping institutional forms and hybrid forms of deliberation and decision making to construct, regulate, and legitimate a very large and variegated federation of states and societies” (p. 138). Amin and Thrift point to the European Union’s success in crafting a continent-wide water policy to show that bureaucracies can achieve progressive ends. Far better to trust “teams of experts from different professional and national backgrounds” than a political class “likely to fall prey to short-term electoral and popular pressures” (p. 138). In other words, leftists need to temper the ideal of citizen participation in favor of bureaucrats getting things done.

Yet this is the exact type of argument that Douglas contests in *In the Spirit of Critique*. Even if leftists see the need for deep structural change, they cannot neglect working with ordinary democratic citizens: “After all, who is responsible for bringing about substantive political change? Any answer that hopes to steer clear of authoritarianism must include ordinary people” (p. 89). To their credit, Amin and Thrift acknowledge that the EU’s economic policy has largely supported corporatism and neoliberalism. But their position is that bureaucracies are here to stay and leftists need to harness their powers if they wish to achieve a just, egalitarian society.

I conclude by offering one reason that I share Douglas’s skepticism of leftist praise for technocratic politics. The Obama administration’s signature achievement is the Affordable Care Act. In 2009, the administration had a choice to endorse the public option, a health-care plan operated by the federal government and subject to democratic oversight, or empower the for-profit insurance industry to broaden its coverage. It chose the latter option, entrusting Liz Fowler, an executive from insurance provider WellPoint, to revamp America’s health-care system. According to the investigative journalist David Sirota, Fowler enlisted insurance industry veterans to help write the Affordable Care Act and many now serve as lobbyists

for that industry. The immediate beneficiaries of the Affordable Care Act, based upon stock price, include health insurance providers such as WellPoint, Aetna, and Cigna. My point here is not to evaluate Obamacare, much less criticize the noble end of providing health-care coverage to more Americans. Rather, I wish to suggest that a leftist faith in technocrats rather than ordinary citizens opens the door for corporate forces to seize the machinery of government. If the Left is to become a vibrant force again, it needs to empower and trust ordinary people to play an active role in self-governance.

### **Ethics of Liberation: In the Age of Globalization**

**and Exclusion.** By Enrique Dussel. Translated by Eduardo Mendieta, Camilo Pérez Bustillo, Yolanda Angulo, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013. 752p. \$124.95 cloth, \$34.95 paper.

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— Christopher C. Robinson, *Clarkson University*

Enrique Dussel’s project is to confront the hegemony of Eurocentric philosophy, and fashion out of this confrontation a philosophy of liberation whose character is uniquely Latin American and more generally subaltern (reflective of the world’s poor). The opposition to European hegemony at the center of Dussel’s work is animated by a profound desire to ameliorate the suffering of the poor and marginalized, and to avert ecological catastrophe as a logical consequence of how life is dominated and controlled by powerful states. *Ethics of Liberation*, first published in 1998 and newly translated, is an enormous intellectual undertaking that opens with an alternative history of ethics that challenges the view of ethics as originating in Hellenism and extending through Eurocentrism from a global systems perspective. Dussel then engages the traditions of utilitarianism, communitarianism, Marxism, Kant, Rawls, the pragmatism of C.S. Peirce and Karl-Otto Apel, the Frankfurt School as reflected in and departed from by Jurgen Habermas, and finally the primacy of ethics argument of Emmanuel Levinas. Dussel challenges idealism with materialism, formalism with the lived experience of suffering, the anti-politics of free-market thought with an equation of politics with human life, pessimism with hope animated by a secular rendering of liberation theology, the priority of unsustainable growth in capitalism with a political economy founded on ecological sensitivity, and dependency on the ethical systems of the Northern Hemisphere with a “philosophy of the periphery” that eschews authoritarianism and conceives of liberation as an ongoing struggle against exclusion and victimization. This list of oppositions constitutive of Dussel’s argument is not at all exhaustive. It stands as an attempt to give the prospective reader of *Ethics of Liberation* a sense of the scope of the project.

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