

BOOK REVIEWS

Sergiu Mișcoiu, Valentin Naumescu

What Is Left From the Left-Right Cleavage? A Comparative Perspective, Editura ISPRI, Bucharest, 2015, 236 pp.

Is the vanishing left-right cleavage a symptom of post-politics? The present collective volume approaches the complementary instances proposed by realities of political rivalry. Not only tremendous political competition, but also the intricacy of the items displayed by the public agenda determine political actions to be more complex and less homogeneously oriented toward either left or right. Nevertheless, the necessity for political referentials remains, although the importance of a left-right divide appears somewhat obsolete.

The book is structured in two parts: “Theorizing the left-right cleavage” and “Beyond the left-right cleavage”. In the opening, “Introductory Remarks: The Left-Right Cleavage Revisited”, Sergiu Mișcoiu originates the left-right differentiation in the heritage of the French Revolution, where the left is related to republicanism and the State-Church separation, while the right is linked to Monarchy and Church influence. With all due historical and political avatars of this left-right differentiation, it is still “useful not only for the voters’ and sympathizers’ orientation but also for the parties’ and candidates’ own understanding of their set of political beliefs and practices”. (p. 11)

In the chapter entitled “Politics, but not too Much. Neoliberalism as Infra-Ideology” Ciprian Bogdan depicts neoliberal socio-economics as the representatives of democratic politics; in this way, the author interprets it as a sort of anti-politics that impoverishes the public debate. Among the symptoms of contemporary neoliberal consensus the author also identifies “depoliticisation” and an interest in the “post-ideology debate”. In conclusion, this investigation indicates that “neoliberalism is an example of infra-ideological consensus that might also explain the ‘relative death of ideologies’ in contemporary society, namely that neoliberalism accepts politics, but *not too much* politics – for that might challenge its dominance”. (p. 39)

“Enlightenment, Counter-Enlightenment, Post-Enlightenment – A Framework of Understanding the Differences between the Left and Right” by Bogdan Constantin Mihăilescu follows both the criteria which position parties and actions upon the political axis and the perspective they compose, against which one understands any modifications occasioned by late-modernity. The starting point of this analysis is the cultural and political Enlightenment project, and its developments identify the modifications, mixtures and innovations that mark contemporary politics. “So, the left-right axis remains relevant in this Post-Enlightenment horizon. We can find here political views attempting to continue Enlightenment – type political propositions specific especially to the left, but with the help of a postmodernity – adapted discourse, such as theories of the minimal Post-Enlightenment sustained by Rawls and his late work, or those of moderate Post- Enlightenment, present in the Rortyan political thought”. (p. 59) Yet, this is not the complete picture: “However, there is also a genre of radical Post-Enlightenment, as that pledged by Gray, where the breakup with the Enlightenment is much more pronounced, and which is, in this way, more closely related to the zone of the political right”. (p. 59)

Adrian-Gabriel Corpădean signs “The Role of the Greek-Catholic Church in Reinvigorating the Romanian Right after the 1989 Revolution”. After the communist era marginalization and persecutions, the Greek-Catholic intellectuals played an important role in conveying a coherent, anti-communist democratic discourse that was also relevant for the identity of the center-right following the 1989 revolution. “The significant number of dissidents belonging to this Church, both inside the country and in exile, contributed to the struggle aiming to reinstate their cult both in social life and in legal order and, in some distinct cases, turned to the values of Christian-democracy to rebuild a political wing that had long been prohibited in Romania. Moderately

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successful in terms of political echo in the long term, the activity of the Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party, the main output of Greek-Catholic political doctrine, did indicate the existence of an alternative to the domineering left; and the message of personalities such as Ion Rațiu, Corneliu Coposu and Doina Cornea remains of actuality in this deep and democratic feeling". (p. 78)

"Present European Liberalism(s) and the Left-Right Cleavage" by Valentin Naumescu is a study of the debate around liberalism in terms of state-market dimension, on the one hand, and in terms of individual rights and freedoms as trumps against religious tradition, hierarchy and social order, on the other. The author shows: "Moreover, the left center parties have also absorbed much of the liberal ideology in the post-war era. Equal access to opportunities, equality of races and gender, welfare state and progressive policies, liberal multiculturalism, feminism and environmentalism assumed in fact parts of the essence of liberalism and then developed their own discourses and specific solutions". (p. 95) The paper explores another important aspect: "The quasi-general assumption of the decline of liberalism in Europe, beyond the real ascension of populism and far right nationalism, is not necessarily sustained either by statistics and electoral results, or by the political framework in which most of the center-leftist, center, centrist and center-rightist parties and actors are conducting their theses and discourses". (p. 95) Approaching theoretical and pragmatic aspects concerning European liberalism, the study emphasizes the interest for economic pragmatism. Answering questions regarding the relationship between liberalism and the left-right division, the author shows: "Of all major ideologies, liberalism is probably mostly affected by this division. Firstly, because what we generally name 'liberalism' is a mix of right wing economic perspective and left wing political vision. Secondly, because it is the only doctrine which allows affiliated parties to conduct either as right of center or as left of center political forces. In the case of socialism or conservatism, things are quite clear with regard to the left-right cleavage, and only nuances may differ". (p. 97)

Approaching the topic of contemporary extreme right movements in Europe and the legacy of fascism, Raluca Moldovan starts from an observation of the European political sphere during the past five years, looking at the European Parliament's elections and at government coalitions in France, Italy, Austria, Denmark, Switzerland. Extreme right parties and populists behave as if reviving a fascist legacy, the author underlines. "Extreme right populists claim to represent the true will of the people, which all the other parties ignore, because of the corruption and ignorance of the establishment. They also use 'low' or 'high' concepts, language and style; and their charismatic leaders depict themselves as the embodiment of what people really think. Populism, both in Europe and the United States, should be considered a style, rather than a specific body of thought; and the political left, as well as the right (and the extreme right) use it to claim genuinely democratic credentials". (p. 113) Paying attention as well to the impact of extreme right politics in media, the author quotes John Palmer from *The Guardian* who identified in extreme right politics the most serious threat posed to the European Project itself. The antidote to the rise of the extreme right is identified in realistic and democratic left and right mainstream parties which fight economic stagnation, the welfare gap and the degradation of democratic liberties and rights.

Gabriel C. Gherasim investigates the topic of ideological syncretism and metamorphoses as they developed in the United States. The author shows: "Many scholars and researchers have not yet agreed upon the existence of a genuine conservative tradition in America: some political thinkers and intellectual historians (such as Louis Hartz or Lionel Trilling) epitomized the development of the entire political tradition in America in strict liberal terms; others (such as Richard Hofstadter, who coined the term 'pseudo-conservatism') were rather skeptical about giving recognition to a conservative strain of thought; while some intellectuals, remarking upon the manifestation of more and more conservative 'impulses and passions', concluded indecisively about the impossibility and ineffectiveness of asserting a singular mainstream ideological tradition and culture across the Atlantic". (p. 140) The myriad diverse ideological considerations are always a more flexible and more adequate tool when answering to complex situations, in order to secure consensus and alleviate conflicts. Nowadays, the doctrine of neoconservatism in the United States is subject to pragmatic lively discussions which seem to entertain more theoretical confusions than clarify the contradictions between the conservative and neoconservative doctrines.

“The Sartrian Bad Faith of Georgian Politics and the Democratic Missing Element. From the Lack of Ideology to the Neoliberal Project in Georgia”, by Alexandra Sabou, evaluates the void of ideological traits in Georgian party politics since 1991. Concrete and important problems of society, such as social cleavages, fail to be addressed, while the parties seem interested in sustaining a strong presidentialism and a wide interest for charismatic leaders. In this respect, the author shows: “Paradoxically, the revolutionary moment that occurred at the end of Shevardnaze’s second mandate didn’t bring about any ideological renewal or deep social transformation. The rose revolution was not a social revolution in the sense used by Theda Skopol, ‘rapid, basic transformation of a society’s state and class structures; accompanied and in part carried through by class revolts from below’, but corresponded to a conjectural moment of presidential elections and split within the elite in power. The revolutionary forces didn’t propose a new social-economic agenda or any political objectives, but stood up against the bankruptcy of Shevardnaze’s regime. By attacking the *ancient régime*, the new elite in power was declaring its pro-democratic struggle. However, the struggle turned to be less about democracy than about a new regime strengthening its grip on power”. (p. 169) The fact is that politicians tend to present themselves as libertarians or neoliberals supporting actions leading to economic development, but without true democratic results.

Emanuel Copilaş presents, in “Right-wing Nationalism in Post-Communist Romania: Ideological Implications and Political Impact” two varieties of contemporary Romanian active nationalism – right-wing and left-wing nationalism – placing the accent on the first type. “It analyzes two main sources of this kind of nationalism, the Prison Saints Movement and the Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance, aiming to prove that, as an ideology, Romanian nationalism has a powerful social impact and numerous ideological implications, while it lacks an important political dimension”. (p. 187) The author explains that “banal nationalism” (as understood by Michael Billig) has a noticeable impact in Romania across the entire ideological spectrum, while it finds no expression in political programs, remaining an element of official discourse for both right-wing and left-wing public interventions. This way, in Romania, the appeal to and of nationalism does not represent a threat to political stability.

Last but not least, Oana Albescu and Mircea Maniu assess the concept of social entrepreneurship, while interpreting the left-right cleavage in economic terms. “Marking the progress of socialization of the capitalist economy in the mid 20th century, the convergence theory seduced many prominent researchers of contemporary political and economic phenomena. While history dramatically penalized the wrongdoings of institutionalized leftist policies in Europe, it also blueprinted the evolutionary pattern of capitalism towards more social exposure, culminating with the gradual distancing of the term ‘entrepreneurship’ from its very grounds of individualism”. (p. 207) Noticing the transcendence of the traditional divide registered between the right – inclined to favor business – and the left – which places the accent on social protection – the study emphasizes the interest for added value, work productivity collective and communitarian processes of decision that characterize social entrepreneurship nowadays. The conclusion of the study highlights the idea that “it makes a lot of sense to say that contemporary issues, such as social entrepreneurship or bridging apparently irreconcilable positions, should be tackled along the lines of common EU policy and not left to *ad hoc*-ratic domestic initiatives” (p. 227)

The volume investigates contemporary characteristics of the right-left differentiation of the political spectrum, with interesting case studies offering a scientific account of the vanishing fascination with left and right in the contemporary political realm.

Ana Bazac (coord.)

Despre dreptate: perspectivă multidisciplinară, Editura Aius, Craiova, 2015, 376 p.

Governed by Aristotle’s phrase stating that actualization is what ensures existence, the present volume approaches the theme of justice in a philosophical contemporary key, with the aim to judge this value within its context. Even from the Introduction, Ana Bazac shows that the foundation of the investigations remains in the capitalization of the “cardinal meanings of the original continental philosophy”. (p. 7)

Academician Alexandru Surdu, in “Heroic Stoicism in Seneca”, proposes a translation into Romanian of an excerpt from a note related to Pierre Grimal’s *Sénèque, ou la conscience de l’Empire*,

which the author also comments upon, and where the human axiological realm emphasizes the power of human beings to face up to and prevail upon any dire conditions that determine their existence. The power of values resides in their capacity to increase the meaning of life, while decreasing the importance of actual life problems, including problems related to injustice and indignity. In this way man approaches life wisely, as a *philo-sophos*, as the man who loves wisdom, with responsibility, strength and heroism.

The salvation of the country and life accordingly to Roman virtue are primordial for Seneca and they guide the just action. "For this reason, despite the dangerous evolution of young Nero, Seneca does not leave him, but attempts to temper him, using of all the petty means of the imperial court, even after Nero resorts to killing his mother. Seneca's judgment by posterity is unfair, though. He was not guilty of anything, and of course Nero acted not to the advice of the philosopher, but against it. The problem, from the perspective of Roman Stoic philosophy, was to keep on trying, even under these dire circumstances, to act in favor of Roman virtue, at all costs." (pp. 24-25)

Academician Alexandru Boboc investigates the distinction between "what is just in itself" and "what is given as just". This interesting contingency in law and in the exercise of justice is interpreted starting from the history of the idea of justice in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, G. W.F. Hegel. The author shows that law is imbued with a dignity provided by the moral register and the juridical exercise actualizes, amongst other moral principles, freedom and dignity.

The author proves that according to Rousseau the ideal state and society ensure that dignity of law which minimizes whimsical actions, while preserving individual freedom. This way Rousseau is interpreted as a forerunner of Kant and Fichte. For Kant, the right results from the action of individual free will which allows space for everyone else's freedom; and in Hegel, the very idea of right is freedom.

"*Justitia* (Lat.) means objectively a *measure* of the just (correct, genuine) social behavior which is supra-temporarily valid, an idea placed at the foundation of the positive law of each nation, and which, as a categorical imperative, addresses anyone concerned with the law, such as law makers and judges, and extends further to each citizen (in his behavior toward others); and *subjectively*, a *virtue* that makes man consider his peers according to their value as persons and to theirs actions; and especially to establish for the others only requirements that himself is able to meet". (pp. 33-34) The challenge presented by interpreting the juridical exercise is to account both for what "is just in itself" and for what is "right" in front of a juridical instance. (p. 37)

"Justice' in the Old Romanian Culture" signed by Alin-Mihai Gherman is a linguistic and philosophical study that approaches the concept of justice in its Latin, French and Romanian meanings. Investigating varied old Romanian sources of language, culture and philosophy – Vaarlam, *Carte românească de învățătură*; *Psaltirea Hurmuzaki*; Gh. Șincai, *Hronica*; Dosoftei, *Psaltirea în versuri*; M. Eminescu, *Împărat și proletar*; Ioan Budai-Deleanu, *Țiganiada* etc. – the author emphasizes the oldest meanings of the concept of *just*: divine justice, purity, equity, justice, correctness, law as divine word etc. The study also captures the historical evolution of the concepts of *justice* and *law* in Romanian culture. In the 19th century, the act of justice began to be understood in the philosophical context of the social contract: the individual is seen as part of a society, a nation and a country, part of the whole of a society and, as in the slogan of the 1848 revolution, justice is related to brotherhood. (p. 50)

The next chapter, entitled "Right, Justice and Law", by Simona Cristea, starts from the Latin idea that *suum cuique tribuere* and the Greek *dikaion* that relates justice and right. Right refers to relations among citizens and to what is just, studying the same relations with attention to the distribution of functions and goods. In this respect, as Aristotle also showed, a society needs both written and unwritten laws (the latter sustaining morals and equity). Christianity imposed even more the idea of abidance by the law. Saint Augustine discerns among the positive law, the natural law and the divine law. The first should respect the second, and both of them the divine law. Saint Thomas Aquinas nuances the idea that only the divine law is immutable and for this reason it should govern both the positive and the natural law.

Modernity brings the laicization of the law and relates the theory of law to the theory of social contract, the theory of individual rights and the theory of the separation of powers in a state. The

definition of law is now found in a continuous evolution, illustrated by Simona Cristea with the concepts of Carré de Malberg, Hans Kelsen, Jeremy Bentham, Emile Durkheim, Michel Villey, H. L. A. Hart, Neil MacCormick, Ronald Dworkin, Jürgen Habermas, and with arguments for the importance of the juridical values that are maintaining the law just.

Dragoş Sdrobiş, in “From the Justice of History to the Histories of Injustice (Intellectuals and Justice: And a Romanian Episode)” evaluates the “modern horizons” of justice in Romania, through the role played by the intellectuals and their policies during the modernization of state and society. Noticing that the evolution of history is associated with the evolution of the idea of justice, the author interprets the transformation of justice from philosophical precept into social norm as discourse and reality of equity. This way the intellectual appears as the defender of justice in front of power, illustrating this in Romania and evaluating the involvement of the political elite in the peasant status after the peasant’s revolt of 1907.

The chapter also presents the social critique of Romanian writer Caragiale, the role of the anti-Westernization position adopted by Radu Rosetti, the sociological research on the inequitable status of peasants as source of social inequity, conducted by Constantin Drobogeanu-Gherea, the intellectual contributions of Constantin Stere and Nicolae Iorga, I.C. Bratianu and Lovinescu. The intellectuals acted in a spirit of social justice and also developed the spiritual public life, leading it toward democratization and social progress.

“The Meaning of Fairness”, by Beatrice Adriana Balgiu, examines fairness as an interactive process that includes assignment and distribution of goods of all sorts and of power. The psychological vision on fairness nuances the sociopolitical and philosophical one. Sensitivity toward fairness is formed since childhood and is nuanced or corrupted by power at maturity.

“The Concept of Justice in the Moral Philosophy of Analytical Tradition” by Constantin Stoenescu investigates the process of reconsidering moral philosophy in John Rawls and Robert Nozick. Analyzing justice as fairness through the two principles of justice proposed and interpreted by Rawls, the author shows that “understanding justice as fairness permits the clarification of the concept of justice within the sphere of moral concepts, without resorting to explicate foundations of a different nature”. (p. 111) Rawls has the merit of going beyond the discussion concerning the objectivity of ethics and the status of moral judgments which lead to an exaggerated linguistic interpretation of the meta-ethical aspects.

The libertarian critique of the theory of justice sustained by Rawls emphasizes justice as entitlement, for “the individuals are inviolable” and the libertarian state should preserve only those functions related to the protection of its citizens, including the function of ensuring justice and the protection of borders. The author discusses also inter-generational justice, showing that persons of different generations should maintain the institutions and improve social life; and that they have duties and obligations towards each other.

Viorica Crăciunescu approaches “The Theory of Justice as Fairness and the Human Beings with Disabilities”. The study interprets the meaning of the difference principle in John Rawls’s theory of justice in relation to the concrete situation of people with disabilities, and analyzes how justice is served in this respect.

Completing a critique of the Rawlsian theory that “justice as fairness based on the social contract method excludes some people from the basic structure of society”, the author enriches the argument with newer approaches such as the comments of Christie Hartley, Harry Brighthouse, Norman Daniels, Thomas Pogge, Erin Kelly, Martha Nussbaum, Eva Kittay, Mark S. Stein and Rex Martin, under the governing of the concepts of self-esteem (Rex Martin) and equality of chances (Norman Daniels).

A very substantial part of the volume investigates an intriguing subject: “The Epistemology of Injustice: The Joy of Life and (In)Justice”. Defending the perspective where justice is a pattern of social relations and a process – not just order, harmony, Platonism, virtue or balance – Ana Bazac mainly examines the ontological value of justice in order to sustain and further interpret the correlation between justice and the joy of life, a correlation that illuminates the particulars of an interesting interpretation of justice as value. The other part of the study epistemologically evaluates the historical representation of injustice, less considered until now. The core idea is that justice is a social construct, an ideal model, only partially sustained by historical practices and the associated social relations.

The author shows why an epistemological approach is important and what its aim is: "A conclusion of this epistemological approach is – somehow bantering the analytic philosophy that subordinates the 'common sense institutions' to the partisanship for one or the other 'inherent' fatal injustice related to social relationships – that in principle there are not only two solutions, but always a *third one* which raises the problem of persistence of injustice irrespective of which part/solution we support and this problem questions, and which opposes to injustice: the third solution is of the *Alexander the Great in front of the Gordian knot* type. Briefly, injustice is not a-historically fatal and, by questioning its structural roots, it is possible to surpass it". (p. 137)

The multidisciplinary perspective of the volume contributes to develop the concept of justice approached in its values, norms, relations and contradictions, in a complex but clear manner.

Gheorghe Dănișor

Filosofia drepturilor omului, Bucharest, Editura Universul Juridic, 2011, 254 p.

This work deserves attentive consideration as a useful instrument for students in various domains: political philosophy, juridical philosophy, ethics, international relations and the philosophy of governance.

Under circumstances described by the contemporary world, the philosophy of human rights is nowadays re-evaluated from multiple perspectives. For instance, the topic of current interest proposed by terrorism brings security to the fore as a principal value, associated with specific public policies, sometimes to the detriment of values represented by human rights and the political liberties associated with the former. Another example is that of situations created by contemporary waves of migration, which exacerbate xenophobia in many European nations, casting a shadow on the irreducible value of the human being found, as a core substantial philosophy, at the basis of the very idea of human rights. As shown in the introductory study "where politics intervenes, things always get more complicated". (p. 5)

The aim of the research is to emphasize the philosophical foundations of human rights, namely liberalism and freedom, as well as the individualism that does not destroy but strengthens the political community; a community that, ever since Plato, attributes with necessity courage and moderation to the free men, in order to preserve the social "fabric". The author considers that human rights should not challenge this "fabric" of good social relations, granting an exaggerated consideration to the individual, observing the phrase "freedom for each and justice for all". (p. 8)

The book is structured in three parts: "Human rights in modern thought", "The critique of the foundations of the human rights of the first generation" and "The effectiveness of the human rights".

The first part offers an incursion into the problems of political and juridical modern philosophy of the human rights, investigating modern individualism in comparison with what the author identifies as individualism in ancient Greece (but as one can argue the introduction of a modern concept in an analysis of a period of time characterized by other central features); relating this theme to theories of the state of nature, and correlating it with theories of natural law and the role of reason, with juridical security and with the elements that convey the substance of human rights in modernity. In this respect, three "generations" of human rights are identified in the book. The first is marked by struggle against the despotic power of the monarch (the 17th and the 18th centuries) finalized with the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*. "The rights of the second generation are justified by the fact that those of the first generation should be extended to all the citizens and not only the favored categories, and that they engage the state in their application". (p. 86) The third generation of rights introduces concepts such as "the people", "humanity" or "future generations" into modern political thought, a perspective upon well-balanced individualism, as well as theoretizations of law which, in the name of social harmony and future social development, tend to bring nuance and limitations to the substance of human rights.

Part II of the work treats the subject from the perspective of philosophical and political pre-modern and modern relativism, discussing the relation between law and rights, as well as the new dimensions of individualism, from the perspective of Charles Taylor and Jean-François Petit. Thus,

the author shows: “Although there is yet an imbalance between individualism and communitarianism in favor of the former, nevertheless, the tendency of balance exists. It seems to take shape ever more in international regulations and the constitutions of the states. Jurisprudence has an undisputed contribution in this respect”. (p. 125)

The third part analyzes, through the instruments of juridical and normative philosophy, the problem of modern human rights, including interesting assessments of alterity, the contextualization of law and the universality of human rights.

In conclusion, the author states: “This book pleads (...) for a rediscovery of the ontological Good and, implicitly, of the *zoon politikon* as a transposition of good at the human level. Only starting from this perspective could morals and law vindicate their foundations”. (p. 240)

This work accomplishes a critique of juridical formalism seen from the positions of juridical philosophy, with accents of political ethics; and proposes a nuanced and relevant approach to the subject.

Henrieta Anișoara Șerban