Montserrat Herrero. *Filosofía política: De la antigüedad al mundo contemporáneo*. Ediciones Rialp 2024. 552 pp. €26,00 EUR (ISBN 9788432167768).

Emerging from use as a manual for lecture courses, *Filosofía política* offers a synthesis of many of the primary texts of Western political philosophy, tracing the decisive questions concerning the organization of the state in its relation to the ultimate ends of human life. It focuses on the relationship between politics and religion. Both types of culture—secular-political and moral-religious—propose comprehensive systems for regulating human collective life and for promoting human happiness. They can work together but are also often in tension, if not outright conflict, with one another. However it is viewed, religion often insinuates itself unsuspected in the normativity propounded even by the most ostensibly secularized of political theories. The outstanding merit of Herrero's treatment is that it enables readers to survey the entire historical arc of development of this crucial issue from ancient Greece to our contemporary world.

A central question already for the Greeks is how the contingent political order of the state relates to the ideal order of reason and the order of the cosmos, not to mention the paragon of the gods. The various types of government discussed in the ancient sources range from kingship and aristocracy to democracy, oligarchy, and tyranny. These types provide models that are evaluated as to their moral worth and conformity to the natural—which is to say also to the divine—order of things. Kingship is still bound to an idea of divine right while the further forms of political organization represent a series often interpreted as a progressive decline from the ideal. These various paradigms of government for the polis were evaluated as to their comparative merits famously by Plato and Aristotle, but before or alongside them also by Xenophon and pseudo-Xenophon. Especially the latter brings out how the charismatic leadership of the tyrant could be more pragmatically efficacious than the complicated and conflicted processes of democratic government. Today, such "tyranny" finds its equivalent in certain forms of populism.

The Latin tradition, notably with Cicero, emphasizes the rule of law and introduces the structure of the empire overreaching that of the polis. Justice is assured not by any type of personal rule but, instead, by the rule of law. Roman law continues to be a foundation and a pillar of European jurisprudence down to our own day. The imperial dimension entailing universality and multiculturality beyond the walls of a single city or polis seems an important step in preparing for theories adequate to our massive and culturally and religiously mixed societies in the modern world. The Roman Empire unified politically and administratively great cultural diversity. It offered a powerful historical precedent throughout the Middle Ages in its continuation as a civilizational ideal under the aegis of the Church as the Holy Roman Empire.

This multicultural, supranational form rendered possible aspiration to a spiritual universality even without a unified political order. Nevertheless, political and religious motives remained very difficult to reconcile. With Augustine, the question of priority between political and religious ends of human life and of the authorities governing human life from these two different angles of approach became acute. Augustine's city of God clearly takes precedence over the city of men. One is holy, the other profane, and their motivations are opposite—toward altruism or toward

egoism. One leads to blessedness, the other to condemnation.

The Middle Ages following Augustine tended to further polarize these alternative ends and authorities, and the controversy over investitures pitting popes against emperors played out the conflict bitterly and dramatically. However, with Thomas Aquinas, a harmony was envisaged between the orders of nature and grace that would reconcile and reciprocally order spiritual and temporal authority. Dante works further to establish a relationship in which the autonomy of the secular realm is unambiguously affirmed, however without being separated from the ultimate authority of God. Ecclesiastical power has no place in secular politics, and yet human reason, of its own accord, is wholly oriented to a divine vocation.

It is often thought that Dante's insistence on secular autonomy and on the emperor as the sole legitimate authority in the political realm, leaving to the pope only a limited spiritual sphere, already entails the modern secular vision that is affirmed by Marsiglio of Padova in *Defensor Pacis* (1324) and ultimately enshrined in its radical consequences in Machiavelli's *Principe* (1513), who abandons all religious and moral bonds for a politics of pure expediency. However, Dante's idea, to the contrary, is that state authority separated from ecclesiastical authority finds its own theological compass within reason itself and within free, absolutely disinterested human will. Religion is not rejected or excluded from the secular realm but, instead, is found to be inherent within it, even without the external support of revelation or ecclesiastical institutions. Orientation to God the Creator and providential disposer of history is held to be the inner vocation of human reason in all its worldly manifestations.

For Dante, some kind of holy normativity, a vestige of divinity, is inherent in secular politics taken purely on its own terms. This ingenious intuition remains alive in many different forms in subsequent political theory to the extent that political thought resists reduction to purely material motives and instrumental reason in the organization of the state and recognizes some kind of higher spiritual or moral norm. The endlessly thorny and teasing question is whether and how this higher, holy, sacred norm can be within human grasp and be subject to determination by merely human will, once any kind of intervention from another order of superhuman revelation has been ruled out. This higher, absolute norm must somehow be accessed from a plane of pure immanence. Political philosophy has continued to wrestle with this issue ever since.

Hobbes, Spinoza, and Locke, by common acknowledgment, develop the modern secular vision of politics. For all their secularizing thrust, however, there is nevertheless some idea of moral or ethical normativity that is linked in each case also to religion, which finds its place at the foundation of their modern political philosophies. Hobbes, in his construction of absolute monarchical sovereignty, like Dante, finds a divine norm to be operative in nature and reason that must not be subjected to ecclesiastical authority. Spinoza similarly affirms the autonomous authority of secular reason yet holds it to be the only truly divine power: for him, nature and divinity coincide (*deus sive natura*). Locke, too, still makes law in the republic a mode of divine normativity in necessary agreement with natural law.

Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel likewise work out, each in their own terms, this relation to a higher normativity. It can be the normativity of a popular will that transcends any express agent in society

(Rousseau) or of an impersonal moral law of universal reason, a categorical imperative (Kant), or "spirit," *Geist*, that asserts and corrects itself dialectically through the course of history aiming at ultimate reconciliation with reality (Hegel). These constructions of binding normativity are metaphysical and ideal, not reductions to purely empirical and secular factors. The cement of religion, in these various ways, is built into the foundations of political organization. These Enlightenment figures lay the foundations for the liberal approaches to thinking politics that have developed down to our own times.

Isaiah Berlin, with his penchant for Herder and Hamann, refracts political liberalism through the thinking of the Romantic Age, where reason reaches its limits in the irrational. Berlin takes British empiricism as a rational system and breaks it open to unrationalizable political realities. Liberty is fundamentally negative for Berlin: it means freedom from interference. No positive form of freedom propounded in liberalism such as Mill's or Locke's is acceptable to him. There is no natural norm but only human decision choosing among an irreducible plurality of goods. However, these goods need to be realized concretely in a particular nation state, and religion turns out to be decisive for free human choice to determine itself in the case of *Isaiah* Berlin's Zionism. Herrero's presentation brings out how his thought embodies another unique combination of radically secular yet, at the same time, religious motives for political philosophy.

Twentieth-century thinkers of polity and the law in this broadly liberal tradition have remained beholden to the task of discerning some kind of higher normativity, generally moral or religious, even in a world severed from its metaphysical bearings. On this point, even modern Marxism, with its messianic residues, expressed strikingly by Walter Benjamin, tends to be in agreement.

Jürgen Habermas thinks in terms of reason rather than force as the indispensable resource for norming and regulating life in society. His Marxism initially and classically viewed religion as alienation and illusion. Yet Habermas entered increasingly into intense dialogue with theologians as his political thought developed. He authored a book together with Regensburg theologian Joseph Ratzinger, who became Pope Benedict XVI, and he concluded that modern liberal society needed the communitarian values affirmed and motivated by religion to remain cohesive. Purely rational concepts prove to be insufficient.

Charles Taylor, too, attempts to make community modeled by religion the source of norms. He emphasizes that language is constitutive of community, and the Roman Catholic community is exemplary for him of constituting community through narrative and verbal decree. At the other end of the liberal spectrum, John Rawls proposes a liberalism of fairness based on individuals' choices blind to their own place in society. This move confines any possible sacredness to the private sphere. Still, all these thinkers are striving to reassert binding norms for politics without the metaphysical underpinnings that were typically supplied by some form of religion, even if secularized, in earlier centuries. This task becomes most explicit in the final political thinker treated in Herrero's historical trajectory.

On the cusp of the twenty-first century, Ernesto Laclau thematizes the empty space left by a transcendent God who is no longer humanly accessible. This space he understands as inhabited by revolutionary violence expressed especially by populism. This move renders explicit a predicament

that had been impinging crucially on political philosophy throughout the modern era. Just as in medieval Scholastic theology the names of God are all equivalent names for the Ineffable, so social discourse in modern times has no foundation: its value terms are empty. The hegemonic discourse that founds society is dialectically upset by populist "reactivation" that manifests as revolutionary violence against the original representational violence of every order imposed by power. Only the openness of the system of signification in which no signifier can render present the transcendent (God), together with continual substitution of one signifier for another, can make God negatively present. This reaction against any fixed representational hegemony can certainly be a source of violence but also a necessary (non)foundation for peace, a voluntary peace without external constraint, a peace in liberty, but without guarantees. It presupposes only mutual respect and self-limitation on the part of all participants without exclusions.

Walter Benjamin would again be relevant at this point, with his messianic revolutionary ideal, though this would be another immense corpus to take on. Instead, Benjamin is alluded to rather obliquely in relation to other thinkers. Max Weber, too, remains very active in the margins without emerging in any chapter centered on him alone.

It is rare that any work furnishes such a comprehensive survey of the whole arc of thinking of politics in the West from the Greeks to our own contemporaries in the twenty-first century. Herrero's book gives an intelligible shape to this vast, amorphous tradition by highlighting the dialectic between secular, earthbound vision and the moral and religious ideals that have always been in view in any designs for political life.

Herrero's method is to place the decisive ideas of each thinker into their historical context. She considers also the lives of the writers and the circumstances that influenced and put pressure on their thinking. The result is a lucid contemplation of crucial nodal points in the history of political philosophy that enables us to continue to think about our enormously complex and important political dilemmas today at a moment of deep crisis for Western democracies with the whole of our tradition and its different options in view and at our disposal. Herrero occasionally takes us into the intricacies of interpreting the thorny questions that divide critics on one historical figure or another. Mostly, however, it is the overarching lines of development from age to age that emerge with clarity and coherence from these precise overviews of key thinkers and their epoch-making works. The crucial importance of religion, manifest or hidden, in virtually all forms of political organization emerges without being declared explicitly or forced upon the texts as an agenda.

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