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Willem Styfhals and Stéphane Symons, eds. *Genealogies of the Secular: The Making of Modern German Thought*. SUNY Press 2019. 260 pp. $95.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781438476391); $32.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781438476407).

Genealogy is a concept mostly associated with Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, and, more recently, Giorgio Agamben. In *The Kingdom and the Glory* (Stanford University Press 2011), Agamben writes that genealogy is research into a fundamental paradigm that exercised a decisive influence on the development and arrangement of Western Society. This paradigm is of theological origins and, behind the appearance of secularization, is a persistent feature of Western society. While Agamben did not contribute an essay to this collection himself, his interpretation of the 'secularization thesis' and his political theology appear to have guided the editors—but not necessarily the contributors—in their choices for this volume (1-2; Cf. 17, note 5). At the end of their introduction, the editors conclude that the study of the early secularization debate can teach us not only about the melancholic views of the cultural conservative, but also the more optimistic views of authors such as Blumenberg and Taubes. We can imagine an additional lesson. This book can serve as a propaedeutic to the writings of Agamben. Arendt, Benjamin, Heidegger, and Taubes who can be counted as the sources that inspired Agamben's original and controversial interpretation of modernity.

The book opens with a methodological section on genealogy and secularization. A section dealing with thinkers not previously associated with the secularization debate, such as Cassirer and Heidegger, Benjamin, and Arendt, follows. Part three centres on Jacob Taubes' thought. The last section deals with the work of the Egyptologist and cultural memory theorist, Jan Assmann.

Part I contains two essays. In the first, Kirk Wetters asks about the legitimacy of the genealogical claim. He suggests a classification of such claims into 'weak,' 'traditional,' and 'critical.' Weak genealogies make claims to metaphors of succession, lineage, continuity, friendship or enmity, family, and school. Critical genealogies—associated with the work of Foucault and Nietzsche—highlight the contingency and uncertainty of historical derivations (22-3). Based on this typology, Wetters suggests that we review the debate on secularization and evaluate the basis for the claims made by the parties. After reviewing several genealogical contests and claims, Wetters remains unconvinced. If the most important question of any genealogy is what it can contribute to a better understanding of our political or intellectual situation, then we need to be reminded that genealogies can degenerate into the production of alibies and scapegoat (42). Genealogies are important, but they do not provide solutions (45).

Agata Bielik-Robson offers a Jewish perspective on the debate. She suggests that the question of the relationship of modernity to pre-modern theology is still unanswered. Both partisans and opponents of secularization agree that with modernity theology became immanent, but from this they draw different consequences. Bielik-Robson sees an opportunity for a crypto-theology, which celebrates immanence, is more joyous, affirmative, and future-oriented. She contrasts the 'death of God Theology'—which she identifies with Jean-Luc Nancy's 'bringing myth to an end'—with a Kabbalistic approach *based on tsimtsum* (the reduction of divine energy requisite for the creation of the world in the Lurianic myth), as in Jacques Derrida's retelling of the Lurianic myth. Derrida does away with the gnostic or antimodernist temptation. He replaces it with a theology centered on the promise and justice, and with the messianic imperative of 'remembering to remember the future' (70).

Part II presents some German thinkers usually not associated with the secularization debate. Sigrid Weigel's 'Distance to Revelation' reconstructs Benjamin's criticism of secularization. Jeffrey

Barash discusses theology and politics in the Cassirer and Heidegger's Davos debate. Barash has written extensively on both Cassirer and Heidegger. His essay targets Cassirer and Heidegger's different approaches to religion and theology. According to Barash, Cassirer and Heidegger understood—even if they never explicitly articulated it— that their philosophical outlooks were related to their opposite approach to theology.

Progress has been under attack for quite some time. Recently, critical theorists like Thomas McCarthy and Wendy Brown, have joined the ranks of the progress sceptics. In his 'Is Progress a Category of Consolation,' Michaël Foessel reviews Kant's idea of progress in light of the Blumenberg-Löwith debate. He concludes that in Kant, progress has a regulative function. It is meant to convince us that the world should be embraced, because 'there are accessible ends *in* this world' (129).

Samuel Moyn sets up to show Hannah Arendt's contribution to the criticism of Carl Schmitt's interpretation of politics. Arendt and Schmitt reject the reduction of politics to other spheres of existence, and both are deeply concerned with the founding of politics and constitutional order. While there is not direct proof that Arendt intended *On Revolution* as a response to Schmitt, there is at least heuristic value in placing their respective doctrines in the same frame (132). According to Moyn, Arendt believed that the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages established a baseline for the ordering of our collective life. This baseline is the challenge that secular regimes need to rise to. Secularism, from that point of view, is an attempt to find a non-religious version of the kind of authority and sanction that the Church was able to provide. This is not an easy task, and revolutionary politics is frequently tempted to fall back to previously discarded beliefs (137-8). Moyn intimates that if Arendt followed Schmitt's cue, it was ultimately to deny 'the necessity and thus the outcome of his nostalgic analysis' (142).

Part III is dedicated to Jacob Taubes' thought. Taubes is mainly known for his influence on the renewal of interest in Paul the Apostle's writings among leftist European thinkers in the post-communist era. Styfhals, one of the editors of the present volume, recently published a study of Taubes' role in stirring the post-war 'Gnosticism debate' (Willem Styfhals, *No spiritual investment in the world: Gnosticism and postwar German philosophy*, Cornell University Press 2019).

Martin Treml contributed a study of Taubes' critique of Carl Schmitt. He reminds us of the role that Schmitt filled during the Third Reich and proceeds to narrate the story of Taubes reaching out to Schmitt, and finally succeeding in meeting him face to face. According to Treml, the work of Benjamin inspired Taubes' 'loving strife' with Schmitt.

The *pièce de résistance* of this section is an essay from Taubes, published originally in 1955. The article deals with the question 'whether the religious and political symbolism of traditional, theistic religions is capable of providing the symbolic canon for the democratic society.' The difference between democracy and religion concerns the sanction of authority. In a democracy, authority is established through consent, but in religion, it is set by decree (183). Democracy's religious roots trace back not to the established churches but to mystical and dissenting communities, such as the Anabaptist. After discussing Schmitt, Donoso Cortés, Proudhon, and Marx, Taubes concludes with the observation that to achieve the democratic ideal, men must 'overcome the principle of domination that rules both the spiritual and temporal realms of the old dispensation' (191).

This part concludes with an essay by Sigrid Weigel on Taubes as a reader of Benjamin. Weigel shows that Taubes' interest in Benjamin began in 1960. Of particular interest are the sections dealing with Taubes' mobilization of Benjamin for his reception of the work of Schmitt, and his reading of Paul.

The last section deals with the work of Jan Assmann. A paper by Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins introduces Assmann and his role in the debate. He claims Assmann turns the secularization debate upside down. The question is no longer whether modernity is a secularized form of Christianity, but rather what is the political origin of the monotheistic faiths that are presumed to constitute the foundation of the contemporary state (225).

Assmann's essay, never before printed in English, is taken from two sections of Assmann's *Herrschaft und Heil: Politische Theologie in Altägypten, Israel und Europa* (‘Authority and Salvation: Political Theology in Ancient Egypt, Israel, and Europe,’ in Bernhard Giesen, Daniel Šuber (Hg.), ‘Religion and politics. Cultural perspectives,’ *International Studies in Religion and Society* 3 (2005), S. 39-53). Assmann dismisses Schmitt's description. It is seductive, but wide of the mark (231). The analogy that Schmitt sees between miracle and ‘state of exception’ presupposes a concept of law that is foreign to ancient thought. The political ideas that Schmitt wants to deduce from theology ‘have never left the realm of the political’ (232). Assmann's essay proceeds to present his theory about the origins of monotheistic religion, the relationship between monotheistic religion and the ban on images, and finally, his controversial claim about monotheism's potential for intolerance and violence.

Interestingly, the editors chose to conclude their book with such a clear and elegant rebuke of Schmitt's political theology theorem. We can only wonder what the results could be of reading the *Genealogies of the Secular* backward.

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