

UNGUREANU, Camil and MONTI, Paolo (2018)  
*Contemporary Political Philosophy and Religion: between Public Reason and Pluralism*

New York: Routledge, 349 p.  
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This book is an ambitious and valuable overview of the current debates in contemporary political philosophy and religion. Written in an accessible and jargon-free style, the book deals with topical questions in political philosophy (what is the role of religion in a democracy? What is secularism? What is religious freedom, and what are its limits? Are religious exemptions legitimate?), different schools of thought (liberalism, Critical Theory, feminism, republicanism, postmodernism, etc.), and legal cases from various jurisprudential traditions. This panoramic book is all the more necessary given the explosion of literature on political philosophy and religion over the past two-three decades, as well as the increasing relevance of religious conflicts (legal, political) from the US, Italy, and France to India and Indonesia.

Ungureanu's and Monti's work builds a carefully crafted argument for a pluralist approach to secularity that avoids the extremes of dogmatic and exclusive liberalism or republicanism (in particular in an influential French version of it) and the exaltation of political theology of the event advanced in the works of Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou. In terms of format and substance, the book is an exercise in what I call *dialogical political philosophy*. First, the work is remarkable in that it deals systematically with philosophers from two traditions (Continental and analytical) that generally do not communicate and are even hostile to each other (for an outstanding recent exception, see Cecile Laborde's *Liberalism's Religion*, Harvard University Press, 2017). Classic books such as Will

Kymlicka's *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (2002, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford University Press) gloss over the philosophers associated with the Continental field with the exception of a few passing references to Charles Taylor and Jürgen Habermas. In contrast, Ungureanu's and Monti's work engages dialogically and in detail with philosophers that appear to be incommensurable – from John Rawls, Robert Audi, Susan Moller Okin, Martha Nussbaum, and Philip Pettit to Gianni Vattimo and Richard Rorty. In fact, Ungureanu and Monti dismiss the Continental/analytical dichotomy with persuasive arguments: first, as Bernard Williams argued, building a dichotomy out of these categorically different terms (analytical/Continental) is “as though one classified cars into front-wheel drive and Japanese”. Second, Continental philosophy has an “eclectic and amorphous referent” that brings together authors as diverse as Hannah Arendt and Slavoj Žižek in an artificial way. Third, and most importantly, it is not productive for political philosophers to turn crucial “philosophical and methodological debates and questions into fault lines between enemy intellectual camps”. As Ungureanu and Monti point out, “political philosophy gains little from rejecting complexity and congealing core questions into ideological stands: what is the nature of practical rationality – is it based on one or a few abstract principles, or is it historically and socially rooted? Do religious paradigms historically contribute to the content of practical rationality? What is the specificity of political philosophy with respect to scientific research, and should political philosophy draw on

hard socio-economic science or the humanities?" (p. 10). The corollary of Ungureanu's and Monti's dialogical opening of political philosophy is that the questions are dealt with in an interdisciplinary manner, building interpretations that combine normative reasoning and empirical analyses coming from disciplines such as sociology and political science.

This dialogical approach is further enhanced by the authors' sensitivity to different political and religious contexts. In this sense, the emerging field of comparative political theory shapes the agenda of their work, generating original discussions (e.g. by relating Rawls to the Bolivian constitutional framework or to the political-ethical implications of Buddhism for the international scene, see Ch. 1 and, respectively, Ch. 9). However, the interest in comparison and context in political philosophy can lead to different consequences. Ungureanu and Monti differentiate four ideal-typical uses of comparison in recent theorizing and argue for the last one: (i) the *communitarian* perspective is concerned with particular communal arrangements that are legitimate and valuable although they are different from the Western and liberal practice, but it tends to convert the context into a homogenous and incommunicable whole; (ii) a specific *liberal* perspective is interested in comparison but mainly in order to corroborate an ideal Western model of secularism, which entails a form of parochialism; (iii) a *post-colonial* perspective is meant to unmask processes of domination behind conceptual travelling, as well as the limits of translatability from one context to another, but often ends up over-emphasizing the differences and compactness of cultural-religious areas (iii); finally, the authors opt for a *pluralist* strategy that investigates how different political cultures can shape multiple paths to secularity and democratization.

By starting with a criticism of the rigidity of the mainstream public reason approach (Rawls, Audi, Habermas, see Ch. 1, 2, and 3), Ungureanu and Monti aim to inject normative analysis with more attention to the plurality of contexts, as well as to the different and normatively legitimate ways of organizing the relationship between democracy and religion. From this perspective, the authors reject any one-dimensional or parochial understandings of religion, by arguing persuasively that religions involve different dimensions that are in tension (e.g. the same religion can codify relations of domination and even violence, but it can also provide emancipatory moral narratives that nourish the public discourse). Local and historical deliberative practices hold a value of their own and support multiple forms of public reasoning that cut across liberal and non-liberal models, as well as across different cultural contexts. Understanding multiple democracies without measuring them against an (Western) ideal benchmark requires considering how the "spirit of democracy" resonates with different versions of modernity around the globe (Alessandro Ferrara). These "resonances" emerge from the analysis of political categories and practices that originate from a non-European history or from the encounter between Western and non-Western political cultures that determine in time an original understanding of similar institutions. After debating the tensions between versions of feminism and multiculturalism/interculturalism, the book aptly ends with a chapter on global justice, international relations, and religion. The authors apply their pluralistic approach to point out the limits of the Rawlsian' Law of Peoples but also to reject Schmittian political theology and its echoes in the clash-of-civilizations thesis supported by scholars as diverse as Samuel Huntington and Žižek. In contrast, the authors argue that the global diffu-

sion of universalizing moral ideals and democratic forms of government inspires “translations” of political ideas around world, questioning established authorities and publicly engaging religious vocabularies and local traditions in new and transformative ways.

Any book of such synthetic ambitions is bound to have downsides. When it comes to the authors considered, for better or worse, part of the continental camp, Ungureanu and Monti could have included other philosophers than, just, Vattimo. Giorgio Agamben, Michel Foucault, Slavoj Žižek, and Jacques Derrida appear to be more influential and representative in contemporary debates. Moreover, some themes are missing and others are undertreated. For instance, the question of political theology is dealt with in the last chapter only in relation to Schmitt, while today it plays a key role in debates concerning the relation between politics and religion. Likewise, the

issue of terrorism is treated only cursorily despite its importance nowadays. In addition, issues such as freedom of speech are discussed only briefly in spite of their growing importance in contemporary debates. More work needs to be done from the perspective of comparative political theory; Africa, for instance, is poorly represented in this work.

However, the book is pointed in the right direction in terms of the necessity for a dialogical approach to political philosophy and religion that takes into account the plurality of contexts and the conflictive dimensions of religion itself (e.g. source of valuable meaning; institutionalization of relations of domination). On account of its broad and balanced arguments, this book is an extremely valuable instrument for political philosophers, religion scholars, legal theorists and also for MA students and PhD students working with religion and democratic politics.

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GARCÉS, Marina (2020)

*Escola d'aprenents*

Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 192 p.

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Marina Garcés és una pensadora de proximitat i de guerrilla. De proximitat perquè planteja qüestions elementals, concretes i quotidianes amb un llenguatge planer; de guerrilla perquè formula preguntes que obren esclatxes inesperades que provoquen nous possibles. El seu pensament és pregon i sinuós, farcit de referents i de plecs. És, ahora, assequible: els seus textos es poden considerar dins la caixa d'«cines bàsiques a l'abast

de tothom» necessària per fer-nos càrrec del present i per imaginar futurs (p. 152). A banda de la claredat, pot ser que la seva virtut principal sigui la capacitat de preguntar a boca de canó i d'obrir perspectives imprevistes. Gosa formular qüestions que ens toquen i que empenyen una mica més enllà l'horitzó del que és imaginable.

A *Escola d'aprenents* ens convida a preguntar-nos per l'educació. No és el