

BOOK REVIEWS

theorists. He adds to this open and convincing argument that “Europe has always been contaminated, altered, exceeded, and differentiated” (214). However, a sharp contrast to this apparently non-essentialist view, appears shortly after. Esposito moves to what he conceives as the current European crises: migration and terrorism. His use of language is surprising (revealing?) where – seemingly out of nowhere and without argumentative backing – fearful and prejudiced terms appear: 1. “genuine refugees” (222), as if there were those that are not genuine – and even if there were, what about them? 2. Migrants, according to Esposito, may be seen as a “[...] resource to be acquired instead of as a risk” (222-223), but only if “[...] they intend to productively engage with [Europe’s] cultures” (223). How does such exclusive rhetoric fit with Europe as the “land of difference” (223)? Why should it be acceptable to treat humans as resources – and even more so, in light of Europe’s colonial past, which the author mentions at several points? While Esposito first defends a non-determinist view on European identities, it appears to go only as far as the European outside borders. Insofar as they and what lies beyond are concerned, there is an apparently clearly distinguishable European “history, resources, and culture” (229). Only on the very last pages, Esposito clearly frames the European problem as also one of internal inequalities, exemplified by “increasingly obese” people as well as those “increasingly worn down by need” (231).

I cannot help but wonder: is it not rather a clear and critical perspective of the ‘inside’ that we need right now, in order to be able to take a clear and consistent stance on the ‘outside’? The wealth that is so unequally distributed both internally and externally – is it not a most pressing crisis we need to face? Is it not many peoples’ susceptibility to extreme-right ideologies that seemingly offer the most convincing answers to this crisis? I think these questions need to be addressed without stigmatizing those seeking our wealth or safety, whether or not by claims of historical injustice, asylum or pure desperation.

It seems like a risky step to “break dramatically” (224) with any old identity in order for a new one to arise for a unified Europe. Our history and who we are and have to be eternally coalesced just so that disaster may hopefully never repeat itself.

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George ESTREICH. *Fables and Futures: Biotechnology, Disability, and the Stories We Tell Ourselves*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2019. 205 pp.

George Estreich, an award-winning poet and memoirist, and the father of a young woman with Down syndrome, delves into popular representations of cutting-edge biotechnology: websites advertising next-generation prenatal tests, feature articles on ‘three-parent IVF’, a scientist’s memoir of constructing a semisynthetic cell, and more... Each new application of biotechnology is accompanied by a persuasive story, one that minimizes downsides and promises enormous benefits. Estreich tries to restore disability to our narratives of technology. He also considers broader themes: the place of people with

disabilities in a world built for the able; the echoes of eugenic history in the genomic present; and the equation of intellect and human value. Estreich argues that, given a biotech that can select and shape who we are, we need to imagine, as broadly as possible, what it means to belong.

Each chapter focuses on a single biotech application, using it as the occasion for meditating on some intersection of biotechnology, disability, and the way we talk about both: “Even — or specifically when an explanation of technology is presented as information, it’s key to remember that a description is not only accurate or inaccurate. It is a force in the world, a wave in the ocean of messages we live in. I’m interested in descriptions with force, the widespread accounts aimed at lay people: the accounts of experts, or those that have the sheen of expertise” (XVII).

This is a very intriguing book, almost a (personal historiographic) novel, making us aware that even the best biotechnological progress still confronts us with our limitations and shortcomings.

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James Gordon FINLAYSON. *The Habermas-Rawls Debate*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019. 312 pp.

Name the two most influential political philosophers of our time! Most of us would suggest Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls. Habermas is a giant scholar, having immensely influenced the social sciences and humanities during at least five decades; from sociology through political science to political philosophy and ethics. With the publication of *A Theory of Justice* in 1971, Rawls radically changed the agenda of political philosophy, from conceptual discussions on liberty and democracy to a focus on justice. Since then, most contributions in the field relate, supportive or critical, to Rawls’ ideas. There are good reasons to compare these two philosophers and the new book by James G. Finlayson, reader in philosophy at University of Sussex, is most welcome.

While there are many similarities and differences between Habermas’ and Rawls’ ideas, and while they also engaged in discussions with each other, it remains a considerable challenge to write a comparative and critical analysis of their philosophical positions.

First, the similarities. Both Habermas and Rawls can be characterised as neo-Kantians. Habermas’ principle of universalisation, that “A norm is valid if it [...] could be freely accepted by all concerned” can be seen as a reformulation of Kant’s first Categorical imperative. There are of course many differences between Habermas and Kant, but it is obvious nevertheless that Habermas is heavily influenced by Kant’s philosophy.

The same goes for Rawls. In his priority of the right over the good in a *Theory of Justice*, Rawls explicitly refers to Kant, and his idea of a social contract is also influenced by Kant, along with Rousseau and others. Rawls refers to ‘Kantian constructivism’ as his own theory, and his treaty *The Law of Peoples* (1999) which is an essay on international justice, is much influenced by Kant’s *Zum Ewige Frieden*.