

“difficulty” raised by an aporetic disposition is not to presume the Kantian conceit that concepts are the basic building blocks of political thinking. What if the actual aporetic impasse of the “between” in Arnold’s title is that the philosophical concept is *not* a stable unit of theoretical expression and political meaning? No doubt, this is an insurmountable difficulty to cross; a true aporia of theorizing.

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Wayne Cristaudo: *Idolizing the Idea: Critical History of Modern Philosophy*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020. Pp. xii, 327.)

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“Idea-ism” is the belief that philosophy enables us to have access to timeless abstractions that “serve to dictate (and hence occlude) our focus” (x). The result is, as we see in the title of Wayne Cristaudo’s new book, “idolizing the idea.” According to Cristaudo, philosophy cannot provide “eternal standards” of evaluation. Modern philosophy, commencing with Descartes, exhibits idea-ism and in so doing has made things worse, becoming “a major source of social ill, folly, and division” (293). This critical thesis is rooted in the claim that the proper role of philosophy is not to answer questions which require all sorts of extraphilosophical knowledge but to question the questions that lead our inquiries about ourselves, lives, and world (ix). To do this adequately requires a hermeneutical, dialogical, and anthropological approach (1). To believe that the “anthropological horizon is predetermined by the underlying metaphysics is to succumb to the idea-ism” (296).

Cristaudo examines all the major figures in modern philosophy up to the present. He does so by identifying key junctures, often by challenging traditional dichotomies. Descartes initiates the quest for indubitable ideas by making the thinking self the “fulcrum for rethinking the world” (42). Rather than oppose this allegedly rationalist turn with an empiricist turn, Locke merely disagreed about what the thinking process involves (50). Subsequent philosophy from Berkeley to Leibniz is a series of attempts to close the gap between thought and reality. Hume is a breath of fresh air who uses common life to cut philosophy down to size and in so doing, like Reid, welcomes “historical memory” into epistemology (76), but Hume’s analysis of reason and critique of superstition keep him within the idea-ist camp. It was

Kant who truly grasped “the conceptual significance of the cleavage between subject and the world of objects” (86) and created an absolute fissure between our existence and our ideals. Hence Kant grasped that the modern philosophical understanding of God, self, and world required “that morality is to be understood first and foremost as an *idea*” (91), which becomes the touchstone for assessing the worth of our world making. Kant may have Platonized the Copernican revolution, but he “left largely untouched what the phenomenologists would call our ‘life world’” (93). Kant’s transcendental idealism would be seen by Hegel as a watershed in modern philosophy, bequeathing to posterity the challenge to overcome the “dualisms of reason and world, subject and object, freedom and necessity” (97).

In many ways, Hegel emerges as the crucial figure in this story. In a manner of speaking, it seems to me, Hegel Aristotelianized the Copernican revolution, putting it into social and historical context (Cristaudo acknowledges similar endeavors by Vico, Hume, Ferguson, etc.). Cristaudo will later argue that modern radicalism “strives after and promises an infinite freedom from the restrictions of social and historical finitude, which is why it is ever a negation” (102).

Chapter 6, on Schelling, contains the most powerful exposition in the book. Schelling, like Hegel, provided a “systematic and penetrating critique of the grounding of ideas and their development” in modern philosophy (109). “Schelling is symptomatic of an end of philosophy,” its “final crisis” (118), so to speak, in that he assesses “the ‘spiritual sickness in mankind’ that comes from the dominance of reflection” (112). According to Cristaudo, Schelling’s analysis is not compatible with Marxism as Žižek and some others have claimed (139). Rather, Schelling is critical of Hegel for allegedly deifying the state, and he goes on to criticize the idea that the authority of the state can protect us on the grounds that it actually negates freedom (126). While Hegel had little sympathy for a personal God, Schelling’s philosophical work is “preparatory for a new amalgamation of philosophy and religion” (132).

Cristaudo’s discussion of post-Hegelianism is divided between an extended critique of Marx, on the one hand, and an analysis of Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, on the other. Here I shall limit my review to saying that the critique is highly enlightening and linked to later antidomination theorists because “Marxism was destined to ever do critique” (142). More important for the main thesis of the book is the claim that Marx is still a metaphysical idea-ist by virtue of his “arguing that the economic phenomena of a social system are intrinsically law-governed” (150) and the absolute totality of the idea of a classless society (149). Notably, Cristaudo maintains that liberalism is the product of a collective practice and not a philosophy, though it “attracts philosophical support” and becomes a form of idea-ism when some economists take it as a blueprint for “rational construction on a global scale” independent of historical and social context (see 183n36).

Of the other three post-Hegelians (Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche), the first two are antipolitical, although all three provide a personal and subjective response to the world in opposition to abstractions. Nevertheless, they all come up short. Kierkegaard makes a kind of absolute of the subject; Schopenhauer's "depiction of the subject is materialist" (160); Nietzsche opposes asceticism and yearns for great deeds, but his idea of the superman is an empty abstraction (178). The failure becomes acute in the inability to provide an understanding of how and why the individual chooses a certain social collective—think Sartre's embrace of communism and Heidegger's embrace of Nazism (159).

"Post-Hegelianism tends to bring philosophy to an 'end'" (180) but also leads to the reaction of those who form schools of philosophy (analytic and Continental), which "are deeply dogmatic and are symptomatic of the last gasps of what deserves to die philosophically" (208). Cristaudo's detailed treatment of analytic philosophy is impressively subtle. Two of his points are worth noting: insofar as analytic philosophy is a method or style, it "generates disagreement rather than agreement" (207); and most of Wittgenstein's followers "reapply what he was doing in a purely philosophical way, rather than go through the door leading beyond philosophy. . . that he had opened" (201).

A chapter is devoted to Husserl and Heidegger. Husserl's phenomenology is an attempt to free philosophy from the shackles of "naturalism, historicism, relativism" (220), but he reverts to the Cartesian temptation by absolutizing "a finite moment, the initial indubitable 'fact'" (223). Husserl was deserted by Heidegger's rejection of the dominance and primacy of the theoretical. Cristaudo lauds Heidegger's critique of the technological carving up of the world, and he fully appreciates Heidegger's "spellbinding" writings on the history of philosophy (246) as well as the belief in "a better way of philosophizing. . . beyond and outside of philosophy" (246). Nevertheless, Cristaudo deplores Heidegger's "delusions of political grandeur," the escapism of poetry as a substitute for metaphysics, to which he remains captive, and his retreat into the life of the solitary thinker (233).

Chapter 10 focuses on the idealism of the 1960s in France (structuralism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, postmodernism, etc.) and Germany—philosophies of antidomination (of which Rawls is a watered-down version) and limitless freedom, a series of movements that ultimately reduce ethics and politics to the limited ideas that drive them. Cristaudo points out how these antiestablishment figures have become the comfortable new establishment. Interestingly, he reminds readers that this style had been diagnosed and critiqued by the now largely ignored Camus in his discussion of "metaphysical rebellion" in *The Rebel*. Given Cristaudo's overall perspective, his final critique is that herein lies "a significant degree of failure of understanding of how the world came to be the way it is and why it is the way it is" (278).

Cristaudo's knowledge of the primary and secondary sources is staggering. This is the best book on philosophy that I have read in a long time.

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John T. Scott: *Rousseau's Reader: Strategies of Persuasion and Education*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020. Pp. ix, 328.)

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There are many philosophical exegeses of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. John T. Scott's *Rousseau's Reader* is something different. It is closer to literary analysis than philosophical exegesis, not because Scott is primarily interested in literary analysis, but rather because he believes that attending to Rousseau's literary and rhetorical strategy can deepen our substantive understanding of Rousseau's philosophical system. In chapters on the *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, *Discourse on Inequality*, the *Social Contract*, and *Emile*, Scott takes for his subject not Rousseau's philosophical arguments themselves but the literary and rhetorical architecture within which Rousseau situated those arguments. Mining in areas less careful readers may regard as peripheral, Scott demonstrates that the periphery is in fact not at all peripheral to Rousseau's project. On the contrary, by adopting this approach, Scott uncovers insights that he is, in turn, able to illustrate for his reader. And this points to a second contribution of the book. In addition to deepening his readers' understanding of Rousseau, Scott's book operates as a study in *how* to read—an example of what might be discovered through a certain kind of careful reading.

While all writers pay some attention to presentation and form, Rousseau's concern for these questions was exceptional; he devoted as much energy and attention to the presentation of his philosophical arguments as he did to those arguments themselves. His writing is replete with prefatory material, notes, literary conceits (apostrophe, metaphor, paradox), epigraphs, genre shifting, illustrations, and variations in authorial and narrative voices. Why was Rousseau so preoccupied with literary and rhetorical style? The answer to this question, Scott argues, lies in the radically transformed worldview Rousseau was asking his readers to contemplate: "Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man." This claim, which formed the foundation of what Rousseau