

***The Bloomsbury Anthology of Transcendental Thought: From Antiquity to the Anthropocene***

DAVID LARocca (Ed.)

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David LaRocca's edited anthology contains chronologically organized excerpts of written expressions of (or approaching) transcendental thought, beginning with Plato and ending with Charles Taylor in 2007. Over 100 excerpts are included, from 85 authors. These collected works are notable for their diversity not only in their authorship and dates of composition, but also in their forms. That is, this anthology contains essays in philosophy, theology, and criticism; works of fiction, poetry, and drama; sermons; lectures; autobiographical remarks; and private journaling. Together, this broad range of work points readers to an understanding of the various ways in which the transcendental has been evoked over time.

This temporally and formally diverse collection is not united by any common definition of 'transcendental.' Indeed, by LaRocca's own admission in the introduction, the phrase 'transcendental thought' refers not to any established canon of texts, but rather to his observation of common intellectual concerns, habits, and perspectives in the included works. These excerpts each illustrate different ways of characterizing and drawing meaning from 'the transcendental'—it is not that they each embody it in some categorical sense, but rather that each writer, in the included works, has written about or gestured toward the notion of the transcendental. Guiding readers in understanding this myriad of perspectives on the transcendental, LaRocca's introduction includes a discussion of the contemporary relevance of the transcendental, as well as brief explanations of the connections between many of the excerpts contained in the anthology. Since the anthology proceeds from one excerpt to another without individual preface material, the introduction serves not only as an overview of the aims of the text as a whole, but also as the thread that articulates the carefully woven connections between the texts—from Plato's 'real' world of Forms and Ideas, to Kant's phenomena and noumena, to the ideological foundations of the transcendental in Marx, and so on. That is, the introduction itself is a useful essay for those seeking to understand the meanings of and connections between various versions of 'transcendental.' And the works that follow read like a carefully designed constellation that exemplifies the interconnected traits, concerns, and habits of such transcendental thought.

Such a project is, of course, not without limitations. While I do not think it worthwhile to focus on what is *not* included over what is, it may be useful to note some of the ways in which the inevitable limitations of space, language, cost, and copyright have manifested in the book's contents. For instance, though LaRocca does include excerpts from some seminal works of Eastern philosophy (Svetasvatara Upanishad, Vimalakirti, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Swami Vivekananda) and some works by women writers (Margaret Fuller, Emily Dickinson, Simone Weil, Iris Murdoch, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Luce Irigaray), the anthology leans heavily toward Western and male: in this, too, those represented are, for the most part, white.

Given these omissions—and it is up to individual readers to decide how damning each particular omission is—in the introduction, LaRocca suggests that the purpose of an anthology such as this, given the impossibility of curating an exhaustive collection

in one volume, is to prompt readers to explore more works on these subjects and/or by these writers. While it may be easy to see how a reading of only Socrates' second speech in the *Phaedrus* would prompt curious readers to seek out the entire dialogue, one would be an incredibly adept reader who, after reading the works collected in this anthology, explored, for instance, African American literary and philosophical works in search of similar transcendental themes. As a project of canon-creation, then, *The Bloomsbury Anthology of Transcendental Thought* is ambitious and notable in its diversity of form, its chronological expansiveness, and its avoidance of a fixed or uniform understanding of 'transcendental'; yet, it is not immune to the social and political considerations that arise in the selection of texts that may come to, at least in part, constitute such a canon.

Nonetheless, LaRocca's anthology is exceptional in that its chronological collection of works gives readers a sense of both the enduring importance of the idea of the 'transcendental' in literature, philosophy, and theology, as well as the diverse ways in which it has been conceived over time. While many classes and collections showcase only one form of transcendental literature or philosophy (e.g., the many anthologies of American Transcendentalism), LaRocca has selected texts that give readers a sense of the multifarious, denomination and discipline-defying, reflective, and at times contradictory nature of the transcendental, from passages from Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, to seven soliloquies from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*—Spinoza's *Ethics* to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode"—Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* to Thoreau's *Journals*—Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* to Charles Sanders Peirce's *The Law of Mind*—Proust's *Swann's Way* to Wittgenstein's *Notebooks*—and forward. For these reasons, this anthology will be useful to an interdisciplinary scholarly audience—especially in philosophy, literary and cultural studies, and the arts and humanities more generally—as well as to students of these disciplines looking to better understand the intellectual influences on those major writers that they read in and outside of class.

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