

Laval théologique et philosophique



Cyril O'REGAN, *The Anatomy of Misremembering : Von Balthasar's Response to Philosophical Modernity, Vol. I, Hegel.* New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company (coll. "A Herder & Herder Book"), 2014, 528 p.

George J. Seidel

Volume 71, Number 3, October 2015

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1036277ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1036277ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Faculté de philosophie, Université Laval
Faculté de théologie et de sciences religieuses, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (print)

1703-8804 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Seidel, G. J. (2015). Review of [Cyril O'REGAN, *The Anatomy of Misremembering : Von Balthasar's Response to Philosophical Modernity, Vol. I, Hegel.* New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company (coll. "A Herder & Herder Book"), 2014, 528 p.] *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 71(3), 558–560.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1036277ar>

Cyril O'REGAN, **The Anatomy of Misremembering : Von Balthasar's Response to Philosophical Modernity, Vol. I, Hegel.** New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company (coll. "A Herder & Herder Book"), 2014, 528 p.

In the first volume of Cyril O'Regan's work, *The Anatomy of Misremembering : Von Balthasar's Response to Philosophical Modernity*, the author deals with Balthasar's response to the modernity represented by Hegel, although his effort includes much, much more. It is, in effect, a guided tour through the whole of 19th and especially 20th century theology, Protestant and Catholic, Jewish and Agnostic. And O'Regan is an excellent Cicerone. It is not a tour through an Inferno, even though theologians of the age were sometimes forced to react to the "slaughter-bench of history," to use Hegel's phrase, which was a good portion of the 20th century. In no sense is the work an apocalyptic that ends in Paradiso. Rather, the period for the theologians, as the author portrays it, is more like a Purgatorio made up of a couple of centuries of quarantines.

The Hegel that O'Regan picks up on is largely the one he has been struggling with since his early piece *The Heterodox Hegel* (1994). As he says, "Hegelian thought [...] houses ghosts and especially the ghost of Gnosticism" (p. 110). In this connection he notes that the Valentinian Gnosticism which taints Hegel's philosophy is essentially of the pre-Nicene variety (p. 247). Though it needs to be noted that relative to the Valentinian apocalypse instantiated in the modern period (p. 398) that it is found more in the later Schelling than in Hegel as such.

When it comes to Hegel's personal religious stance, O'Regan notes that he was "putatively" Lutheran (p. 190). At various points in the volume the issue of Hegel's "pantheism" comes to the fore. Though one could hardly put Hegel in the same category as a Spinoza. A card-carrying pantheist might be willing to say that nature is the other *of* God, but could not countenance saying, as does Hegel, that nature (as estranged Spirit) is other *than* God. Further, Spinoza is a mechanist ; Hegel clearly is not. O'Regan points out that Balthasar demurs when it comes to the view of those 20th century theologians who asserted that Hegel traded in Parmenides (the metaphysics of being) for Heraclitus (the metaphysics of becoming, p. 335). After all, the dialectic with which Hegel begins the *Logik* is an indeterminate being pairing with an indeterminate non-being to give rise to an indeterminate becoming.

In the Afterword/Foreword O'Regan considers Balthasar with respect to "what is alive and what is dead in Hegel" from his aesthetics to his views on apocalyptic (p. 519-528). The author concludes that there may be some continuity when it comes to their respective views on aesthetics, but a definite discontinuity relative to apocalyptic. Further, Hegel and Balthasar while they may be close to one another when it comes to their respective Christologies, they are far distant from each other when it comes to their views on the Trinity, above all, according to O'Regan, given Hegel's Sabellianism (p. 523). For Balthasar, influenced by Bonaventure, the unity of the Trinity is founded in the Father (p. 636, n. 81). Needless to say, for Hegel Spirit, above all communal Spirit, looms large.

In the matter of aesthetics it should be noted that Hegel's is not all that special. The better parts of it derive from Schelling, who is much more original on the subject. Speaking of aesthetics the author pursues an interesting interchange between Balthasar and Walter Benjamin regarding the relative merit of dramas in the Baroque period. Balthasar prefers the Spanish Baroque (Calderón and Lope de Vega) over German Romantic drama (p. 491-493), as distinct from Benjamin. "Benjamin favors the Protestant dialectical, Balthasar the Catholic analogical world-views" (p. 497). However, the argument between the two, he says, is as much about apocalyptic as it is about aesthetics relative to the apocalyptic (p. 498).

What O'Regan's book is about is not simply the theologians that populate the intellectual world after Hegel, it is about modernity, above all, the species of modernity the author sees in Hegel and the efforts expended by Balthasar to counter it. So what is modernity? The easy answer is to say that it is what comes before post-modernism. Or, one could say that modernity is what Pio Nono was against in the *Syllabus Errorum* (as focused in the Anti-Modernist oath). So is Hegel modernity? One could easily argue that he is, in many respects, post-modern. After all, he is against Rationalism, as also the Enlightenment that it spawns. Still, on the other hand, he is pro-France, both the source and the fruit of the Enlightenment, and would have liked to see the German lands follow the French suit. And he is equally against Romanticism. He cannot abide Fichte's subjective idealism with its negative (that is, with its unfinished, if not, indeed, unfinishable) infinity. So what is the version of modernity that Hegel would favor? Again, there is an easy answer: his.

Reading papal encyclicals is an acquired taste. The style alone is off-putting. Nevertheless, I did read John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio*, and found in it a solution to the age-old, long-standing argument regarding the relation between faith and reason. The curious thing about the encyclical is that the resolution of the issue is fundamentally Hegelian. Well, one may say, the Polish pope did, after all, live under a Marxist regime for many years, and may very well have picked up some Hegelian dialectic subliminally. O'Regan, however, indicates that Cardinal Angelo Scola apparently had a major hand in the 1998 document. He further notes that Scola is a Balthasar scholar. So if that is the case, then why does the encyclical seem so Hegelian, that is if Balthasar is anti-Hegelian (p. 134, 559, n. 44)? Something does not quite jibe here.

Again, one can only marvel at the command O'Regan displays in dealing with the theologians and thinkers especially those of 20th century Europe as they individually and collectively confront the powerful philosophical force that is Hegelian thought. Though I do have a couple of animadversions regarding his account of Hegel, one minor, one more serious. O'Regan often speaks of the Hegelian triad of art, religion and philosophy (e.g., p. 509). However, in addition to art and religion, among the forms of objective Spirit there is also the state. Philosophy, on the other hand, is the "circle of circles." The more serious concern is with the author's view of Hegel as absorbing religion into philosophy (p. 132). At the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel does not say that Christianity or religion is taken up into philosophy but, rather, that it is the *difference* between the two that is *aufgehoben*, that is, not just canceled and preserved — for they remain distinctly what they are, faith and reason — but also and, indeed above all, they are raised to a higher level — the third meaning to Hegel's *Aufhebung*. And the higher level to which both are raised is the reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) of the two in the Truth. It would be absurd, on Hegel's or anyone's view, to suggest that one would need to be a philosopher in order to be religious.

One final note. O'Regan, likely Balthasar, and certainly Schelling and Kierkegaard, are (or were) aware that the thought that would contest the system gets swallowed up by the system, in the case of Schelling and Kierkegaard, "both of whom acknowledge the tendency of the Hegelian system to absorb even or especially what contests it" (p. 637, n. 88). Whether the author's work is doomed to suffer a similar fate or, instead, cause the Hegelian system to have a severe case of acid reflux, cannot be known.

In any case, one can only look forward to volume II with Balthasar, and the author, ready in the wings to take up the misrememberings in Heidegger. There are hints, already in this first volume, regarding what may be on the menu.

George J. SEIDEL
St. Martin's University, Lacey

Martin RODAN, **Camus et l'antiquité**. Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Oxford, Wien, Peter Lang S.A., 2014, 261 p.

Version remaniée de la thèse de doctorat de Martin Rodan, professeur de littérature française à l'Université Hébraïque de Jérusalem, *Camus et l'antiquité* entend montrer que l'Antiquité a servi de « sol fertile » à l'élaboration de l'œuvre de Camus, tant sur le plan littéraire que philosophique. Au premier abord, la méthode de Rodan semble très séduisante et laisse espérer un ouvrage fort novateur. Il propose de concevoir le rapport entre Camus et l'Antiquité d'un point de vue dialectique, étant entendu que l'intérêt de Camus à l'égard des Anciens provient du souci du libre penseur et non du souci de l'historien, cela lui permettant de forger sa propre originalité et de mieux aborder en retour la culture antique. Si, plusieurs décennies auparavant, Paul Archambault avait rigoureusement étudié l'exactitude de la connaissance camusienne des auteurs anciens dans son article « Camus and Hellenic sources », aucune étude d'envergure n'avait encore exposé leur relation sous l'angle de la réappropriation personnelle. Cette thèse amène l'auteur à refuser deux autres méthodes de rapprochement entre Camus et l'Antiquité. La première méthode refusée propose d'étudier seulement les passages de l'œuvre camusienne faisant explicitement référence à des textes anciens. Cette méthode rigoureuse centrée sur les rapprochements textuels ne considère pas « l'imprégnation culturelle » de Camus et les processus d'acquisition de connaissances plus personnels (p. 3). La deuxième méthode refusée propose d'étudier tous les passages pouvant être lus comme « inspirés » (analogies, parentés de pensée, figures de style) par un auteur ancien. Cette méthode plus relâchée, plus « universelle », risque évidemment de commettre « des rapprochements tout à fait gratuits » (p. 4). C'est dans ce contexte que Rodan tente de mettre l'accent sur la façon dont les sources antiques ont permis à Camus de forger sa propre originalité.

Dans la première partie, l'auteur retrace les études et les commentaires de Camus dédiés à des auteurs anciens, poètes ou philosophes. Il y étudie notamment l'apport de Nietzsche, de Grenier, de Plotin, de saint Augustin, des Présocratiques, de Socrate, de Platon, d'Aristote, des Stoïciens, des Épicuriens, d'Eschyle, de Sophocle, d'Homère, de la Bible, du Christ. Plusieurs analyses se démarquent par leur originalité et leur exactitude. Il suffit de penser aux quelques pages (p. 9-14) dédiées à Nietzsche, où il est prouvé avec rigueur que Camus ne souscrit ni à l'anti-socratisme nietzschéen ni à la valorisation dionysienne de la *Naissance de la tragédie*. Il faut aussi se référer au deuxième chapitre (p. 19-26), consacré à Plotin et à saint Augustin, où une analyse serrée de son Diplôme d'Études Spécialisées, intitulé *Métaphysique chrétienne et néoplatonisme*, propose de concevoir l'hellénisme sur le plan de la connaissance (amour de la connaissance) et le christianisme sur le plan de l'amour (connaissance de l'amour). Les chapitres portant sur la tragédie (cinquième chapitre, p. 53-60) et sur le mythe grec (sixième chapitre, p. 61-67) sont aussi dignes de mention : l'auteur y propose des synthèses particulièrement lumineuses du sujet traité, même s'il se munit parfois d'un cadre interprétatif trop lourd (cf. la distinction entre mythes platoniciens et mythes dionysiens).

Quelques difficultés importantes apparaissent pourtant dans quelques passages de cette première partie. Rodan s'expose pour la première fois dans le chapitre dédié aux philosophes grecs