

SUMMARIES AND COMMENTS

859

Salvation comes through the subjectivity established through God, since it is only in the relation to God that the self encounters an “infinitely compelling subjectivity.”

This is one reason why Socrates remained an important reference point for Kierkegaard. Like Jesus, Socrates understood that truth is subjectivity, and likewise that virtue cannot be taught: “it is not a doctrine, it is an ability, a practice, an existing, an existential reformation.” This has been confused by the “entire unholy pack of ‘priests and professors’” who reduce faith to intellectual assent to doctrine. Accordingly, in numerous entries Kierkegaard continues to heap contempt on the clergy as well as the faculty of theology. Unlike bishops, priests, deacons, and apostles, the category of “theologian” is foreign to the New Testament. Similarly, modern biblical scholarship also tends to distract from the actual requirement of following Christ. “The N.T.,” Kierkegaard bluntly states, “is extremely easy to understand.” But we pretend it is difficult because we don’t want to understand it, so we invented scholarship to protect ourselves against the N.T. and the claim it makes on us. “Above all,” he counsels, “read the N.T. without a commentary.” Of the writing of commentaries there is no end, but reading the bible with scholarship in mind is reading it *contra naturam*.

One might say something similar about how to read Kierkegaard, who wrote to awaken the reader ethically and religiously rather than to provide subject matter for scholars. And yet for many of us, Kierkegaard is also a topic of scholarship. As such, the scholar’s relation to Kierkegaard’s texts will always reflect a certain ambiguity, even ambivalence. What is clear, however, is that these new critical editions do an excellent job of making Kierkegaard’s journals and notebooks available in all their richness.—
Brian Gregor, *California State University–Dominguez Hills*

LACHS, John. *Freedom and Limits*. Edited by Patrick Shade. New York: Fordham University Press, 2014. 520 pp. Cloth, \$125.00; paper, \$30.00—Great philosophers in the past hundred years or so have been masterful technicians, but many have been less concerned than their counterparts in previous centuries to link their subtle theories to a vision of the good life. John Lachs is a notable exception to that rule. Here is a collection of previously published material that reveals the development over some fifty-six years of what Lachs calls his *lebensphilosophie*, while showcasing the impressive range of his thought, his original ideas, and his technical prowess.

This nicely bound volume consists of thirty-two selections divided into five parts, plus a substantive prologue and epilogue. Each part features a major theme addressed by Lachs, including mind and reality, self and society, pluralism and choice-inclusive facts, meaningful living, and

human advance and finite obligation. Within those five parts, selections are helpfully organized in chronological order by publication date, making it easy to see lines of continuity and development in Lachs's thought that might otherwise remain hidden. Ideas central to Lachs's philosophy include finitude, immediacy, liberty, optimism, and the individual as the basic unit of action and decisions. All of these receive ample coverage, as do choice-inclusive facts, reimmediation, and stoic pragmatism, perhaps Lachs's most important original ideas.

While some philosophers hold that facts are objective, others subscribe to the view that they are conventional. According to Lachs, certain facts are both. Choice-inclusive facts include some elements that are independent of human decisions, but such facts also include elements that are determined by human choices. Adulthood is one example of a choice-inclusive fact, as it includes both an objective element, chronological age, and decisions about when to allow younger people to hold full time jobs, drive cars, or drink alcohol.

Few philosophers since Hegel have been as keenly aware of mediation and its pervasive role in modern societies as Lachs. Unlike Hegel, however, Lachs takes a dim view of mediation when its pervasiveness degrades the lives of individuals by destroying what Lachs calls the "natural integrity" of human action. A complete human action, Lachs explains, flows unimpeded from intending to do something, to taking action, to experiencing the consequences of one's deed. Unfortunately, the complex institutions that enable our world to function often come between our intentions and the consequences we intend to bring about. We are forced to rely on anonymous others with specialized knowledge that we do not have and cannot learn. On the one hand this is positive, because an elaborate division of labor enables us to create the immense prosperity that is the hallmark of advanced societies and that hundreds of millions now enjoy. The downside, however, is significant. We become less free and thus less responsible for our actions when they are carried out through what Lachs calls "mediated chains" than when we are the sole authors of what we do. In addition, satisfaction with our jobs and our lives becomes that much harder to achieve when mediated chains hide the consequences of our actions from us. When we are unable to see the fruits of our labors, because that is someone else's department, our work becomes meaningless drudgery. To Lachs, the answer to too much mediation is what he calls "reimmediation." This means that, at a minimum, workers at all levels need to know what those above and below them are doing, making them aware of the larger significance of what they do. Immediacy with the ends for which we strive restores the natural integrity of human action and provides the satisfaction appropriate to ends.

Stoic pragmatism is perhaps the crown of Lachs's *lebensphilosophie*. Here one can see all the major elements of Lachs's thought serving a single idea. As the basic units of action and decisions, individuals must determine when to keep fighting for improvement like a good pragmatist

and when to call it quits and choose, like a good stoic, to prefer what is to what ought to be. There is satisfying immediacy to be had while in the fight, as well as in the calm acceptance that comes after the decision to surrender. But stoic pragmatism presupposes two things: that we are finite and that we are at liberty to decide for ourselves when the point of futility has arrived. Infinite beings have no need of stoic pragmatism, because for them perfection is within easy reach. In contrast, knowing how much is too much is the very foundation of wisdom for finite beings. Yet that knowledge cannot help us if mediated chains replace individuals in their natural role as ultimate deciders. Thus, while immediacy with ends is a necessary condition of satisfaction for finite beings, so is the freedom to choose those ends for ourselves. Individuals must whenever possible be at liberty to pursue the good as they see it.

Philosophy for Lachs must be a guide to life if it is to have any value. That is what he means by *lebensphilosophie*. Thanks to editor Patrick Shade, we have here in a single volume an exemplary *lebensphilosophie*.—Michael Brodrick, *Miami University*

MULLA SADRA. *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*. Translated by Seyyed Hussein Nasr. Edited by Ibrahim Kalin. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2014. xli + 123 pp. Cloth, \$39.95.—This work provides a complete English translation with facing page Arabic text of the metaphysical treatise *Kitāb al-Mashā'ir* by Muhammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Yayhā al-Qawāmi al-Shirāzi or Mullā Sadrā (c. 1571–1636 CE), the most influential and well known Islamic philosopher after Avicenna (d. 1037). As Nasr explains in his “Translator’s Preface,” this translation arose from private extracurricular classes with advanced students (*dars-i khārij* in the Persian tradition) with close reading of the Arabic text followed by a draft English version with discussions of the translation. Once the matter of the translation was settled, comments on the text were presented and discussed, with all these being recorded. Ibrahim Kalin joined the group in 1996 and later proposed publication of the text, translation, and commentary. The present volume contains the Arabic text and English translation edited by Kalin along with his “Editor’s Introduction” and modest notes on the translation. The second part of the project, the edition of Nasr’s commentary, awaits future publication.

In many respects similar in kind to metaphysical explorations of existence or being in Latin Christian scholasticism, this work assumes the truth of the author’s faith tradition and proceeds to explicate key metaphysical terms and teachings of the *falsafa* tradition that explain scriptural revelations found in the *Qur’ān*. The Opening and First Penetration sets the stage with the explication of the notion of *wujūd* (existence or being, though the term is left untranslated throughout the