

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Natural Law and Justice*. Lloyd L. Weinreb. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987. 320 pp. Reviewed by Peter P. Cvek., St. Peter's College.

In the twentieth century, the concept of natural law refers to a particular philosophy of law in the general area of jurisprudence. In this context, contemporary theories of natural law are collectively defined in terms of their opposition is typically said to revolve around the correct understanding of the relationship between law and morals. Natural law maintains that genuine positive laws must conform to the principles of morality. Since the purpose of both law and morality is to promote the common good, this conformity is the primary cause of any laws obligatory force. Legal obligation is thus a subset of moral obligation. The major implication of natural law theory is succinctly captured by the Thomistic declaration which states that a law which is judged to be immoral is not a law, but a perversion of law. In contrast, legal positivism insists on the autonomy of law, or the separation of law and morals. Positive laws are identified by criteria of legal legitimacy that are not themselves moral requirements. These laws may or may not conform to the dictates of morality, nevertheless, they are still laws, and hence legally binding. Although one's moral obligations are distinct from one's legal obligations, for moral reasons, one might choose not to obey a law which one judged to be immoral.

Professor Weinreb's *Natural Law and Justice* begins with a simple observation about the current state of jurisprudence. "Considered on its own terms, the contemporary debate has a curiously arid quality..." (4). Does it really make a difference, he asks, whether we say, along with the proponent of natural law, "This enactment is too immoral to obligate us; therefore it is not a law," or, as the legal positivist would have it, "This law is too immoral to obligate us; therefore, it ought not be obeyed"? Weinreb summarily concludes that the difference has little practical value. In fact, he suggests that contemporary natural law and legal positivism have more in common than is typically supposed. Most importantly, both theories deny any normative significance to the causal order of nature. In the contemporary context, both natural law and legal positivism assume the distinction between "is" and "ought," between descriptive laws of nature and normative principles, or, on another level, between positive law and morality. Commenting on the contemporary "deontological" version of natural law, Weinreb asserts that "although its various formulations have important points to make, they establish nothing that is not compatible with legal positivism and contained misleadingly within it." (8)

In light of these common features, Weinreb suggests that "the persistence of natural law in its present guise is itself a puzzle and an indication that something more lies hidden beneath the jurisprudential debate." (8) The purpose of this book is to reveal this something which lies hidden, a purpose that can be achieved only by an examination of the history and original character of natural law. Because in its classical-ontological form, natural law directly confronted the fundamental problem of responsible human freedom in a causally determined universe. The aim of classical natural law was to explain how a human being can be part of the causally determined natural order and still be a free and morally responsible agent. Since moral responsibility seems to require that an act be both free and determined at the same time, the problem is contained within the very idea of freedom itself. On the one hand, unless a person's act is free and self-determined, one cannot be said to be morally responsible for it. On the other hand, unless the circumstances and personal qualities which make one act as one does are determinate, the act appears as a the result of an arbitrary occurrence and not something for which one could be responsible. Yet, if circumstances and personal qualities do determine one's act, then it is not free and one is not morally responsible. So, in order for a person to act freely and responsibly, then the act must be determined, but if it is determined, then it cannot be free (6).

For contemporary natural law, the issue is merely to explain one's obligation to obey the law. This limiting of the problem is a direct result of the rejection of classical-ontological natural law and its replacement by a new deontological formulation. This is not to say that the problem addressed by classical natural law has been resolved. Quite the contrary, the problem remains, albeit under new names and within different conceptual frameworks. Weinreb curtly dismisses the contemporary philosophical discussions of the problem as irrelevant, since they amount to either simple acts of conceptual clarification or merely verbal reformulations of the problem. Accordingly, Weinreb intends to restore "the original understanding of natural law as a theory about the nature of being, the human condition in particular" (7).

This project of restoration is divided into two parts, each with its own distinctive strategy. Part One is essentially a brief history of the natural law tradition from its beginnings in ancient Greek speculation about the *Kosmos* to the present deontological theories. Although the idea of a natural law as such first appears in Cicero's Latin translations of Greek Stoicism, its sources lie in the earliest stages of Greek reflection on the human condition. Chapter 1 introduces the original ontological understanding of natural law as it appears in Home, the Greek tragic poets, the *nose-physis* debate, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. The classical solution to the problem was contained in the idea of a unitary normative natural order within which human beings are simultaneously free and

determined. From an internal perspective, even though one's acts are free and self-determined, they fulfill the cosmic order. From an external perspective, one's acts are determined, nevertheless, what occurs is subject to personal responsibility. Within the natural order, everything is as it ought to be and ought to be as it is.

Chapter 2 follows the course of natural law in Roman jurisprudence and the theological doctrines of early Christianity. The chapter concludes with an extended discussion of the philosophy of natural law expounded by Thomas Aquinas. For Aquinas, the natural law is the divine Eternal Law immanent in the created order of nature. While all creatures are necessarily determined by nature, rational beings possess the power of self-determination. Yet, in acting in obedience to the natural law, they likewise fulfill the Eternal Law and the order of all things as determined by divine providence.

Chapter 3 examines the use of natural law in the political philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, and Rosseau. In its modern development, natural law, separated from its theological and ontological roots, became "an isolated abstraction," which continued to affirm that nature set standards of conduct, without explaining what nature was or why it was normative. As illustrated by the modern contractarians, "natural law persisted, the more easily because there was nothing to limit its specific content," and it could be used to identify whatever each theorist believed to be fundamental, that is, certain, self-evident, and non-negotiable (2). The chapter concludes with the critical philosophy of Kant, who attempted to reconstruct a natural law on a rational foundation, without recourse to the old metaphysics of nature.

Chapter 4 reviews the contemporary deontological theories of natural law as found in the conception of "practical reasonableness" advocated by John Finnis, in David Richards' "methodological natural law," and suggestively in Ronald Dworkin's theory of "law as integrity." John Finnis' new natural law theory is the best example of the contemporary Kantian-inspired theories of natural law and is well worth a close examination.

Part Two pursues the same goal of restoration by a critique of contemporary political philosophy. Specifically, chapters 5 through 8 examine the current analysis of the normative ideas of liberty, equality, and justice, which are said to be the principles of a just social order. Weinreb persuasively argues that the project of contemporary political philosophy is hopeless. Since these concepts have been divorced from nature, they are effectively without content. What content they do possess is typically based on an unvalidated conception of the self and various reconstituted conventional beliefs. Although many of these comments are reminiscent of the recent communitarian critiques of liberal political theory, Weinreb criticizes communitarianism for similar shortcomings.

For Weinreb, however, the concepts of contemporary political philosophy are important because they are analogues for the basic problematic of classical natural law. Weinreb argues that there is a connection, at least by analogy, between the ontological natural law and contemporary normative issues. The classical idea of natural law sought to mediate the opposition between freedom and determinism within a normative natural orders. Analogously, the idea of justice, with respect to the individual, attempts to reconcile the ideas of desert and entitlement. Desert presupposes freedom and responsibility, whereas entitlement is based on the application of a determinate rule. Although justice would require that persons get what they deserve and deserve what they get, the divergence between desert and entitlement, like that of freedom and determinism, is inherent and unavoidable. Similarly, social justice replaces the ideas of desert and entitlement with the ideas of liberty and equality. Liberty defines a person's capacity for self-determination according to the law. Equality is effected by the laws granting of entitlements which attempt to eliminate or disregard natural differences, not to mention, different uses of the capacity for self-determination. Unfortunately, liberty and equality are similarly inconsistent. "Abstractly, every principle of liberty or equality is contradicted by another principle no less powerful than itself. A just social order, in which liberty and equality coexist without contradiction of the principle prescribed by each, is unattainable." (10) The antinomies of justice are insoluble because their source, concealed by contemporary political discourse, is the age old ontological antinomy between freedom and determinism.

What distinguishes Weinreb's otherwise standard history of natural law is his attempt to restore the ontological impetus which has propelled the natural law tradition throughout its development. Yet, it is not clear what this restoration is meant to accomplish. Weinreb concedes that the solution proposed by the classical-ontological account is incorrect, or at least, unacceptable to the modern mind. The distinction between ontology and morality is readily acknowledged by both contemporary deontological natural law and legal positivism. Weinreb's claim that modern political philosophy is ultimately infected by the same, until now undiagnosed, disease is provocative and may not be far off the mark. Tragically, it appears to be a disease for which there is not cure. One is reminded of Alasdair MacIntyre's similarly dismal appraisal of the history of western ethics in *After Virtua* (1981). It is not evident that Weinreb is waiting for another St. Benedict, let alone another Thomas Aquinas.

*Excesses*, Alphonso Lingis, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983). ISBN 0-87395-797-0. Reviewed by Benjamin S. Pryor., Claremont Graduate School.

Books in philosophy almost always lack one important thing: pictures. Linguis' *Excesses*, a sort of "On the Road" for academics, has some pictures and a surplus of conviction which makes the book both unnerving and satisfying. *Excesses* is full of strikingly clear explanation of everything from Aristotle to Lacan, making it valuable to anyone wishing to understand these philosophers, our culture, and the trouble our particular form of civilization has with what is not civilized. Lingis sets out not to explain, but to discover "the excessive impulses of our eroticism in new ways, in remote places." He does this by offering both a fascinating first person narrative of his adventures under water, in East Africa, India, Bali, New Guinea, and Sri Lanka, and their arrangement in counterpoint with strangely consistent and illuminating analyses of Freud, Lacan, Kant, Aristotle, and others. But he does not fall back on the philosophers, but instead lets their observations on civilization, law, and excess both elucidate and fall short of that which they purport to explain. By this constant uneasy dialogue between our culture as represented by Freud, Kant, Aristotle, et al., and ones which it cannot begin to understand, we begin to learn something about our own ways of thinking with respect to our dealings with alterity. Lingis does not conceal outrage at civilizations' violent encounter with the savage, with what does not belong to it, or at the economic and political philosophizing that justifies its actions to itself. This is what makes the book primarily ethical in tone and point of view. *Excesses* begins and ends with a question of ethics. We are from the beginning confronted with the dismantling of the integrated ego, and the violent expenditure of excess libidinal energy, expenditure without return, the compulsion to "unreasonably spend weeks to cross Afghanistan to go...look at some dust covered ruins." But between the disassembling of the self and this violence arises the question of community and culture, the problem of how we are to live together when the manifestations of excess take completely alien forms. *Excesses* manages to explore this question through the confrontation of 'western' manifestations of excess and the "savage", or what occupies the place of the inaccessible and shocking other. Through the dismemberment of the self which inaugurates our trek to the gradual reconstruction of the individual in a far away place, we get a picture of what it would be like to live in a world.

We first follow Lingis into the sea, a world in which we are powerless, and in which excess is stripped bare. The question of a consciousness which grasps and orders is rendered null, and the question of erotic excess becomes pressing. Colorful and dangerous fish swimming in darkness present a display over and beyond the function of camouflage and the semantic functions of mating signals, in terms of which we are usually asked to understand living things. But if these explanations fail,

then what exactly *are* the colors illuminated by the fish's own bioluminescence for the benefit of nobody and nothing? They are there for the benefit of the eye adrift in the deep which passes over surface effects, which caresses. For us, the crux of this observation is that the eye is not being operated by an ego for its intents and purposes. It is being moved by the movements it provokes in the other without apprehending or appropriating what it sees.

So much of the rest of the book is dominated by this dismemberment of the integrated body that another question presents itself: how can the explorations of excess in cultural avoid, if only out of anxiety, codification, circumscription, or assimilation of the forms of excess we discover? The answer, here and elsewhere, lies in the "transgressive" nature of the writing itself, in the constant confrontation of one discourse with another without any therapeutic intent. The encounters throughout the book are not between reason and savagery, though we get plenty of charged descriptions of what happens when encounters are self-understood in this way. They are encounters between different manifestations of excess, from within the traveller's manifestation of excess.

The initial dismemberment of the ego prepares us, along with Lingis, to approach others in a new way, unmasked to an extent. Interestingly, the second chapter, "Savages" begins with an extended quote which shows how encounters go when the ego is well in place, but because the quotation runs for a page and a half, it's easy to mistake the speaker for Lingis, and to feel betrayed. For our culture, the scarifications and bodily mutilations of the savage are so many signs waiting for a rational interpretation. And the inadequacy of explaining savage inscriptions in terms of their references, of unearthing their semantic functions, might lead us to simply declare the savage incomprehensible, or entirely other. Or worse, it might lead us to explain the inscriptions anyway, in terms of primitive intentional gestures, perhaps. But, Lingis points out, this never explains the repugnance we feel over the savagery of it all (which, he'll say alter, adumbrates our response to it). Of course, he says, the issue is sex, but it is also cruelty:

They use their own flesh as so much material at hand for-what? We hardly know how to characterize it--Art? Inscription? Sign-language?...Aren't they treating themselves like pieces of dikdik fur, bat's penis...? All that excites some dark dregs of lechery and cruelty in us, holding our eyes fixed with repugnance and lust (p. 22).

Lingis begins, instead of with concepts of intentions and sensations, by working with psychoanalytic concepts, such as excitation: that which occurs in the "physioco-chemical mass of material nature when there is an

effect disproportionate to its cause." Lingis takes things from the "libidinal point of view," and describes libidinal life, the moment when force intensifies, when a surplus builds. This is excess as we have come to understand it, and it is all surface rather than the depth of inward life:

The savage inscription is a working over the skin, all surface effects. This cutting in orifices and raising tumescences does not contrive new receptor organs for the depth body, nor multiply ever more subtle signs for the psychic depth where personal intentions would be being formed; it extends the erotogenic surface (p. 34).

This kind of resolution, an understanding that refuses to appropriate or confront is repeated throughout the book and elaborated clearly and forcefully.

The question of eroticism in culture leads to a new set of issues, raised in the interstice between Plato and Freud, between their theories of sublimation. For Plato, eroticism moves from individuality along the vertical axis to sublime universality and generality, and this in turn animates human activity:

...eros is the purposive in general. It is erotic force in every human operation that animates it with teleology, with a longing for the beyond. Then, paradoxically, it is philosophical dialectics that is the apt method to know the true nature of sensual lust (p. 51).

The Platonic sublimation of intimacy in favor of generality, of the most universal, is echoed in Freud, but minus the teleology. Freud discovers the erotic behind the striving for justice and knowledge, and the attachment to beauty. But he does not see sublimation as an ascension to the world of the forms, but as the result of repression:

It is because the originally wild, unbound sexual attachment of the infant is repressed that it seeks outlets in the sublime forms of a search for knowledge, a striving after just, that is, fraternal and loving, society, and longing for beauty, that is, universal or culturally acceptable phantasms. The ultimate metaphysical oneness and wholeness the erotically driven life seeks is the unavowable intimacy of the infantile condition prior to all culture (p. 53).

The initial impulse, while for Plato finds its home in unity and universality, for Freud is alienated into the fragmented and impermanent forms of

culture and social organization. The fascination with bestiality and other excessive and transgressive sexual acts is merely the "inventive libido" seeking its own norm beyond what is presented to it as proper satisfaction of its immediate needs. In a culture constituted by repression and sublimation, the libido "will always contain the urge to go farther."

High culture does not represent the ever more rich satisfaction of man's protean desiring nature but the ever more extensive dissimulation of its demand. As eros becomes ever more universal, and, in civilization, every more conscious and capable, it turns ever more into a discontent (p. 56) So what else is there? The story of Freudian repression in civilization is a familiar one, and is here given the most clear of expositions, but for a purpose that is not merely expository. What if, Lingis asks, and this is the ethical question of the book, there is simply no other way of thinking about human life on this planet? The temple of Khajuraho is the first of a few examples that shows that there is. The temple as he describes it is liberally decorated on friezes in its intricately assembled geometrical buildings with erotic images: auto-erotic stimulation, homosexual and bestial intercourse, and so on. But these images do not give Lingis the sense that they are provocative or that they record the violation of taboo. Instead, the Platonic telos and the erotic drive are no longer capable of being put at opposite ends of a vertical expanse, or of being thought of in terms of Freudian repression, but are fully contained within human sensuality:

...here craft, engineering, architecture, social organization, mathematical intelligence, religious mysticism were not advances beyond, nor detours from, but new heights and realms for eroticism. These are not temples of love in that the culture knew nothing higher to enshrine than biological functions; they are temples in which sensuality itself reaches a supreme degree of intelligence, thoughtfulness, beauty, capable of entering into or assembling the cosmos (p. 61).

The possibility of such a culture, of such a form of reason, is both encouraging and confrontational, if only to see what is more true to us be most unthinkable to another.

The confrontational nature of this chapter is magnified in the next, in which we encounter a form of excess which is pure expenditure, "solar". Whereas our only encounter in Khajuraho was with a culture long dead, we are now confronted with one that is dying. Lingis begins with a description of the Balinese dance in which entranced men gore themselves with daggers. For us, obsessed with teleology and enlightenment as we are, the dance aroused a host of interpretations which inevitably become "an integral part of an enterprise of destruction of any culture (83)." But instead of finding demented collapse which



transports the dancer upward to inhuman universality, and instead of finding "psychological theater" which exorcises the participant, frees him to invoke what exceeds and underlies the "special economy" of culture and morality, Lingis discovers "pure theater":

...[the] enterprise of theoretical consolation [which promises a cure, postpones the end] is an illusory fixation of forms to cover over the uncontainable forces of universal transience. Theatrical or tragic culture is contrived to bring about inward union with the universal will. The consolation it gives...is to find enkindled in one's heart the pleasure which is that of the universal substance--not a contentment in the stabilization of forms, in immortality, but an exaltation in the ceaseless formation and transformation of forms. In this ecstasy alone there is reconciliation with the imminent destruction of our own form (p. 84).

If this rethinking of the Balinese trance questions our mode of explanation and its imposition, the next chapter, "Black Gods", advances this one step further. Freudian theory accepts as a grounding supposition that "civilization is constituted out of the prohibition of immediate gratification." And for one who doesn't look closely enough, cannibalistic societies of new Guinea are as constituted by repression as any other, the difference being only in the level of sophistication, of civilization in evidence there. Their civilization is merely society in its most primitive form. Lingis, however, effectively argues, and this is as close to an argument as *Excesses* comes, that this explanation of headhunting society is at least questionable. He does so by showing that headhunting is *not* a passage from the demand for immediate gratification to the alienation of that demand into the world of the real, into symbols, and therefore into generality. Instead, headhunting and cannibalism singularize:

The cannibalism would then not be a eucharist which founds a legislated association, the pact of a brotherhood, would not be a participation in the mystical body of the idealized father which puts the legislator of the universal law in each one; it is a singularizing initiation by which one that has killed one of his own kind removes himself from the codes of association. The world that now speaks in him is not the imperative of discourse which prohibits immediate gratification, addresses the libido to the other and regulates its articulation into multiple ways of symbolism; it is rather

the breath and the power, the spirit, that issues the war-cry (p. 107-108).

We are no longer able to see the ritualistic battles as some tropic variation on what we all do. From the point of view of civilization, of our culture, they cannot be truly understood without also being civilized. From the point of view of the libido, from which Lingis constantly tries to write, they are distinctly other, and understood as such.

In the last two chapters, Lingis seems to reach for reconciliation through respect for others, manifested by the use of the second person "you" when addressing those he meets. Excess is still present, but, particularly in the final chapter, as an excess of virtue, of generosity, which is uncalled for by the Kantian imperative, and by the measured and equal exchange that Aristotle sees as constitutive of civilization. In the last chapters, Lingis is utterly honest. We share the agony of separation with him, and the incomprehensible pain of immeasurable suffering that he encounters on the streets of Calcutta. He does not adopt the courageous attitude of the noble sufferer, those sensitive tourists who inevitably compare suffering to their luxury. He understands himself better than that, better than to think that the signs, the traces, he finds there are ready-made for his Aristotelian understanding. Only through an understanding of the erotic foundations of the moral imperative, of the economics of the exchange of signs, of that which makes him an agent can Lingis approach another openly, erotically.

I must admit to not understanding the effect of the last chapter. It works by the counterpunctual juxtaposition of first person narratives in which we encounter a number of people, with short descriptive paragraphs of Aristotelian and Kantian ethics. As in the previous chapters, we are asked to neither accept nor reject the philosophers in light of the narrative. Again, this would be too easy. Instead, it seems as if an awareness of the foundations of these moral imperatives and exchanges of goods and virtues in libidinal life is the goal. Like complicated images in a good film, the exegetical and narrative passages are merely set against one another and neither is allowed to dominate, or even respond. Lingis does not allow us to reject one or the other, perhaps since both are so skillfully written. The effect is unsettling and powerful, as it is throughout the book.

A brief critical note: the book is shoddily proofread. Typographical errors plague almost every chapter making some crucial passages difficult to read.

*Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking*, by Merrilee Salmon. Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1988. Reviewed by Marjorie Hass, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

An introductory course in critical thinking is, for many undergraduates, a first encounter not only with the principles of clear and logical thought, but with philosophy in general. Given this, and the further observation that few students continue the study of philosophy, it becomes apparent that an introductory logic text must serve two purposes. Obviously the text must provide a clear guide to the fundamentals of logic but it ought also to present this material in as philosophical a context as possible, i.e., it must give students a sense of the relationship logic bears to the greater philosophical enterprise.

On both of these counts *An Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking* by Merrilee Salmon fares well. The material is rendered in a brisk cycle foregoing the breezy conversational tone adopted by many such books. Salmon's mood is a studious one that lends itself well to the rigors of the more formal aspects of logic, but its also appropriate for discussions of informal matters. She also avoids the common technique of sectioning off of "points to know" or "key terms". Instead each chapter is followed by a glossary and brief summary which allows the instructor to place the focus according to his or her own liking.

In addition Salmon alludes to the philosophical context in which logic exists. She does not shy away from pointing out, for example, that there are serious questions about whether the material conditional can adequately render the "if-then" of an English sentence or that there exist criticisms of some of the very foundations of classical logic. For those who wish to include material of this nature in an introductory course, Salmon's book offers several nice points of departure. On the other hand, the philosophical content of the book is not belabored and can be largely ignored by instructors disinclined to teach it.

The content of the book includes the requisite chapters on inductive and deductive arguments and fallacies. One nice switch is that the inductive material is presented first leaving students less likely to think of induction as the poor cousin to deduction. In addition, Salmon offers chapters on causal arguments, probability, scientific reasoning, syllogisms, and the role of language and definition in critical thinking. An appendix gives a proof method for truth-functional logic. Each chapter is relatively discrete allowing for a high degree of flexibility. There is quite a lot of material covered and I doubt that it could be completely gotten through in one semester.

There are enough exercises to allow for some to be assigned as homework and some to be practiced in class. The examples are taken from contemporary sources such as newspapers and political speeches as well as from literature and even poetry. Unfortunately, few are taken from

philosophical writing. An answer key is provided for a small portion of the exercises, although students complained that the examples taken from literary sources were often hard to understand and that answers were provided for too few of the exercises.

Overall, however, my students were enthusiastic about this textbook commenting that it did not talk down to them and that it was easy to read. They were able to master quite difficult material, including an introduction to Bayesian confirmation and some applications of truth-functional logic to computing. I felt that much of their success in these areas was due to the clear presentation given by Salmon.

I would recommend *Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking* to those instructors who appreciate a flexible textbook and who ascribe, as I do, to the belief that a good textbook is one that knows its role—presenting material and then staying out of the way so that the instructor can focus and expand on the material according to her interests.

*The Dialectic of Biblical Critique: Interpretation and Existence.* Brayton Polka. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986. pp. x + 191; cl. \$25.00. Reviewed by Patrick M. O'Neil, State University of New York at Binghamton.

Hermeneutics has become one of the liveliest areas of scholarly activity, and the work of intellectual giants such as Gadamer seriously threatens to make that discipline the very fulcrum of new philosophical investigations promising methods of interpretation capable of avoiding many of the logical *culs-de-sac* which have hampered more analytical approaches.

The new hermeneutics has developed novel and exciting approaches to old philosophical conundra and helped to revivify the ancient wisdom of philosophy. In the shadow of the great modern hermeneutists, however, has arisen a tribe of mystagogues and myth-mongers who have taken up the hermeneutical enterprise, but not with an eye to parting the veils of ignorance.

Professor Polka looks to Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard as his mentors in this great biblical dialectic, and the comparison is not wholly inappropriate. Kierkegaard subscribed as the core of his philosophical theology to a mysticism which held in the end that the Divine superseded the laws of logic. Reality in its very ground of being did not necessarily conform to the laws of logic, including the law of contradiction.

Spinoza and Hegel were deeply influenced by the heterodox tradition of the Kabala with its belief in a secret oral tradition which provided the key for the true understanding of the text, and with its special inverted uses of the law of contradiction.

In deciphering Polka, it is vital to appreciate that the core of his system (if I may so term it) rests in the contrasting of the Greek vision with the Hebrew reality—the pagan versus the biblical world view.

The single greatest problem that engulfed Greek philosophy from its pre-Socratic roots to its Hellenistic denouement was not the irritating conundrum of the One and the Many nor the vexatious Third Man Argument with which the sophist Parmenides entangles the young Socrates of the Platonic dialogue, but the perplexing problem of "being and becoming."

A good deal of the problem arose out of the misapplication of the law of contradiction, as one can well see in some of the Zenoistic paradoxes: Death is impossible because at any given moment you are either dead or you are alive. Therefore, when you die you either dead or you are alive. If you die when you are alive, that is an impossible contradiction, for you would be dead and alive at the same moment, but if you die when you are dead, that is redundant, and thus meaningless.

These problems with the application of the law of contradiction to the processes of change led to things like the Parmenidean-Zenoist position that all movement and change are mere illusion. Contrasted to this, of course, was the Heraclitean doctrine that all was flux without stasis and the associated position of Cratylus that, on account of that hyperflux, reality could not be encompassed by words, thoughts, or logical formulae.

Beyond this, most Greek thought was dualistic, although not so dualistic as gnosticism or Manichaeism, its stepchildren, would become. Contrasted to the biblical version of *creatio ex nihilo* (by an omnipotent God), the Greek notions of the eternity of the universe and the origin of material nature in a pre-existing primal chaos led quite naturally to a dualism of matter and spirit.

In addition, of course, Polka emphasizes all of the other dualities embedded in the Greek tradition, especially the duality of the self and the other. This duality was not only the opposition of the self to other selves, but also the opposition of the self to all else that exists. The vision in the portrait of the epic, comic, and tragic hero radically differs from that of the biblical universe where providence reigns.

Providence insures that the other which resists the self is not truly an alien other, but the product of an intelligence proportionately analogous to that of the self, loving and protective of the self, and creative of the other and the self alike.

So much is unexceptional, even standard interpretation, and it forms in irreducible base for the Polka hermeneutic. Nonetheless, one is left with the unavoidable feeling that much of Polka's writing is poetic prose defying a literal analysis.

Kant and Satan dance with the Pre-Socratics, while Kierkegaard whispers with the Hebrew prophets against Orestes! The learning in this

volume seems most impressive, but the style is that of the most dizzying and impenetrable obscurantism. Consider a typical passage:

The law of contradiction is indemonstrable. Indeed, the law of contradiction shows that demonstration is itself grounded or begins in the desire for or lack of demonstration. Satan reverses the law of contradiction by holding that, unlike Socrates, he is not ignorant or of [sic] blind to evil, for indeed he knows evil, for he is the very principle (principal) of evil, he holds. He demonstrates knowledge of evil as the first principle.

In claiming to know (or to will) evil, consciously, Satan claims to know the thing in itself. Satanic spirit is conscious (or willful) paganism, idolatry, the diabolical fusion of the will of truth as its own standard with the pagan notion of the thing known either only in itself or only relative to others (each the mirror image of the other, as we have seen)—that which Kant calls the thing in itself and Hegel immediacy.

The bookjacket blurb ends with the tantalizing claim/promise/challenge: "A true conception of text allows us to discern the common ground uniting all philosophical, religious, and literary works."

This surely is the philosopher's stone of the alchemical/hermetic tradition, the secret knowledge of the Gnostics and the Kabala which reveal all other secrets. Such a key to all texts (at least as regards their common ground) would be a marvelous thing indeed, but the danger with a hermeneutics based on such a claim is that in the end it may prove to be no more than an excuse to indulge a penchant to philosophize in abstruse language using concepts from other theologies and philosophies in ways that wrench from their proper contexts and from their true internal coherencies.