

ROBERTO LAMPA, *Oskar Lange, an Academic Biography, Great Thinkers in Economics*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2025. Pp. 272. € 137.14. ISBN: 978-3-031-90834-7. E-book available.

The book by Roberto Lampa appears in the *Great Thinkers in Economics* series, a collection “designed to illuminate the economics of some of the great historical and contemporary economists by exploring the interaction between their lives and works”. The book successfully does justice to the paradoxical position occupied by Lange in the history of economic thought: he is universally recognized as a key figure in the international economic debate of the 20th century, yet his intellectual legacy is often confined to specific, isolated contributions. As observed in the introduction (p. 3), Lange is frequently remembered almost exclusively within the debate on economic calculation, with his 1936-1937 article *On the Economic Theory of Socialism*, or for his criticism of Say’s Law and the debate on Classical Dichotomy. This fragmentation has led to a widespread interpretation of Lange as an eclectic scholar who has moved erratically between schools of thought, rather than an author with a unified vision. Therefore, Lampa offers a comprehensive intellectual reconstruction of the Polish economist’s “Western period”, roughly around 1931-1945, challenging this view. Focusing on this specific timeframe – from Lange’s entry into the Polish Academy to his departure from the University of Chicago – is considered a necessary precaution (p. 4) in virtue of his subsequent “socialist phase” in Poland marked by a decline in theoretical work due to political constraints.

The book is structured into ten thematic chapters: it begins with Lange's biographical roots and methodological formation (Chapters 2-3), moves through his analysis of the Great Depression and his theoretical battles in the US regarding capital, interest and the classical dichotomy (Chapters 4-7), and culminates in his contributions to welfare economics and the theory of socialism (Chapters 8-9).

Lange's intellectual reconstruction immerses the reader in the political climate of interwar Poland, where emphasis is placed on the influence of the Lviv-Warsaw School of Logic, led by figures such as Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz and Tadeusz Kotarbiński (p. 41). Within this scientific and cultural context, Lange absorbs the principles of logical positivism and a scientific attitude characterized by a demand for "linguistic hygiene" (p. 42) – a desire to cleanse scientific discourse of vague, metaphysical entities. This training made the young Lange intolerant of imprecise language, driving him to seek a level of exactness in economics by eliminating unnecessary or misleading terms and concepts. However, as already anticipated, Lange was also a socialist activist, given his deep involvement with the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) where it is considered of crucial importance that the Marxist debate should start from a reflection on the role of the State (p. 21). Therefore, Lange was constrained by a sort of dualism, the commitment to the working class and its link to Marxism must be balanced with the necessity of being intellectually and scientifically rigorous without succumbing to any dogmatism like the Bonapartistic dictatorship of the Soviet Union.

Therefore, the third chapter, *The Problem of the Method*, helps us to better understand the structure of Lange's works. Lampa argues that Lange's methodology is grounded in a specific epistemological stance: the recognition of two distinct dimensions within social analysis. On one hand, the "hard core" of economic problems – primarily the allocation of scarce resources – possesses an objective and universal validity, independent of the historical context (p. 49). On the other hand, he acknowledges the "historical-institutional" dimension, which concerns the evolution of social structures and property relations. For the first, Lange adopts the tools of Marginalism through the lens of General Equilibrium of Walrasian derivation, while for the historical part, he retains Marxism as a theory of "economic sociology" indispensable for understanding the evolutionary tendencies of capitalism, for the exact specification of the institutional datum, and for distinguishing capitalism from an exchange economy in general (p. 45). A crucial consequence of this division is, by necessity, Lange's rejection of the Labor Theory of Value, because technically inadequate to solve the "universal" problem of resource allocation (p. 52). To explain his socialist stance while adopting bourgeois economics, Lange uses

the “policeman metaphor”, found in his 1943 review of Paul Sweezy’s *The Theory of Capitalist Development* (p. 54). He compares the marginalist economist to a “ballistics expert” who traces the physical trajectory of a bullet (the economic cause of value), but who cannot judge the crime. The socialist economist, acting as a “judge”, determines the social cause: he/she identifies that while capital physically produces value, the private appropriation of that value by a restricted class constitutes exploitation (p. 54-55).

The application of these methodological and epistemological approaches is then developed in the central chapters of the book (Chapters 4-9), which cover with deep technical details Lange’s “Western period” in the United States, and where Lange also makes his “offensive” aims at demonstrating that Capitalism, in its monopolistic stage, can no longer satisfy the conditions of allocative efficiency required by the static equilibrium described by Walras. An example is the analysis of the Great Depression, which illustrates how Lange used the crisis to demonstrate the structural failure of capitalism yet simultaneously rejects the Marxist explanation of “underconsumption”, or the theories of a second Marxist strand with Grossmann, Varga and Dobb (p. 74). Instead, Lange argues that the root cause is a fundamental “problem of allocation” (p. 77), since monopolistic rigidity has destroyed the market’s ability to allocate resources efficiently, resulting in a “chronic lack of coordination” between production and consumption (p. 77).

Then, Lampa documents Lange’s intervention in the *Capital Theory Debate* against Frank Knight (Chapter 5) and his *Theory of Interest* (Chapter 6), where he generalizes Keynesian insights to define an “optimum propensity to consume”. The analysis continues with the rejection of *Say’s Law* (Chapter 7) and the contributions to *Welfare Economics* (Chapter 8), where it tackles the problem of welfare and of income distribution on the theoretical level of economic analysis in connection with the Hicks-Allen approach. This trajectory culminates in Chapter 9, where Lampa offers a comprehensive reconstruction of Lange’s socialist theory, tracing its evolution through distinct models developed between 1934 and 1942 and an article published posthumously in 1989. The first is about a decentralized system of self-management where Lange argues that the transition to socialism must be immediate and revolutionary. The inquiry then centers on the famous 1936-1937 intervention in the *Socialist Calculation Debate*, where Lange’s strategy is to demonstrate that the “parametric function of prices” – the neutral signals of scarcity – has already been destroyed in the capitalist reality by monopolies. Therefore, only a socialist state can artificially enforce the competitive efficiency that capitalism has abandoned. To achieve this, Lange aims at replacing the capitalist market with a “Trial and Error” process managed by a Central Plan-

ning Board, which sets accounting prices to clear markets and compels managers to adhere to the rules of perfect competition – specifically, producing where price equals marginal cost – while centrally fixing the rate of capital accumulation. This theoretical arc concludes with the 1942 lectures on *Economic Democracy*, where Lange refines the accumulation mechanism to allow consumer savings to influence investment. In this light, Lampa demonstrates that Lange’s goal is to prove that a socialist system can fully realize the abstract objectives of economic theory, so much so that no remaining economic reasons can be used against socialism.

My personal verdict for the book is overwhelmingly positive. The book succeeds in its primary goal: to inform in a clear way the reader about the heritage of a great economist and to dismantle the myth of Lange as an “eclectic” scholar who has wandered aimlessly between Marx and Walras. Instead, Lampa presents a convincing portrait of a coherent thinker with a unified scientific project. Personally, I have particularly appreciated the chapters dedicated to Lange’s epistemological and methodological foundations. In an era where economics is often reduced to pure technique, and where theory is easily replaced by data analysis, ignoring any philosophical consideration, Lampa’s reconstruction is a timely reminder that methodology and epistemology are not an optional accessory. As Lange’s work demonstrates, a clear epistemological framework is essential for economic analysis to be sound so that scientific rigor is not an end in itself, but the necessary condition for endowing economic theory with the social relevance it deserves.

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OLIMPIA MALATESTA. *Ordoliberalism State and Society. A Political Theory of Social Order*, Oxon-New York, Routledge, 2025. Pp. 270. €188,70. ISBN: 9781032432014, ebook available.

The fear of the masses has profoundly animated the ordoliberal political programme since its very origins: this is how it’s possible to summarise one of the main and most original theses of the research conducted by Olimpia Malatesta in the book *Ordoliberalism State and Society. A Political Theory of Social Order*, published by Routledge in the spring of 2025 and, from November of the same year, also available in Italian translation as *Ordoliberalismo Stato e Società. Una teoria politica dell’ordine sociale*, published by Mimesis.

The driving forces behind ordoliberal reflection are therefore not to be found solely in the end of *laissez-faire*, in the crisis of 1929, in the critique of Keynesianism, or in the political instability of the Weimar Republic. More precisely, they are rooted in the social power acquired by the masses during the Weimar years – namely, in the democratisation of society associated with forms of state interventionism in the economy, especially of a distributive and redistributive kind. For the ordoliberals, such interventions were entirely irrational, dictated by the political entry of the masses, particularly through trade unions or political parties. For this reason, their shared prerogative was to establish the criteria for a rational liberal state interventionism capable of shielding the competitive market from this social power, restoring the separation between state and society, and insulating the rules of the economy from political decision-making – especially democratic politics – thus opting for a political decision aimed at the depoliticisation of the market. At the heart of the ordoliberal project lies, therefore, the will to discipline a society that had become ungovernable, according to renewed liberal principles intended to sanction the “divorce between capitalism and democracy” (p. 249): by restoring the verticality of state command; constitutionalising the rules of the competitive market; depoliticising society through targeted social reforms; and supporting moral visions congruent with the order established by the market.

Malatesta’s work analyses this broad set of issues through a historicisation of ordoliberalism within both the scientific debate and the socio-political context in which it developed. In doing so, she isolates and reconstructs a fundamental polemical core of the ordoliberal programme – still insufficiently investigated as such – namely, the determination to neutralise the social power of the masses. This thread unifies the three parts into which Malatesta’s book is divided, focusing respectively on the economy, the state, and society.

The temporal arc of Malatesta’s research spans the birth and development of ordoliberal thought from the crisis of the Weimar Republic to the post-war period, yet it begins in the present. Indeed, Malatesta aims to reconstruct the history of ordoliberal concepts also in order to competently analyse the history of their effects – real or presumed – which has fuelled international theoretical-political debate in recent years. Following the global crisis of 2008 and the subsequent European sovereign debt crisis, a hypertrophic body of literature on *ordo-neoliberalism* has flourished, precisely with the aim of providing new interpretative keys to those crises. To mention only a few examples among the studies on ordoliberal thought that have recognised a decisive – though not exclusive – influence of this theoretical framework on the institutional architectures of the Federal Republic of Germany and the European Union, one may recall Thomas Biebricher’s analyses of the technocratic, even authoritarian,

political theory underpinning ordoliberal social sciences (Biebricher, Voegelman 2018), as well as Kenneth Dyson's investigation into the conservative moral philosophy of ordoliberalism (Dyson 2021). In the Italian debate, while Lorenzo Mesini has historicised the ordoliberal paradigm by judging it "rigid and dogmatic in its principles but extremely flexible and adaptable at the political level" (Mesini 2023), Adelino Zanini has analysed the ordoliberal determination to resolve the "social question" of its time "without combining parliamentary democracy in the political sphere and socialism in the economic sphere," instead identifying "liberal methods" that therefore had little or nothing to do with political and social freedoms. It is along this line that ordoliberalism constitutes one of the political cultures underlying the EU's "hybrid" rationality (Zanini 2022). Within this framework, Malatesta offers a further interpretation, showing that the ordoliberal resolution of the "social question" necessarily required the neutralisation of the potential political and social power that could have emanated from it.

The acquisition of power by the masses in Weimar Germany during the 1920s and 1930s was certainly the outcome of concrete social mobilisation; yet, at a deeper level, it was also the consequence of an epistemic error, according to the ordoliberals – as Malatesta explains. This error had its roots in the bourgeois laboratory of nineteenth-century Germany (Schiera 1987): since the time of Lorenz von Stein, this laboratory had analysed society through the lens of class conflict, seeking to control it by accommodating some of the demands of the movements that animated it, thus pursuing the path of compromise between capital and labour and of integration, initiated in the Bismarckian years and consolidated during the First World War. Yet, rather than neutralising conflict, this approach had exacerbated it, in the ordoliberal view: the true way to eradicate it lay first and foremost in removing it from the categorical repertoire meant to guide political intervention in society (p. 226). In short, in order to eliminate politicised masses that could potentially fuel class struggle, one should not recognise part of their demands, but rather ignore them and work to de-massify them by inserting individuals into the ordered, depoliticised ranks of civil society within a true liberal society, so that they would not interfere with the rules of the economy – first and foremost free price formation and competition, to be safeguarded also through law.

For Wilhelm Röpke, this required restoring to individuals the "warmth" of communal bonds – family, neighbourhood, community (p. 227) – with attention to their sense of belonging rather than to their economic interest. Following the echo of Walter Riehl, only their ruralisation could accomplish their de-massification: after all, life in the countryside does not foster, even at a symbolic level, a propensity for conflict. "The individual linked to the

land, to the community and to the family is distracted from the temptation to develop class consciousness, since his identity does not pass through the demarcation lines present in mass society, but is based on his *Vitalsituation*”: this, Malatesta explains, is the ordoliberal line of reasoning (p. 242).

In sum, for Röpke it is necessary to appeal to identity-based feelings of belonging, setting aside economic interest. To eliminate class struggle, one must stop thinking it, analysing society instead in terms of the identities that compose it – here deemed congruent with an alleged human nature made up of hierarchically ordered communal bonds. Certainly, attention to identities – that is, to “spirituality,” in ordoliberal vocabulary – also requires substantial material interventions, including private social policy reforms – *Vitalpolitik*, to use Alexander Rüstow’s term – and the elimination of industrial Giants through serious anti-trust policies.

This articulation between the spiritual and the material planes is also present in Walter Eucken, well known as the ordoliberal theorist of the “economic constitution” alongside Franz Böhm and Hans Grossmann-Doerth, but much less known for his reflections on the civic utility of religion. Malatesta dwells precisely on this underexplored element. One of the historical responsibilities of the Enlightenment, for Eucken – who on this point draws on his father Rudolf as well as on Werner Sombart, Malatesta explains – was secularisation in its socialist version, which entailed the abandonment of the transcendent horizon of religion and the deification of the state, onto which the soteriological anxieties of the masses were projected. As a result, the masses came to demand from the state economic reforms that would satisfy them materially. More precisely, Malatesta shows that for Eucken secularisation was not an evil in itself: Feuerbachian disalienation, for instance, allowed for a societal recovery of the love that human beings had projected onto God, where this could generate a renewed and positive sense of community. The problem arose, however, when this secularised love became the lever for class conflict, as in Marx’s socialism. Similarly, the rationalisation of the economy following secularisation was in itself a positive phenomenon insofar as it concerned the entrepreneurial class; it became destructive when it acquired a mass dimension: “The socialist ideology of capitalist developmental laws caused the fall of that religious-economic mentality – ‘traditionalism’ – which made it much easier to insert human activity into a ‘great religious order of life’” (p. 242). With Enlightenment-socialist secularisation, therefore, the masses abandoned tradition and came to believe they could bend the state to the needs and purposes of their sole life – that which is earthly and material.

It therefore becomes necessary, for Eucken, to recover the traditionalist religious mentality to discipline the masses. This represents the societal,

class-based, and conservative counterpart of his ideal of an ordered and rational liberal society. The other side of this coin is his ‘scientific’ reading of the economic order, more widely known in ordoliberal studies. According to Eucken, the economic order is rational only when competition is made possible by an institutional normative framework that establishes and maintains it. For these reasons, prior to 1933, like Rüstow, he was a supporter of a strong state capable of producing a free economy, borrowing part of the critique of the ‘weak state’ – that is, Weimar parliamentarism – from Carl Schmitt. Unlike the latter, however, for Eucken the strong state had to be grounded in scientific reason rather than in mere political decision (p. 148). For the same reasons, after 1933 – when it was no longer possible to criticise the absence of a strong state – Eucken became a theorist of the “economic constitution” for the competitive economy. In his intentions, this was to be antithetical to Hugo Sinzheimer’s social-democratic model of economic constitution. Today the latter model has been forgotten, whereas Eucken’s “economic constitution” has achieved considerable effectiveness, to the point that a term once contested is now used almost exclusively with reference to ordoliberal semantics (Gustav 2025).

Not only Schmitt or Sinzheimer, but engagement with many other German intellectuals of the time proves fundamental for defining the ordoliberal vision, Malatesta shows. Against Gustav Schmoller, Eucken and the ordoliberals held that the social sciences have a duty to provide normative guidance to politics, shedding the relativist, historicist, and merely observational stance adopted by the German Historical School. Only this posture could save capitalism, which therefore was not destined to end, as Werner Sombart had predicted, according to the ordoliberals. All of this necessarily rested on the political will to construct new liberal institutions, in sharp contrast with the Austrian School of economics – despite a strong theoretical affinity with it, from which the so-called neoliberal movement emerged, heteroclit from its very origins (Audier, Reinhoudt 2017).

These are only some of the many historical-conceptual nodes analysed in great detail by Malatesta, who also focuses on lesser-studied ordoliberal thinkers such as the jurist and theorist of private law Franz Böhm and the inventor of the formula “social market economy,” Alfred Müller-Armack, whose firmly Nazi past – prior to his work for Europe – she recalls. In this way, Malatesta also highlights internal differences within the polyphonic ordoliberalism itself, while insisting on its main point of convergence: the neutralisation of social power. On this point, Maurizio Ricciardi has written that ordoliberalism operates within “a non-revolutionary time, that is, a temporality whose premise is not the identification of modernity and revolution” (Ricciardi 2017). This en-

tails a rejection of the *Neuzeit*, Malatesta argues following Reinhart Koselleck, and thus a model of society that suppresses the social dynamism typical of modernity – not because it believes it can eliminate it once and for all, but because it believes it can control it through political, legal, and societal engineering, thereby finally disposing of modern dialectics.

Among the paradigms of the loose neoliberal field, ordoliberalism is perhaps the most explicitly constructivist, and for this very reason it has collided with the Austrian and US variants, which are openly anti-constructivist insofar as they posit an autopoiesis of the free market. After all, fear of the masses is articulated in many ways within the neoliberal field, whose heterogeneity must therefore be acknowledged. Malatesta's book meets this need, as it undoubtedly represents a rigorous reconstruction and a convincing interpretation of the specifically ordoliberal variant of the hatred of democracy.

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ISAAC STANLEY-BECKER, *Europe without Borders: A History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2025. Pp. 416. \$ 35.00, £ 30.00. ISBN: 9780691261768. E-book available.

In *Europe without Borders: A History*, Isaac Stanley-Becker offers a dense and carefully argued historical reconstruction of the origins and development of the Schengen area, examining the political, legal, and symbolic meaning of the free movement of persons within the broader process of European integration. The work goes beyond a simple institutional history of the European Union and instead presents itself as a study of the conceptual transformations that have progressively reshaped the relationship between borders, sovereignty, and citizenship in Europe. Drawing on extensive archival research and a rich body of diplomatic documentation, the author reconstructs how the abolition of internal border controls emerged as one of the most ambitious – and at the same time most controversial – projects of contemporary Europe. From the opening pages, it becomes clear that the Schengen area has never been perfectly coextensive with the European Union or with earlier forms of European Community integration. Initially created through cooperation among five signatory states, the project gradually expanded to include much of the European continent, forming a zone of free movement stretching from the Iberian Peninsula to Central and Northern Europe. In this perspective, Schengen appears as a decisive step in the construction of the European internal market and in the realization of the free movement of persons, one of the most emblematic principles of the European integration project. The book begins with an examination of the economic paradigm of mobility outlined in the 1957 Treaty of Rome, in which cross-border movement was primarily conceived as a mechanism supporting the common market and the mobility of labor. Stanley-Becker shows how, over the following decades, this conception was progressively reinterpreted by politicians, officials, and European jurists who began to imagine mobility not merely as an economic necessity but as a constitutive element of a broader political community. Within this context emerged the project of a “Citizens’ Europe,” which in the 1980s acquired a concrete dimension through diplomatic initiatives and intergovernmental negotiations that ultimately led to the signing of the Schengen Agreement in 1985. The central chapters of the book carefully follow the negotiation process that led to the gradual elimination of internal border controls. Through an analysis of discussions among national governments, European institutions, and administrative bodies, the author highlights the complexity of the political choices involved: the delicate balance between supranational cooperation and the defense of state prerogatives, the need to coordinate security and immigration policies, and the creation of new mechanisms

of administrative and police cooperation. The result is a picture in which freedom of movement appears less as an inevitable outcome of European integration and more as the product of lengthy, complex, and sometimes contentious negotiations. One of the most significant aspects of the book is the strength of its documentary foundation. The study has been made possible by the relatively recent opening of government archives containing materials related to the creation of Schengen: diplomatic memoranda, draft agreements, confidential annexes, meeting notes, and private correspondence that reveal the complexity of the decision-making process and the often heated debates surrounding the terms of free movement. Because many of these documents remained inaccessible for decades, Stanley-Becker's research sheds new light on discussions concerning sovereignty, European law, and emerging forms of transnational cooperation. Alongside these institutional sources, the author also draws on other materials – court cases, newspaper reports, and testimonies from *sans-papiers* movements – which make it possible to observe the history of Schengen from the perspective of the social tensions generated by the new border regime. Particularly innovative is the attention devoted to the social and political implications of the project. Alongside the diplomatic and institutional dimension, Stanley-Becker incorporates perspectives from the history of migration and social movements, including the mobilizations of undocumented migrants. This interpretative choice makes it possible to observe the construction of European space not only through the decisions of political elites but also from the viewpoint of those located at the margins of the system, offering a broader understanding of the tensions and contradictions that accompany the idea of a Europe without internal borders. Throughout the book, the author also advances a significant interpretative framework: Schengen can be understood as a kind of political and institutional “laboratory.” For its promoters, the dismantling of internal border controls was meant to transform a continent marked by war into a space of liberty, cooperation, and democratic pluralism. Yet this experiment remained deeply connected to the logic of the European market. Freedom of movement helped reinforce the single market and provided it with political and moral legitimacy, while simultaneously generating new boundaries and new forms of control at the external frontier. In this sense, the project combines cosmopolitan aspirations with mechanisms of exclusion, giving rise both to a transnational security apparatus designed to protect Schengen's borders and to movements of protest that claim freedom of movement as a universal right. *Europe without Borders* stands out for its ability to weave together political history, intellectual history, and the global history of migration, offering a nuanced and multilayered interpretation of the European project. Stanley-Becker invites readers to reflect on the ambivalent nature of this historical experiment and on

the dynamics that have shaped its development. The result is a significant contribution to the study of contemporary European history, illuminating the historical roots of issues that remain central to current political and academic debates about Europe.

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DAVID N. LIVINGSTONE, *The Empire of Climate. A History of an Idea*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2024. Pp. 552. \$38.00 / £32.00. ISBN: 978-06-912-3670-4. E-book available.

The title of this book takes inspiration from a sentence of Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Law*, "The empire of the climate is the first, the most powerful of all empires". It singles out the relevance of climate in the fate of human civilisations, up to our days characterised by policies geared to reduce our impact on it. Climatic forces have often been seen as a primary cause of social change, engendering a kind of environmental determinism. The increasing availability of data on historical weather and its impact on species helps the adoption of such perspective. Livingstone says that those histories are dominated by environmental determinism and reductionism, leading to a *futurizing* of history. He introduces the interesting notion of *epistemological slippage* meaning the transfer of predictive authority from one domain of knowledge to another without an appropriate theoretical or analytical justification.

Livingstone begins from a series of contemporary concerns about the influence of climate change on human life and explores how the same worries have evolved in history. He has organised these issues according to the effects on health, mind, wealth and war. Political economists are primarily interested on the effects on wealth, but the other three domains may also be significant for economics.

The first part of the book discusses approaches that anticipate effects of climate change on human health. This discussion had a precursor in Hippocrates and has been revitalised in the Seventeenth century early scientific revolution, evolving in medical geography in the Eighteenth (in connection with the development of empires). This part ends with the birth of biometeorology and the health philosophy for eugenic ends.

The second part is dedicated to the mind. Firstly, the (Darwinian) influence of weather on the development of the brain is discussed. Then, the ef-

fects of atmospheric conditions on psyche and its health are outlined, including the thermic theories of temperament and crime.

The third part deals with wealth and that makes it closer to the interests of the readers of HETP. Livingstone argues that there has been a certain interest on the determinant influence of climate on the wealth of nations. That leads to a kind of naturalistic theory of economic growth and cultural development. Evidently, the impact of Montesquieu zonal geo-philosophy remains relevant. Chapter eight deals with slavery and its understanding, reading the speculations of the geographer Arnold Guyot and of Thomas Jefferson. Then, the philosophy of civilisations is considered looking at the positivist Henry Thomas Buckle that considered the effect of climate via food development. The last chapter of this part discusses climate, capital and civilisation. Here, we find a variety of studies relating climate to economic performance and particularly to workers' efficiency. Finally, various correlations between markets' fluctuations and weather cycles have been found in the economic literature.

Part four is about conflict. Interestingly, John William Draper included climate in the causes of the American Civil War. In conclusion, the last chapter of this part deals with present concerns about global warming and its consequences on national security. Livingstone shows how a vast literature is presently connecting climate change and civil conflict. Inference is drawn from paleoenvironmental data confronted with known long-run history of civilisations. That produced a literature characterised by an approach comparable the Malthusian struggle for diminishing resources, which ended also in Pentagon reports and national security studies.

In conclusion, Livingstone has produced a fascinating reading written with a witty criticism. He analyses well the fascinating long run analysis, conflicting with the usual more voluntaristic approach to social sciences. The problematic aspect of contemporary scientific approach to climate and social development is that, after badly understanding how human activities affect climate, we unduly reverse the logic pretending to control climate. Nonetheless, we should admit that with the present rising temperatures, the international political economy becomes more and more nervous. Nations drop international law, diplomacy and the political attitude that assured peace and progress.

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GEORGIOS VAROUXAKIS, *The West. The History of an Idea*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2025. Pp. 512. \$ 35.00 / £ 30.00. ISBN: 978-06-911-7718-2. E-book available.

The idea of the West in the history of culture is the subject of this work proposed by Georgios Varouxakis. The book is accessible to a wide audience and treats a theme that is of high interest in the present international political fractures. Varouxakis argues that this work reconstructs when, how and why the idea of “the West” emerged as a sociopolitical concept during the last two centuries to point at a social or political entity based on some cultural commonality. It consequently deals with a variety of materials and a plurality of disciplinary approaches, including methodological aspects. Therefore, for the reader, it is a good exercise in the analysis and questioning of concepts. But all perspectives, from politics to philosophy are presented in the most accessible way and that makes this book perfect to a wide audience.

Varouxakis argues that there are two extreme positions to be considered: those who consider the West a civilisation, a socio-political concept, and see it as a legacy of the ancient Greeks and Romans; and those that see the West as a notion emerging in the era of imperialism of the late Nineteenth century (as Kwame Anthony Appiah). The book distinguishes between the West and Europe, two equally ambiguous ideas. The standard distinction within Europe until the Eighteenth century was between North and South, with Russia being a Northern power since the times of Peter the Great. After the Napoleonic wars and the Congress of Vienna, the divide between the West and Eastern Europe, that included Russia, began to be used. Therefore, Varouxakis is able to highlight how relevant has been Russia in the definition of the idea of the West. There have been other non-Westerns: Arabs, Ottomans, indigenous Americans, Islam, China, India, Africa... that have often been identified as non-Christians. Therefore, also the West and Christianity have relevant overlapping dimensions. But, in this case, Rome belongs to the West, while the second and third Rome (Istanbul and Moscow) are out of the West in strict terms (or not?). Actually, up to the Eighteenth century the term West was meaningfully referred to the Latin Church’s *Europa Occidens*, later extended to a supra-European West that included European colonies across the Atlantic.

The author finds in 1840, considering Comte’s definition of *Western Republic*, the first clear designation of this idea (expected to be an altruistic peaceful federation). He chose the notion of West exactly because the notion of Europe included Russia. Similarly, in the beginning of the Twentieth century, Oswald Spengler affirmed that the word Europe “ought to be struck out of history, because it had led people to associate Russia with the West in an utterly baseless

unity” (p. 3). But there are more limited views of the West as those of the French fears with the Prussification of Germany in 1871. That is much alike Thomas Mann’s point that German *Kultur* represents the eternal protest and resistance to the universalising/homogenising tendencies of Rome and later of the West (p. 4). That obviously changed after the Second World War and with the Cold War when the limit was set to exclude communist regimes. After the end of this Cold War, many Slavic and Baltic countries suddenly shifted to the West, often taking with them a large number of Russian speaking people. Interestingly, the 1860s Russian debates between Slavophiles and Westernisers influenced the self-descriptions of Western Europeans. But before the Nineteenth century the fundamental distinction within Europe was between a North and a South, fundamentally due to Reformation. Edward Gibbon and Jean Bodin considered such distinction more relevant than the East-West. Varouxakis carefully reviews the opinion of a wide array of scholars from the middle Eighteenth century on on these issues and the reading is quite interesting and instructive.

The second chapter traces the gradual emergence of the West in Continental European languages and writing. The third concerns what emerges from the British scholars. In the fourth chapter the USA is included in inter-connection with European universities’ debates in the Nineteenth century. In the middle of that century Francis Lieber sought to increase, celebrate and entrench the commonalities in US and European people’s consciousness. Then, in chapter five, Varouxakis studies the important developments in the use and meaning of *the West* and of *Western civilisation* during the First World War, when the involvement of the US in the European conflict became crucial. Chapter six continues in the same perspective to the debates of the inter-World Wars period. At that point the discussion on Spengler’s *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* has seen some divergence of opinion not only to the decline, but also on what the West was (with tendencies to exclude Germany from the West by the French). The array of scholars considered here goes from Antonio Gramsci to Carl Schmitt. Things change of perspective during and after the Second War when the term West was tied to liberal democracy, to be imposed to both dictatorships and to communist regimes (chapter seven and eight). The variety of scholars discussed here is quite rich and includes Walter Lippmann, Simone Weil, Jaques Maritain, Albert Camus, Raymond Aron, Alexandre Kojève, Hannah Arendt, Paul Valéry, George Orwell and Aldous Huxley and many others. Arendt tried to understand what happened to the great political and philosophical traditions of the West referring to *the West*, *Western civilisation* and *Western tradition* as the legacy of the long philosophical tradition from Socrates and Plato to the political-institutional tradition of the ancient Rome. She considered an Euro-

pean federation as a possible solution to recover such tradition. Kojève's recommendation (during the Second World War) for France that it should become the *primus inter pares* of a Latin empire that would unite it with Italy and Spain is of a particular interest.

In chapter eight Varouxakis scrutinises the Cold War and in chapter nine deals with current times. He finds Samuel Huntington's *clash of civilisations* thesis of the uniqueness of West's civilisation a fundamental reference, opposing the beliefs in the universalisability of Western democracy. Other scholars as Cornelius Castoriadis, Jürgen Habermas and Heinrich August Winkler are analysed in the European context of the Western expansion Eastwards. Castoriadis' is seen as a Trotskyite (Critical) Defence of the West in the sense that he was a fierce critic of capitalism as well as "vociferously anti-Stalinist" (p. 298). In the end, he defends the Western internal ability of self-criticism compared to other cultures. The triumph of the West in Fukuyama's book on the end of history is discussed and contrasted to Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilisations*. A final discussion follows on the pretended Western values in the present difficult context of the international relations. In this part I feel the lack of Emanuel Todd, who did not discuss much the idea of the West, but nonetheless declared its end. In any case, Todd anthropologically distinguishes a core West composed by USA, UK and France from an extended West, formed after the Second World War, including Germany and Japan (differences are based on socio-demographic variables as the form of the family). In any case, Todd is not cited, maybe substituted by Michel Houellebecq.

Presently, the West tends to be equated with NATO or to the space under US military control. I find Huntington position relevant and convincing for noting that the West has conquered the world not thanks to the force of its ideas but to its ability of *organised violence*. Actually, it is difficult to trace the legacy of Aristotle and Plato in contemporary politics and I see little common political culture within the West, surely not that of Plato. Frankly, I don't see the existence of a polity or a common civic identity shared by Western Europe, North America and Japan; nor I see some converging interests. The present idea of West is purely instrumental, finding little homogeneity of values, representing an attempt to counterbalance the processes of internal disintegration.

Therefore, the book is worth reading as it supplies and dissects an extremely rich material of reflection. It is recommended also to those who are acquainted with these ideas and to the scholars discussed.

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FERNANDO COLLANTES, *Consumer Society and the Economists. Consumption and Well-Being in the History of Economic Thought The History of an Idea*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2025. Pp. 229. €124.79. ISBN: 978-3-031-96644-6. E-book available.

Fernando Collantes is an applied economist that studied depopulation and development in rural areas as well as changes in food consumption and the dietary issues of developed economies. Starting from the latter subject, he has perceived a gap between the theory of consumer society and the historical analysis. Therefore, this book on consumer society tries to fill that gap starting from the history of economic thought on consumption from the late Eighteenth century to the present day. Therefore, the history of ideas is studied in parallel with social history and that makes the text very interesting.

In the second section, Collantes presents the conceptual framework of his discussion, that dialectically includes three thesis. According to the first, the consumer society brings material prosperity and expands people's opportunities to lead a good life. The second holds that growing material wealth ultimately trades off with interpersonal relationships and the cultivation of existential meaning. The last view rejects the significance of consumer society as an object of study. The author reconstructs these evolving perspectives in the last 250 years, from Adam Smith to the present, taking inspiration from Albert O. Hirschman and Joseph Schumpeter. The third chapter is about the era of the industrial revolution and of classical political economy. Material abundance and consumption were associated to progress even if, up to John Stuart Mill, some distinction was made between productive and unproductive consumption. Classical thought was still dominated by the idea of surplus and reproduction that was subsequently abandoned. Then, Collantes illustrates the economic debate on consumer society during the period 1870–1945. This is the time of the explosion of consumption in the USA and of the conceptualisation of the sovereign consumer. Nonetheless, many scholars that remained open to the insights from history, sociology and philosophy as Veblen questioned affluence.

The fifth chapter studies the post-Second World War evolution up to the 1990s. While neoclassical theory became consolidated, some scholar as John Kenneth Galbraith produced critical accounts of the consumer society. Finally, chapter six deals with present times, in which the author affirms that, despite a diversification of approaches and subjects, the Cold War era trajectories remain operative: some support the doctrine of the sovereign consumer as a cornerstone of market democracies, others, more open to neighbour disciplines, question such point in many respects.

Collantes argues that it is possible to distinguish two intellectual genealogies. The first includes economists who have shown a willingness to consider the deviation thesis and include classical political economy, Marxism, institutionalism, ecological economics and even strands of neoclassical economics. The second stream supports the progress thesis, associated with the Austrian and neoclassical world view that became dominant during the mid-Twentieth century. In any case, the interest in consumer society has been intermittent in the various schools and tendencies.

In the end, bringing the world of consumption into the heart of the great debates on capitalism, acknowledging its ties to human well-being and social progress, is probably an ethical issue that goes beyond the bare positivism of neoclassical economics. Nonetheless, this is a complementary hidden hypothesis of mainstream, as *homo oeconomicus* is open to any interpretations. Certainly, we cannot understand economic growth and development if we exclude this subject and the actual social transformation from the study of political economy. Political economists who studied Fordism, intended as an institutional arrangement, have underlined how its crucial point was the nexus between mass production and the expansion of consumption via the wage-labour nexus. Nonetheless, there are limits to growth and Collantes rightly studies scholars that highlighted how happiness is tied to immaterial and relational elements that are more related to quality and not to quantity. He discusses and explains well these aspects with a large quantity of data, documents and facts. The result is a very rich text comparing a large variety of economists as well as other scholars. Certainly a book worth reading and keeping at hand.

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KATHLEEN THELEN, *Attention Shoppers! American Retail Capitalism and the Origins of the Amazon Economy*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2025. Pp. 344. \$ 29.95 / £ 25.00. ISBN: 978-0-691-26652-7. E-book available.

The evolution and the role of retail in the economy is an understudied topic in political economy and Kathleen Thelen has filled this gap with an excellent book. The title points at the Amazon economy, but the history concerns all large distribution chains from the second half of the Nineteenth century on. The subject is business history and the content is interesting for both

historians and political economists, without forgetting those studying marketing. It is well-written and extremely accessible to a wide public. Despite the scientific attitude, the narration is catching the interest of the reader so that this book could be a good companion in any occasion.

Mega-retailers have been typical of US capitalism since the end of the Nineteenth century. They have been the result of a business idea requiring some organisational and technological innovation that other economies did not allow. That has contributed to shape the US' consumption-driven growth regime even before Fordist mass production was affectively enacted. The fundamental idea is that Amazon further developed the fundamental model of large low-cost retailers that emerged since the 1860s. That evolution, according to the author, was possible thanks to the US permissive regulatory landscape. Actually, a second phase of this history is defined by Thelen in the 1920s and 1930s with the politicisation of consumption and the backlash against chain stores. Then, in the post-World War II period there has been a resurgence of the low-cost, low-wage discount retailers.

This consumption-driven US capitalism has also invented and diffused other innovations as consumer credit and credit cards as well as mail order retail, sales finance corporations, customer loyalty programmes, Black Fridays, etc. This economy has promoted popular consumption and mass availability of goods thanks to the low margins applied by large organisations operating on very wide markets. On the other hand, these companies have enjoyed an enormous power over workers and suppliers, facilitated by a favourable legal arrangement. In Europe, this innovation took place late in the Twentieth century and in a partial form due to a different idea of economic organisation that kept various kind of regulations in order to keep competition under control (a legal order more favourable to industry and small companies). Thelen also highlights that in the first part of the history, American judiciary was hostile towards associational forms and that did not help cooperative forms of organising distribution as in many European countries. Moreover, in Continental European regions the middle class was mostly made of shop keepers and small traders, which successfully limited the size of retail thanks to strict administrative authorisations.

Thelen stresses the role of anti-trust policies and the abolition of *resale price maintenance* in the US as a factor of distinction from European organised capitalism. Actually, resale price maintenance persisted in Europe in most of the Twentieth century for the different path of retail development that shaped our model of capitalism. On the other hand, the local authorities' role in authorising the size of retailers and town planning are relevant regu-

lations not considered by the author. Therefore, the European regulation could be more accurately analysed.

The central argument is that the rise of Amazon, from book selling to the present-day configuration of services is a model of business strictly in continuity to the mail order retail (the farmer's friend) of the late Nineteenth century. The success of this low margin aggressive expansion is convincingly said helped by loose regulation. Thelen admits some Amazon's tendency to predatory pricing, but she overlooks the long lasting losses in Amazon budget that allowed, at least in Europe, to finance the aggressively low prices.

In conclusion, this is a original, brilliant and informative book that traces the evolution of economic structure to the relevance of different institutional set-ups. Nonetheless, the reader sometimes feels the absence of some precise date related to rules and changes, as well as the notion of Europe is a bit vague compared to its internal differences. The historian of economic ideas would have enjoyed some closer integration to the history of political-economic ideas. In any case, the conclusion of the book about the *high costs of low price*, in the sense of a disruptive business that shaped capitalism and then expanded worldwide, is quite convincing.

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FEDERICO REGGIO (ed.), *Honeste Vivere. Percorsi filosofici per l'etica pubblica*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2025. Pp. 380. € 39.00. ISBN: 978-88-351-7251-2.

Honeste Vivere is a collection of essays in philosophy of law edited by Federico Reggio dealing with the *ethics of the public space*. That makes it interesting for all social scientists, including historians of economic ideas. A second feature of the book is its approach, keeping reference to classical political philosophy. That represents an interesting aspect, in contrast with the prevailing individualistic economic epistemology characterising these topics. Therefore, this work is interesting for developing a full set of ideas according to a perspective that has fundamentally characterised our civilisation, but that economists have tried to do without (failing).

The idea of *the public* is today experiencing severe difficulties, affirms the editor Federico Reggio, due to the scarce reliability of information, the increasing polarisation of positions and the loss of the idea of reciprocal en-

counter in the political space. The aim of the book is therefore to propose a philosophical path for public ethics, looking at present issues red through classical frameworks.

The first contribution is proposed by Francesco Cavalla and deals with the foundations of ethical norms, looking for a third way between dogmatism and scepticism. This alternative is found in the intersubjective dialogue that accepts other's arguments and analyses them to detect eventual contradictions. Therefore, the search for the good is a dialogical process. Our present society is badly characterised by nihilism, in particular by the conviction that the source of any truth and of any precept is based on the insurgence of specific volitions. Cavalla discusses the philosophical foundations of the notions of human rights, liberty and punishment through the discussion of some difficult theme. The idea of liberty in experience is discussed arguing that man must accept himself to find his freedom. Finally, he discusses truth in experience in a situation of uncertainty. Truth is here defined as that immutable and undeniable reality that permeates everything and that can be a foundation for any authentic theoretical or ethical knowledge.

Howard Zehr discusses *restorative justice*. He is one of the developers of this principle that now finds some application in our juridical orders. The message is that this idea is to be grounded in a model of restorative ethics based on intersubjectivity and responsibility.

Giovanni Grandi discusses *public ethics*, referred to the case of those working in institutions. He discusses the difference between public and private as well as that between morals and ethics, which is said an issue of different moments rather than of different scopes or spheres. Grandi, after discussing the position of Hegel and Ricoeur, analyses the view of Max Weber in *Politik als Beruf*, where he proposed the distinction of an *ethics of principles* from that of *responsibility*. Giovanni Angelo Lodigiani discusses the issue of acknowledgement and the ethics of intersubjectivity. He does so by taking inspiration from Martin Buber, Georg Simmel and Romano Guardini. Man is a rational and relational being, affirms Lodigiani at the beginning. The three scholars examined belong to the German stream of philosophy that in the beginning of the twentieth century introduced the idea of intersubjectivity. Intersubjective relationships, dialogical identity and encounters are notions including an ethical dimension.

Stefano Fuselli discusses *European identity* taking inspiration from *The Persians* of Aeschylus. This tragedy suggests that the process of self-consciousness forming the identity of a population depends on the capacity to assume the perspective of "the other". Thanks to the presence of the others

we become aware of ourselves and constitute our cultural identity as well as the reasons to hold on and defend the difference.

Federico Reggio deals with the issue of *cancel culture* in relation to public ethics and to justice. He analyses all the possible forms of *cancel culture* and their role for the self-understanding of a community, to the idea of restorative justice, as well as for the rights of the actors involved. He argues how symbols have a political and educational role even when have some negative meaning. Daniele Butturini discusses the right to the search of the truth in relation to public communication. He argues that the ruling and the organisation of mass media is an element characterising the material constitution of a country. Butturini inquires the notion and the function of truth in public information and the relative deontology of journalists. He connects these concepts with the freedom of thought granted by the Italian Constitution and to the subjective right of searching the truth. Paolo Moro focusses on the ethics of the lawyer in the age dominated by informatics. That determines an evolution from the *gentleman lawyer* to the *digital lawyer* that requires no change in its fundamental virtues, but surely a magnified engagement and effort to develop competence and dialectics according to a more demanding environment. Similarly, Simone Grigoletto considers the ethics and deontology of the Judge starting from Aristotelian thought. The issues concern the ambiguity of what is just and the moral complexity of judgements. Grigoletto position magnifies virtue ethics looking at the overall *action attitude* of the Judge.

Paolo Sommaggio presents a contribution on the *ethics of commons*. He argues that ethics in our society is replacing the sacred as a paradigm for the foundation of social life. That drives an increasing need of rules and precepts on a variety of issues that tend to become compulsory. The problem of the commons is a peculiar issue in which public ethics is relevant, but no clear agreement on the solutions is reached. Sommaggio presents a first dichotomy between a *tethic* and a *zetetic* approaches to the commons. The former is foundational, dogmatic and prescriptive and tends to affirm a re-appropriation of commons by the citizens that results in a common ownership of resources granted by the state. The latter is a bottom-up approach to research with an orientation to knowing viable solutions. Sommaggio proposes to add a maieutic approach to the former two. It consists of a classic, Socrates-like, dialogical method based on opposition of arguments. In this dialogue of reasons, this approach could allow a harmonious relationship between communities' experiences and principles.

Paolo Monti discusses the ethics and practice of consumption that emerges in the tension between the sphere of needs and that of normative principles. Consumption choice has indirect public effects through its feed-

back on supply and on the use of resources. Individuals are supposed to evaluate the impact of their actions and ethics asks to include the social and environmental consequences of their pattern of consumption. Monti discusses the notion of *value capture*, defining it as an externalisation of the individual deliberation on values. Actually, consumers accept the values proposed by the marketing activities of producers without any personal effort of evaluation. Monti calls this phenomenon as the access of *ready to use methods of justification*. Ethical behaviour in this context is therefore seen as a re-appropriation of judgement, criteria joint to a renewed awareness of social consequences of consumption patterns.

Federico Reggio proposes a further essay on the ethics of technology. This is a theme that emerged in the first part of the XX century and now assumes a new relevance with the studies of the human impact of digital technologies. Man has co-evolved with his technics and has always been a *homo tecnologicus*. Ethics, however, may inquiry the capture of man by his technics and the impact on our life of an extensive use of new means. We can judge if these (predictable) changes induced by technology are desirable or not. Reggio concern is with the degradation of the *homo dialogicus* at the basis of classical philosophy. Nonetheless, he argues that before rehabilitating the *homo dialogicus* we have to recover the *homo sapiens*, the being able and willing to conceive himself in a non-objectivising way, aware of his intrinsic dignity as a subject (p. 306). The contemporary digitalisation presents several patterns of discrimination and deresponsabilisation. Therefore, a public ethics that promotes a human-centered design of these technologies is relevant.

Letizia Mingardo discusses animal welfare and the path going from ethics to positive law. Animal welfare is defined as the quality of life and death conditions of animals, particularly the domestic and those raised for human purposes (without totally neglecting the wilderness). Mingardi reviews the normative evolution in several countries and analyses how these rules have been conceived and their place in the legal order. Her view is that this evolution tends to express a conception of normativity that is secularised and non-anthropocentric. These animal rights are a response to the ecological, economic, legal and political challenges that are raising more questions than those reforms are able to solve. Finally, Federico Reggio and Letizia Mingardo close the collection with an essay that discusses the work of Francesca Zanuso from a dialectic and biolegal perspective geared to the bioethics of the public space. This contribution highlights many challenging philosophical issues as the “right of not being born” (when non healthy). They conclude on Zanuso’s idea of recognition of the unrepeatable and unavailable *suitas* of each person from which the principle of *neminem laedere* de-

rives. This recognition of a reciprocal *suitas* is the starting point of a philosophical adventure in which, beyond *honeste vivere*, we seek experiencing a deeper sense of our existence.

This book provides a lively review of relevant public ethics themes red from the perspective of present-day classical philosophy. The dialogical and relational perspective helps projecting the understanding of individual action in the social context. Broadening the perspective from individual judgements to the intersubjective dimension allows the theoretical inclusion of the public. In the modern individualistic approach, we conceive the individual and public level of analysis as separated and to be studied apart from each other. In the classical view, the public is intersubjectively produced and inseparable from the individual. That makes this philosophical approach particularly suited to discuss and develop the ethics of and for the public. Consequently, this book is recommended for those desiring to get an understanding of present-day problematic issues from a different and extremely stimulating and fruitful perspective.

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