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The Legitimacy of the Human by Rémi Brague (review)

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the Leiden University Library, and the Bodleian in Oxford. The Vatican library was established in 1475, although its collection dates to the Middle Ages. All these libraries became depositories for major Islamic manuscript collections. Printing aided the dissemination of Islamic texts.

In 1698 the entire text of the Qur'an was published by Cardinal Barbarigo at the printing press he founded in Padua. Ludovico Maracci, a professor of Arabic at Sapienza University in Rome, provided the translation and a commentary. The first English translation was produced by George Sale in 1734. His study convinced him that the Qur'an derived much of its content from the apocryphal books of the Old and New Testaments, with the Jews providing Mohammed's chief sources.

That said, it must be kept in mind that the present book is not so much about Islam as it is about Arabic scholarship produced in Europe. Bevilacqua in his discussion of the Enlightenment vis-à-vis Islam takes Voltaire and Edward Gibbon as representatives of that movement. He finds that neither had studied Arabic or any other Semitic language. Both relied on the Republic of Letters for their knowledge of Islam.

Gibbon writes that, before he was sixteen, "I had absorbed all that could be learned in English of the Arabs and the Persians, the Tartars and the Turks." Voltaire held that Muslim achievements did not spring from Islam itself. Gibbon believed that Islam was handicapped by what he called "religious captivity." Bevilacqua is convinced that each veered from learned scholarship on the subject of Muslim achievements. Voltaire erred on the side of enthusiasm, Gibbon on the side of condemnation.

Bevilacqua makes no secret of his contempt for those eighteenth-century *philosophes* whom he regards as spokesmen for a political movement rather than an intellectual one.

A brief review can only hint at the richness of this volume. The book may not be for everyone, but for anyone interested in European scholarship in the period covered, it is a treasure.—Jude P. Dougherty, *The Catholic University of America*

BRAGUE, Rémi. *The Legitimacy of the Human*. Translated by Paul Seaton. South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2018. xiii + 177 pp. Cloth, \$26.00—The present work is based on a series of lectures given at the Catholic University of Louvain when Rémi Brague occupied the Cardinal Mercier Chair in 2011. Reflections initiated there were further developed in two subsequent works, *Eccentric Culture* (2012) and *On the God of the Christians and One or Two Others* (2013).

The focus of these works is the character of European civilization, its formation, development, and challenges. "European culture," Brague declares, "was formed by Christianity, the religion of the Creative Logos." Today that culture is on the defensive. What took centuries to construct

has taken only a few decades to contest. Given the present schizophrenia that seems to characterize European intellectuals, Brague finds it necessary to state *what* and *who* man is, and his difference from the rest of nature.

Man is understood as constituting a species distinguished from others by certain properties he possesses exclusively. He is a rational animal, a social animal, a political animal, superior to all other living beings. He is cognizant of the intention of nature. "Nature may be said to glorify herself in him." His status as the greatest success of nature assures him proximity to the divine. Man realizes his superiority in his conquest of nature. Francis Bacon spoke of "the kingdom of man," and René Descartes of "the master and possessor of nature." But the dominion of man over the rest of things has not gone without saying. In antiquity Brague finds Pythagoras and Porphyry promoting questionable accounts of the nature of man. Similarly, modern natural science is often guilty of ignoring the unique status of the human being. Biologists have said that the human species is a deviation of nature—a faux pas, as Max Scheler put it. From that viewpoint the very existence of man is taken as a danger to other species.

Brague reminds his readers that those engaged in the natural sciences do not deal with the human as such. "The science of nature in its modern version is a dehumanizing authority." We falsely expect the improvement of the human condition by means of a scientific increase in our knowledge of the nonhuman. But in the modern study of nature one finds no trace of human values. Science refuses to answer the question posed by man, namely, the question of purpose or the final cause of nature and human nature. The scientist is forbidden to ask *why*? He is confined to description and the formulation of laws. "The motto of modern science is fundamentally the same rule that governs the conduct of inferiors vis-à-vis their superiors in the army: no need to understand." As needed, the scientist may seek the complicitous aid of philosophers, who will explain that those "why" questions are meaningless.

We turn to the "humanities" for correction, but more and more the humanities are eclipsed by the exact sciences. The term, "humanities," itself dates to antiquity. Ever since Cicero, the type of learning he called *humaniora* has entailed the study of good authors. "The classics," we call them now. They were thought to render one who read them more human. We speak of Renaissance humanism. In the nineteenth century, the Weimar authors Goethe and Schiller came to be regarded as the foremost representatives of humanism.

Following the order of his Mercier lectures, Brague devotes a chapter to the thought of Alexander Blok (1880–1921), the Russian poet. Another chapter is devoted to Michel Foucault (1926–1984), the French philosopher and historian, and yet another to Hans Blumberg's book *The Legitimacy of the Modern*.

"Modern times" is understood by Brague as a rapture vis-à-vis the preceding period, not simply as something that is more recent than that

which preceded it, but as something that “tore itself decisively away from a past in order to establish itself in its own and definitive reality.” The transition to modernity was not simply undergone but consciously willed. To be modern, Brague insists, is to want to be modern and to know one’s self as such. The passage to modernity is a choice—a repudiation of the past—a rupture in the unbroken continuity of history. If we attempt to define it, its description would contain reference to the conquest of nature, application of mathematical physics, and technology that gives control. But one cannot live by modern science alone.

A return to the perspective of the Middle Ages is inevitable. What sort of Middle Ages? Not one devoid of modern industrial achievements or devoid of contemporary medicine. Alfred Loisy is quoted as saying, “[Early Christians may have] expected the Kingdom of God but it was the Church that came.” The Middle Ages conceived of man as a creature of God. The subject of origins, says Brague, has to be raised anew. What or who made man? Who or what deserves to be called man’s creator?

Distinguishing between the idea of “creation” and “Creationism,” which rests on a naïve reading of Genesis, Brague finds inspiration in the biblical narrative that tells us that God looked upon his creation and found that it was good—thus attesting to the value of what exists. The natural sciences may describe reality, but it is not theirs to say that it is good or bad.

Much of this perspective is affirmed in the May 2017 Paris Declaration, “A Europe We Can Believe In,” signed by thirteen prominent European intellectuals, including Rémi Brague, Pierre Manent, and Robert Spaemann, whose works have been reviewed within these pages.—Jude P. Dougherty, *The Catholic University of America*

DALLMAYR, Fred. *Democracy to Come: Politics as Relational Praxis*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. 192 pp. Cloth, \$29.95—Dallmayr’s latest book follows a series of multidisciplinary works on political theory, globalism, political theology, religious studies, history, anthropology, metaphysics, ethics, and spirituality, including, since 2013: *Being in the World: Dialogue and Cosmopolis*; *Mindfulness and Letting Be: On Engaged Thinking and Acting*; *Taming Leviathan: Toward a Global Ethical Alliance*; *Humanizing Humanity: For a Global Ethics*; *Freedom and Solidarity: Toward New Beginnings*; *Against Apocalypse: Recovering Humanity’s Wholeness*; *On the Boundary: A Life Remembered*; *Critical Phenomenology, Cross-Cultural Theory, Cosmopolitanism*. If his previous books are anything like this one, they not only, as a whole, examine politics from a staggering variety of disciplines and perspectives, but perform this incredible feat of erudition and integration. Alasdair MacIntyre has taught us that today’s philosopher must have a mastery of not only his own tradition of rationality but also several others—and from the inside, on their own terms, like learning