

# ASDIWAL

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on scholastic thought, such as the schism and the persecution of heretics. Grellard only briefly acknowledges these authors' engagement in church politics, preferring instead to foreground the internal logic and dialogic aspects of these scholastic debates.

Grellard several times uses the phrase « the right to err ». In some ways this right represents a radical tolerance because his authors acknowledge a moral imperative on, for example, the old woman who has been misled to persist in her false beliefs. On the other hand, the theologians of the thirteenth and fourteenth century set strict limits on this right, because they insisted that *simplices* must seek guidance from religious experts and dismiss an erroneous conscience if necessary. Up until the Protestant Reformation, or the discovery of the New World, I wonder whether we can properly talk about a « right to err », or whether it would be more accurate to call this an acknowledgement that unavoidable error sometimes occurs. There is a question about scale

in play here: how does it change a problem when one transitions from a situation where only a tiny minority are expected to hold erroneous beliefs, to a new reality in which entire populations live in heterodox religion, as was the case after the Protestant Reformation and Europe's encounters with the peoples of the New World?

This is a fascinating, thorough, and insightful monograph that will be of interest not only to specialists in medieval philosophy, but also to historians and specialists in religious studies. Grellard provides an account of the development of religious tolerance that is both precise and empirical, but which also addresses important theoretical questions about the philosophical ramifications of Christian soteriology and the ability of scholasticism to respond to a world in crisis.

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JASON ĀNANDA JOSEPHSON STORM, *Metamodernism: The Future of Theory*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2021, 328 pages, ISBN: 9780226786650.

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In *Metamodernism*, Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm sets out to analyze and resolve some of the thorniest of philosophical problems posed to the social scientist today: the possibility of knowledge or lack thereof, scepticism, moralism, ethical nihilism, the meaning of language and – what is especially important for religious studies – the anti-essentialist or critical turn. As he states from the beginning on, however, *Metamodernism* is not a new name for an actual *Zeitgeist* or state of things. Rather, it is a project, a place the author wants to get to. To be metamodern, according to Josephson Storm, is to be in search of a new foundation for the social sciences in particular, and for theory in general, the seeds of which one can find in this book.

The first chapter offers a discussion on realism and anti-realism, concluding that both these categories are at their core polemical. On the one hand, scholars who portray themselves as realists without discussing the concept of reality are doing nothing but « portraying their scientism » rhetorically, while anti-realists are usually criticizing the same scientific, positivist worldview. This polemic is here interpreted as the consequence of a « crisis » – in the Kuhnian sense of the term: the *dénouement* of models transposed from the natural sciences to the humanities. A possible solution to this impasse, a metamodern solution, would be to account for the difference between reality and existence – what is *real* does not necessarily have a physical, mind-independent existence,

which is precisely the case of the « objects of study » of the social sciences. But to resolve this issue, that is, to understand and not fall into the ideological trap of either scientism or pure deconstructivism, the author suggests that we meticulously analyze the crisis that the humanities seem to be in, instead of either appealing to more « realist » accounts of epistemology and ontology or for anti-essentialist, purely negative philosophical stances. Moreover, Josephson Storm suggests that not only has conceptual analysis crumbled as a method of inquiry, but also that almost all concepts that structured or defined entire fields of study have been deconstructed in similar ways, « religion » being but one example of this. For him, however, the critique of these concepts is « but the beginning », the announcement of a twilight already passed. In the case of « religious studies », he argues that questioning the concept of religion has always been much more characteristic of the field than any actual definition or method of study could ever be. Like many other scholars, the concept of religion is primarily, for Josephson, a product of Protestant theology or, to put it differently, although in similar, pseudo-secularized terms, ideology. To study other « religions », then, is the result of a simplistic transposition of the categories of a particular frame of thought or worldview onto others. Not only is « religion » a late, Christiano-European concept (a claim he nuances in *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012), it is also a concept that subverts and negates itself. It pushes what we call « religion » to a place that is strange to the experience of the believer and of the theologian, who are both convinced by the universality and truth of what they believe in. In this sense, Josephson's main idea is not that we should altogether stop using the concept or term « religion », but only to give up on the search for a final and perennial definition for it, as if that would be the solution to all the impasses of the discipline.

After criticizing this method of conceptual analysis in Chapter 2, Josephson Storm suggests a new way out – what he calls « process social ontology » (Chapter 3). He argues that the building blocks or objects of study of the social sciences are only seen as problematic because of a paradigmatic confusion between the social and natural sciences. Once scholars realize that mind-dependency and processuality are fundamental traces of what they study, the search for its *quidité* turns obsolete. In this way, the social sciences are to be renewed as « process ontology of social kinds », that is, a discourse about what exists *socially*. Social kinds are not static « objects », but are themselves a process that affects and creates other processes which share common dispositions or « powers », as Josephson Storm puts it. Relying on and adapting Boyd's account of natural kinds as « homeostatic property cluster kinds », Josephson Storm then analyzes his own definition of the « social kinds », and suggests that the latter are formed or bundled up together by a shared power or property, a common cause, which he calls « *anchoring process* ». His main conclusion is that trying to analyze such kinds and to discover what their anchoring processes are should replace our endless search for a closed-up and static definition of concepts, thus eventually opening a new path for research in the humanities.

The last chapters offer further solutions to the crisis of meaning and cynicism (both epistemological and ethical). The newly founded social science advocated by Josephson should not, according to him, shy away from values, but rather try and make them explicit, relying on eudaimonean ethics and hylo-semiotics. Simply put, Josephson Storm defends that language should be taken as a way to « understand and interpret our environment », something that is done by human and nonhuman animals alike. Indeed, in his view, humans are understood as one among many other sentient species, who are defined as semiotic beings – that is, animals living in « a world

of signs». In this frame of thought, humans are also capable of non-discursive thought, a major difference from poststructuralist philosophy of language. The core of this project of a new semiotics is an invitation to interpret voluntary and involuntary signs, leading to an understanding of translation as interpretation, although having in mind that there is a way of knowing which interpretation is correct or valid and which one is not.

Josephson Storm's book opens just as many doors as it closes. Contrary to what he claims in the opening remarks, it is difficult for the reader not to interpret his enterprise as a philosophical system, even though his suggestions are essentially methodological, aimed specifically at the *praxis* of the social scientist. Yet, the double-edged character of the book is in no way a flaw. The author treats these problems energetically and it is rare to see so many issues mentioned, reflected on, and resolved at once. While complex in

its treatment, each chapter could and should (as one can only hope) become the object of a monograph of its own, in order to answer some of the questions that remain after a first reading of the book. Two of these are, for instance: 1) how exactly can bad interpretations be differentiated from good or valid ones?; 2) how can we, in a eudaimonistic enterprise, discover the means by which happiness and emancipation are to be attained, without recourse to a conceptual definition of what happiness and emancipation are?

After a first reading of the book, what is left for us is to wait and see if and how Josephson Storm answers these questions and whether his suggestions will be acknowledged and put to use in the every-day work of scholars in the social sciences and humanities.

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AARON J. KACHUCK, *The Solitary Sphere in the Age of Virgil*,  
Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2021, xiv + 316 pages,  
ISBN: 978-0197579046.

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L'ouvrage d'Aaron Kachuck propose une relecture des principaux classiques de la seconde moitié du 1<sup>er</sup> siècle av. J.-C. (Cicéron, Virgile, Horace et Properce) à l'aune du thème de la solitude. Dans ce but, il remet en question la conception traditionnellement binaire du modèle de culture romaine, qui tend à opposer les sphères privée et publique sans prendre en compte la place de l'individu. Dans la lignée des divisions tripartites indo-européennes élaborées successivement par Georges Dumézil et Jean Haudry (pp. 13-14), il propose donc sa propre distinction ternaire entre les sphères publique, privée et solitaire, qui permet de « repenser la relation entre l'individu, la famille, l'État et le cosmos » (p. 2). La solitude exprimée par rapport à la collectivité peut se signaler par l'isolement ou le retrait de la vie

publique, mais elle consiste aussi en un état mental, marquant un retrait en soi sous une forme tantôt positive – autosuffisance –, tantôt négative – aliénation. En littérature, le *topos* de l'écrivain-e reclus-e montre la solitude comme une posture réflexive à l'origine du geste créateur. En ce sens, la littérature représenterait toutes les facettes de la sphère solitaire.

L'auteur s'inscrit en faux contre l'idée selon laquelle la sphère solitaire et ses manifestations, comme la subjectivité, l'introspection ou encore l'imagination, n'auraient été conceptualisées qu'à partir de l'ère du christianisme, en particulier avec les œuvres d'Augustin. Il impute le refus de cette pensée de la solitude (« *the denial of solitude to the Romans* », p. 5) à la peur de produire une lecture anachronique influencée par une conception romantique