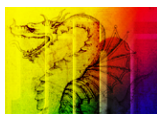


JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY HISTORY OF IDEAS



2020

Volume 9 Issue 17
Item 6

– Section 4: Reviews –

Book Reviews

A. Montebugnoli, E. Pasini, L. Righi



JIHI 2020

Volume 9 Issue 17

Section 1: Editorials

1. *Editorial* (JIHI)

Section 2: Articles

2. *Habermas and the English Public Sphere Reconsidered: Freedom of the Press, c. 1695* (R. Robertson)
3. *Six hypothèses socioéconomiques pour définir la confiance* (J.-M. Servet)
4. *Les idéologues, la Décade philosophique politique et littéraire et Jean-Baptiste Say* (A. Tiran)

Section 3: Notes

5. *L'animal entre Histoire et Droit. Regards croisés* (P. Brunet, P. Serna; dialogue coordonné par M. Albertone)

Section 4: Reviews

6. *Book Reviews* (A. Montebugnoli, E. Pasini, L. Righi)

.....

Book Reviews

A. Montebugnoli, E. Pasini, L. Righi

Reviews of Muzzarelli (ed.), Riferire all'autorità. Denuncia e delazione tra Medioevo ed Età Moderna, Viella 2020; Thomas & Chiffolleau, L'istituzione della natura, ed. by M. Spanò, Quodlibet 2020; Wolfe, La philosophie de la biologie avant la biologie. Une histoire du vitalisme, Classiques Garnier 2019; Omodeo, Amerigo Vespucci: The Historical Context of His Explorations and Scientific Contribution, Edizioni Ca' Foscari 2020.



1 MARIA GIUSEPPINA MUZZARELLI (ed.), *Riferire all'autorità. Denuncia e delazione tra Medioevo ed Età Moderna*, Roma : Viella, 2020, 299 pp. ISBN 9788833135694, € 32,00.

L'ouvrage collectif *Riferire all'autorità. Denuncia e delazione tra Medioevo ed Età Moderna* est le résultat de deux séminaires organisés en 2018 et 2019 à l'Université de Bologna ; le travail a donc bénéficié d'une discussion entre les auteurs, bien visible et appréciable à travers les multiples liens et échanges qui relient les contributions.

L'ouvrage rassemble dix-sept contributions et se compose de trois parties qui organisent les interventions en fonction des sources utilisées en suivant un critère qui va du spécifique au général. La première partie – *la città e i delatori* – se focalise sur les systèmes de dénonciation et de délation touchant des aspects

multiples de la vie urbaine entre Moyen Âge tardif et Renaissance ; la deuxième partie – *lo specchio delle norme* – dresse un panorama des *corpora* normatifs à partir du Haut Moyen Âge jusqu'aux normes des tribunaux inquisitoriaux d'époque moderne ; enfin, la troisième partie – *rivelatori di mentalità* – conclut l'ouvrage avec deux réflexions sur la définition de délation dans la littérature italienne et dans la philosophie, en dialogue direct avec l'introduction de la curatrice.

La dénonciation et la délation sont des sujets bien connus par les historiens qui s'occupent des institutions judiciaires et de leurs cadres normatifs, mais rarement, et seulement récemment, elles ont été l'objet de recherches spécifiques, au moins en ce qui concerne la période historique ici prise en compte¹ En outre, par rapport aux précédentes recherches, ce volume a le mérite de mettre en avant une multiplicité d'approches et de perspectives différentes. La pluralité de ces contributions répond aux questions posées dans l'introduction par Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, nourries à leur tour par une réflexion sur la société contemporaine, à savoir : La dénonciation a-t-elle été jugée positivement ou négativement par le passé ? Quelle différence y a-t-il entre la dénonciation et la délation ? Quelle est leur fonction sociale ? Et encore, la délation faisait-elle partie d'une forte culture de la coopération et de la participation du corps citoyen au nom du *bonum commune*, ou bien faisait-elle partie d'un projet de répression autoritaire ?

Les réponses à de telles questions ne peuvent que résulter de disciplines différentes et cette première enquête ne les représente que partiellement. À première vue, l'interdisciplinarité de l'œuvre paraît en effet déséquilibrée, notamment si l'on compare aux deux autres la troisième partie (avec deux contributions seulement). Toutefois, les différents regards disciplinaires apparaissent tout au long de l'ouvrage qui rassemble les réflexions d'historiens aux intérêts et spécialisations très variés. Ainsi, le focus se déplace-t-il à plusieurs reprises (et parfois à l'intérieur même de chaque contribution) de la structure juridique et normative au sujet économique, des conséquences sociales au développement de la pensée politique et plus généralement aux changements culturels, toujours en prenant

¹ *Denoncer le crime du Moyen Âge au XIX^e siècle*, éd. M. Charageat et M. Soula, Pessac, MSHA, 2014 ; *La necessità del segreto. Indagini sullo spazio politico nell'Italia medievale ed oltre*, éd. J. Chiffolleau, E. Hurbert, R. Mucciarelli, Roma, Viella, 2018.

en considération les institutions – soit civiques, soit ecclésiastiques – et leur contexte historique.

Au delà des statuts communaux, principe normatif de référence, dans la première partie on découvre plusieurs sources documentaires ainsi que des fonds archivistiques différents et inédits, qui reflètent un vaste échantillon d'offices et d'officiers encore méconnu par l'historiographie. Ainsi, après avoir engagé une réflexion sur la dénonciation d'un point de vue spécifiquement juridique et judiciaire, Ferdinando Treggiari introduit la figure des *boni homines*, les intermédiaires par excellence dans la surveillance des villes de l'Ombrie (XIII^e-XVI^e siècles). Les officiers communaux sont aussi au centre de l'analyse de Giuliano Milani qui se sert d'une version inédite du *liber falsariorum* de Padoue pour explorer les cas de corruption dans les offices publics. L'exemple de Bologne médiévale permet de découvrir d'autres offices qui ont été très peu explorés jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli introduit alors le concept de auto-dénonciation à travers le cas des vêtements qui sont subordonnés à la législation somptuaire dans la Bologne du XIV^e siècle. Et dans la même ville, l'existence de l'*officium spiarum*, au centre de l'essai d'Edward Loss, montre un cas plus éclatant de dénonciation institutionnalisée à travers l'analyse des procès aux espions, eux-mêmes sujets de délation de la part des citoyens.

Néanmoins, ce focus précis sur la dénonciation permet aussi aux auteurs de vérifier et confirmer des processus institutionnels bien connus par l'historiographie. C'est le cas de l'essai de So Nakaya et de celui de Julien Briand, qui encadrent les spécificité des cas de Lucques et de Reims au XIV^e siècle – et en particulier l'institutionnalisation de la dénonciation et donc la création de plusieurs offices et officiers compétents – dans le processus de modification de l'ordre public et dans l'augmentation du pouvoir répressif des gouvernants survenus après l'épidémie de peste, soit à travers d'intéressantes données quantitatives sur les démarches de la justice pénale (*maleficia*), soit en reliant à ces transformations institutionnel la question de la résistance à la dénonciation de la part de la population.

De plus, les cas spécifiques analysés offrent aux auteurs la possibilité de dévoiler les relations entre contrôlés et contrôleurs, en soulignant les distances ainsi que les réseaux des relations sociales, politiques ou économiques, un point nodal souvent difficile à identifier à travers l'étude des institutions médiévales. C'est le cas, présenté par Roberta Mucciarelli, de Sienne au XIV^e siècle. Cette

dernière offre un exemple de la manière dont la délation est employée en lien avec les rebellions et permet à l'auteur de s'interroger sur les dangers de l'utilisation de la dénonciation à des fins politiques. C'est aussi le cas de Venise (XV^e-XVI^e siècles) exploré par Luca Molà. À travers l'analyse des délateurs et des dénoncés pour des causes de fraude et vol dans le domaine économique, Molà rend compte des conflits et des relations hiérarchisées au sein des secteurs productifs.

La deuxième partie de l'ouvrage met l'accent sur le cadre normatif, de ses écrivains à ses racines théoriques. On trouve ici les références les plus datées : Carmelina Urso expose le lexique et le contenu des principales textes législatif du Haut Moyen Âge – le *Pactus legis Salicae*, l'*Edictum Theoderici* et les *Variae* de Cassiodore –, alors que Emanuele Piazza à travers les narrations historiques montre le développement de la culture de dénonciation chez Liutprand de Cremona. En ce qui concerne la pensée politique, la culture de la délation a connu un fort développement dans le Moyen Âge tardif. Comme l'explique Bernardo Pio, cela se produisit inévitablement lorsque l'espionnage et la délation acquirent une signification de plus en plus négative, comme le témoigne Bartolo de Sassoferrato dans son travail sur la tyrannie. Comme dans le cas de la culture de l'espionnage qu'on vient d'évoquer, l'enquête de Franco Franceschi se lie aux cas spécifiques considérés dans la première partie, et revient sur le côté économique et productif en exposant les fonctions des corporations dans le contrôle des activités productives et la mise en place d'officiers spécifiques – *exploratores secretos* – pour contrôler les membres des corporations, et ses conséquences à l'intérieur d'un contexte très hiérarchisé tel que le processus productif.

Le tribunal de l'Inquisition et les principes fondateurs des institutions ecclésiastiques sont les derniers protagonistes de cette enquête normative. Riccardo Parmeggiani analyse les procédures inquisitoires contre les hérétiques, ses officiers ainsi que le développement, voire l'assouplissement, des règles qui autorisent à admettre les dénonciations, en débouchant de plus en plus sur des abus. Mais le tribunal ecclésiastique a connu de nombreuses évolutions au cours de l'époque moderne, bien expliquées par Lorenzo Coccoli qui analyse l'utilisation du concept vétérotestamentaire de la *correctio fraterna* pour encourager la délation entre religieux. Et pour finir son dépassement au cours de l'époque moderne assuré par l'*officium fidei* qui transforma ce concept et rendit la dé-

nonciation une obligation en utilisant le concept de correction sacramentelle, opération que Vincenzo Lavenia attribue à la modernité de l'institution, qui avait acquis les moyens de favoriser le contrôle des « vies des autres ».

La troisième partie se compose de deux contributions seulement, qui apparaissent un peu isolés par rapport aux autres, mais qui sont utiles pour répondre aux questions qui ont été posés (et rarement résolues) tout au long de l'ouvrage. Ainsi, Gino Ruozi et Francesca Rigotti s'interrogent-ils sur l'évolution de la délation – positive ou négative ? – dans la littérature italienne du XVIII^e siècle et sur le rapport entre sincérité et délation d'après plusieurs philosophes, en concluant par le rôle de la délation – toujours dépendant des intentions du délateur – dans les démocraties contemporaines. Ces contributions reviennent donc aux questions qui ont été posées en introduction, comme si le but était d'une part de boucler la boucle, et d'autre part de stimuler la recherche à venir.

Cet ouvrage est donc un instrument incontournable pour ceux qui veulent se confronter au sujet (l'index des noms en fin d'ouvrage est très apprécié) et poursuivre sur un terrain de recherche qui reste encore à développer, notamment en ce qui concerne une approche interdisciplinaire qui sache enfin dépasser les cloisons entre lois et pratiques souvent proposés par l'historiographie.

Laura Righi



2 YAN THOMAS AND JACQUES CHIFFOLEAU, *L'istituzione della natura*, translated and edited by Michele Spanò, Macerata: Quodlibet, 2020, 128 pp. ISBN 9788822904843, € 15,00.

At the beginning of Woody Allen's *Love and Death*, just before being executed, the protagonist remembers his boyhood at the summer house where, among many other characters, were "Old Gregor and his son Young Gregor.

Oddly enough, Young Gregor was older than Old Gregor. Nobody could figure out how that happened”. Such an inversion, which belongs in the first place to the sphere of logic and its paradoxes, represents, if transferred in the context of the history of law and of its use of the concept of nature, a most subversive statement. In fact, the impossibility for a father to be younger than his own son is the clearest example, as well as the main refrain running throughout the legal history of the concept, asserting the normative and institutional power of nature, and therefore setting the boundaries to the artifices of law since the age of the Roman *leges* and *ius* and throughout the medieval configuration of the *ius naturale*: “Minorem natu majorem non posse adoptare placet. Adoptio enim naturam imitatur: et pro monstro est, ut major sit filius, quam pater” (*Institutiones*, 1, 11, 4).

However, beneath the continuity of this formula—as of many others—the study of its conceptual modifications and, even more, of its technical applications makes it possible to glimpse the shifts of the legal formulations and uses of ‘nature’. The critical inquiry into such shifts is the focus and the *fil rouge* of the essays collected in *L’istituzione della natura*, which analyse, at different points in history, the mechanisms of its institutionalization, while following at the same time its progressive and concurrent ‘naturalization’. The book is in fact an assemblage of three texts: Yan Thomas’s “*Imago naturae. Nota sull’istituzionalità della natura a Roma*”, on the fictional legal status of Roman nature (it is the translation of Thomas 1991); Jacques Chiffolleau’s “*Contra natura. Per un approccio casuistico e procedurale alla natura medievale*”, on the links between the medieval Christianised *natura*, God’s *voluntas* and the theory of majesty (originally published as Chiffolleau 1996); and Spanò’s afterword “«Perché non rendi poi quel che prometti allor?». Tecniche e ideologie della giuridificazione della natura”, on the limits of the modern process of subjectivation as applied to nature in the context of environmental legal actions. The collection, while discussing the notion of nature and, moreover, its practical applications within the framework of case-law history, draws a diachronic line of critical investigation that challenges both the legal historical and philosophical assumptions on nature, and its contemporary understanding and uses. What results from this collective archaeological inquiry is a peculiar image of nature emerging from the analysis of the subtle deviations of its legal formulations and purposes.

Thomas's inquiry allows for the identification of the metaphysical and moral status of Roman nature as the 'by-product' of the (linguistic and rhetorical) artifices and devices through which the law grasps and shapes the 'things' of the world. In the context of Roman law, reconstructed in its historical complexity through a meticulous case analysis, nature exists as "an image of the institutions" (35), which produce it as something existing outside of their domain in order to strengthen their institutional hold on facts and reality. That is to say, to return to the previous example, the nature forbidding the son to be older than the father, which the law imitates, is created as such by that same law that claims to be shaped according to its example. Roman law, in fact, summons nature so as to set its own boundaries, which ensure its legal effectiveness and, in so doing, 'artificially' produces the figure of *natura* as an entirely "institutionalised and legal" one (44).

Chiffolleau's critical analysis, in turn, makes it possible to spot the peculiar dialectic among nature's metaphysical normativity (which results from the Christian interlacing of the ancient philosophical concept with its Roman legal form), its role in the shaping of the medieval concept of *majestas* (78-79), and the modern configuration of power (98-101). The acts *contra naturam* discussed by Chiffolleau are indeed defined against the background of a nature which is identified with God's Will, whose order shapes the phenomenal world, and at the same time work as the instruments measuring the extent of the "institutional" effects of the equivalence among nature, *divina omnipotentia*, and majesty. Thus, the impossibility for a son to be older than the father is now prescribed by a law of nature which precedes human law, rather than descending from the latter—as in the case of Roman law. At the same time, the *acta contra naturam* are defined as such (that is, they come to be into the language despite their "unspeakable" nature) by prosecuting institutions, which in turn establish their power by virtue of that same defining ability.

Finally, Spanò's inquiry into the contemporary notion of nature, carried out in light of its inextricable connection to the ecological question, aims at a radical critique of subjective law. In fact, once again, the analysis of legal techniques and practices makes it possible, by virtue of the dialogue with Thomas's and Chiffolleau's essays, both to recognise the metaphysical normative tradition working behind the contemporary use of the concept of nature, and the inherent limits, resulting from this concealed premise, of the dichotomy be-

tween subjects and things which informs contemporary legal environmental struggles. The attempts at personifying nature in order to defend its 'rights' end up reproducing a radical ontological separation between things and individuals, which rests upon the idea of a reality (metaphysically and morally) pre-existing to the artificial world of law, thus somehow orienting its actions. Within this framework, the only weapon of subjective law seems to be its ability to allow for the transition from one ontological plane to the other: a lake, a tree, a forest are transferred from the realm of things to that of subjects (119). Such a transition, however, not only reaffirms the same metaphysical dichotomy that structures the anthropocentrism deeply linked to the environmental crisis, in so far as it assumes that rights belong only to persons and subjects—and that consequently language is a matter of persons and subjects rather than things; it also automatically implies a vicarious subject able to speak for the 'personified' and yet silent things of nature (117).

However, the circle between the ontological difference of objects and subjects, which is implied and affirmed by subjective law, and the inefficacy of the legal personification of nature can be broken by the peculiar *imago naturae* emerging from Thomas's and Chiffolau's analyses. In fact, as Spanò argues, "the legal existence of a 'nature' uncompromised by metaphysical arguments is one of the most extraordinary formal intuitions of Roman civil law" (109). At the same time, its medieval multiple uses in different fields and for various functions enlighten the 'plasticity' of the concept, that is, its willingness to be shaped over and over again, and to serve different purposes at the same time. From this double perspective – that of its institutionalised existence and of its plasticity – nature becomes the main expression of the artificial and linguistic power of the law to 'manipulate' the distribution among objects, facts, and subjects that the metaphysical viewpoint made appear absolutely fixed. Thus, a whole new kind of 'things' emerge: assemblages and collectives constituted by heterogeneous elements that do not result in a new unity (subject to personification or reification) but that, on the contrary, put in motion a multiplicity of singularities outlining new figures and opening up new legal possibilities. In light of this, the legal environmental debate should not be about nature and natural objects but, rather, about "ecosystems, that is, a certain kind of relations among beings localised in spaces of various extension; put another way, vital environments, whatever their nature may be" (119).

The point therefore is not simply to put aside the concept of nature. In fact, what emerges from the reading of this collection is how its normative and meta-physical implications are structured by its artificial character. That is, nature itself, and therefore the ontological paradigm it establishes, are the product of the intrinsic fictional quality of law. They result from the *fictio legis* which represents the inner mechanism through which the *ius* uses language in order to both affirm its indifference toward any ontological truth, and to shape the very same order of reality and facts (Thomas 2016).

Interestingly enough, the same ambivalence of nature can be observed also from other disciplinary perspectives. More precisely, it can be observed in all those cases where the intersection between the manipulative power of language and technique over reality and facts is more evident. Particularly relevant in this regard is the case of the history of art, in so far as it allows for the recognition of practises and techniques which are similar to the artifices of law, and which, moreover, interact with them in unexpected ways. I shall limit myself to a few examples. The fictional character that Roman art inherited from the Hellenistic tradition is well known, as well as its radical indifference toward any mimetic effort to reproduce natural truth (see Guastini 2003). Among the many instances of Roman artistic illusions, the case of the *asarotos oikos* or “unswept room”, an artistic device first employed at Pergamon during the 2nd century B.C. and which became popular among roman élites, is particularly revealing. It consisted of floor mosaics reproducing food scraps that served the purpose to hide, by virtue of the technique of the *trompe l’œil*, the food waste thrown on the ground during the banquets (Dunbabin 1999, 26-27). Such an artistic ‘trick’ well illustrates the same indifference toward the ontological issue of truth and falseness which informs the principle of *fictio legis*. It is in fact precisely on the basis of the “certainty of the falseness”¹, which lays beneath the institutionalised nature emerging from Thomas’s essay, that this fiction can bring together different ontological planes without any care for the distinction (so fundamental for the Greek philosophical tradition) between the ‘scraps’ of nature and their illusionistic reproductions. The illusions of the *asarotos oikos* work particularly well as an example of the metaphysical Roman laicity, in so far as it presupposes the confusion and the “contact” between ontologically heterogenous ‘things’ which

¹ This formula can be found at the beginning of another essay by Thomas (2016).

the surface, rather than separate, articulates.

If this Roman case works mostly as an analogy between art and law, that is, between the fictional legal language and the artifices of artistic techniques, the link between law, nature, language and artistic fiction becomes cogent in the case of Bernard of Clairvaux's critique of Romanesque art. In the context of the monastic diatribe which characterised the first half of 12th century, Bernard's *Apologia* outlines, through his argument against the deformed and monstrous creatures adorning monastic cloisters, a principle of equivalence between the law of God, the rhetorical rules laying underneath monastic reading (Carruthers 1998, 81-87), and the division among the realms of nature:

In the cloisters, before the eyes of the brothers while they read [*coram legentibus fratribus*]—what is that ridiculous monstrosity doing, an amazing kind of deformed beauty and yet a beautiful deformity? [...]. You may see many bodies under one head, and conversely many heads on one body [...]. In short, everywhere so plentiful and astonishing a variety of contradictory forms is seen that one would rather read in the marble than in books [*magis legere libeat in marmoribus, quam in codicibus*], and spend the whole day wondering at every single one of them than in meditating on the law of God [*in lege Dei meditando*] (Bernard, *Apologia*, 12.29, 283).

In the eyes of Bernard, the main fault of Romanesque grotesques is that their monstrous images, in so far as they transit from one form to the other and create hybrids figures, alter, along the line of the fictional power of language and art, the order of nature (Rudolph 1990, 119-124). Its law is presented here, as in the 12th century sources analysed by Chiffolleau, as one and the same with that of God, which is studied by the monks during their readings in the cloisters, and which should be mirrored, in its ontological order, by any visual reproduction. In this context, nature is therefore at once the phenomenal representation of the metaphysical partition ordered by the law of God, and the *imago* of its subversive (“*contra*”) rearrangement resulting from the artifices and fictions of rhetoric and art.

As for modernity, at the point of transition from the Renaissance world, shaped by the newly discovered philosophical and literary Greek tradition, to the cultural hodgepodge—from which the modern subject of subjective law will emerge—stands, as an example of the ambiguity of the modern image of nature, the art of Arcimboldo. In his *Composed Heads* representing the seasons, he plays

with the boundaries between the order of natural continuity and contiguity, the rhetorical compositional implications of art's fiction, and its metaphysical subversiveness. As Roland Barthes wrote:

If you look at the image close up, you see only fruits and vegetables; if you step back, you no longer see anything but a man with a terrible eye, a ribbed doublet, a bristling ruff (*Summer*): distance and proximity are promoters of meaning. Is this not the great secret of every vital semantics? Everything proceeds from a spacing out or staggering of articulations. [...] What has been combined forms aggregates which can combine again among themselves a second, a third time. I imagine that an ingenious artist could take all of Arcimboldo's composite heads, combine them with a view to a new effect of meaning, and form their arrangement procedure, for instance, a landscape, a city, a forest (Barthes 1991, 141-142).

An ingenious artist, that is to say, would be able to use the instruments of rhetorical and artistic fiction in order to form 'ecosystems' which result from the recombination of the 'things' of nature—things that, by virtue of this "mobile painting" (Barthes 1991, 142), are no longer things but assemblages of singular parts, along the line of linguistic and artistic artifices. The "odd mathematics" outlined by the composition of these parts (Barthes 1991, 141) brings us back to the legal "*tertium*" of the assemblages of singularities that do not add up in a new unity of things or individuals (122). These realities, deriving from the composition of 'pieces' of reality, which reshapes the ontological order of nature, hint at something as a mobile mereology that, along with the fictions of language, art, rhetorics, etc., seems to allow for a radical rethinking of the same metaphysical immobility which has informed such an important part of the history of the concept of nature.

Bibliography

- Barthes, R. (1991). Arcimboldo, or Magician and Rhétoricien. In: *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Howard, R. Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 129-148.
- Bernard of Clairvaux, Apologia ad Guillelmum Abbatem [A Justification to Abbot William]. Transl. Rudolph C. In: Rudolph C. (1990). *The "Things of Greater Importance": Bernard of Clairvaux's Apologia and the Medieval Attitude Toward Art*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 232-287.

- Carruthers, M. (1998). *The Craft of Thought. Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chiffolleau, J. (1996). *Contra naturam*. Pour une approche casuistique et procédurale de la nature médiévale. In *Micrologus. Nature, Sciences and Medieval Societies*, 4, 265-312.
- Dunbabin, K. M. D. (1999). *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Guastini, D. (2003). *Prima dell'estetica. Poetica e filosofia nell'antichità*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
- Rudolph, C. (1990). *The "Things of Greater Importance": Bernard of Clairvaux's Apologia and the Medieval Attitude Toward Art*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Thomas, Y. (1991). *Imago naturae*. Note sur l'institutionnalité de la nature à Rome. In: *Théologie et droit dans la science politique de l'État moderne. Actes de la table ronde de Rome (12-14 novembre 1987)*. Roma: École Française de Rome, 201-227.
- . (2016). *Fictio legis. La finzione romana e i suoi limiti medievali*. Transl. Spanò, M. Macerata: Quodlibet.

Anna Montebugnoli



3 CHARLES T. WOLFE, *La philosophie de la biologie avant la biologie. Une histoire du vitalisme*, Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019, 514 p. <https://doi.org/10.15122/isbn.978-2-406-08074-9>. ISBN 9782406080725/32, 56€/93€.

The first point that a reviewer must inescapably avouch about this book is that the Author is the best specialist of the subject matter and that the opus was long awaited. The book opens with the *grande révolution dans les sciences* that Diderot announces in his *Thoughts on the interpretation of Nature* (1753). This happens to happen at the same time as the birth of a volatile but specific language for a series of phenomena pertaining to living things, and in particular to 'living matter'. This historical juncture is, according to the Author (who has

an infinity of documental *pièces d'appui* up his sleeve to support this stance), a kind of—Koselleck-style—*Sattelzeit* of biology: a period that predates the formal constitution of the science and of its conceptual framework, yet contains both its seeds and the urging need for its development.

Is this “revolution” part of that ‘Scientific Revolution’ that science historians have depicted, then celebrated, finally undone, in their 20th-century debates? The Author refuses to cast his enterprise as the request of a place at the table, of a more or less ample addition to some ‘Canon’. This would beg the real question, which according to him revolves around the “crisis”, the “challenge”, the “scandal” that is brought about when the living becomes, as in vitalist materialism, the theoretical pivot of a new, deeply problematic subject field (the Author quotes Jacques Monod as an inspiration for the apt expression “scandale du vitalisme”).

Now when materialism crosses this new focus on the autonomous nature of life and living things, philosophy and experimental science become, in the Author’s view, permeable. Not only a new science, but a new philosophy emerges: after a century of clockwork universes and clocksmith gods, living things provide the intellectual sphere with a subversive indeterminacy.

This indeterminacy notwithstanding, moreover, in the vitalist aleatory materialist field, according to the Author, lives, even thrives a different, clandestine sort of determinism, that in various forms escapes the usual definition of Laplacian-daemon-inspired determinism, which indeed is, at the birth time of the philosophy of biology before biology, conspicuous by its absence.¹ But just like for ‘revolution’, also in the case of ‘determinism’ the point is not what might be undone, enlarged, integrated, but what can be discovered when the historian sees what was unseen.

A book on an ‘-ism’ could easily get lost in ‘-isms’. There is a second part, more theoretical and more concerned with current debates and technicalities. This enterprise should not be judged by how much it is academically up-to-date. When you bring together history of thought and present-day, à-la-page

¹ It might be noted that determinism, just like talent, does what it can: thus, to conceive of the universe as an entirely describable mechanical system requires some idea of the possibility and means of such description: and indeed, determinism in Laplacian form might be absent before the years of Laplace and Lagrange because of a lack of mathematical furnishings.

debates, something that most of us will do at least once in a while, you are setting side by side, so to say, a geomorphological study of a landscape with the photograph of yesterday's plaza. The Author's way out of this conundrum is Canguilhem, as a philosopher of biology who somewhat escapes, and allows to escape presentism, and not only because he's dead. To him are devoted the most interesting and robust sections of the 'contemporary' part, just like a *very* good section on Maupertuis, Diderot, and their relation, forms, it seems to me, the spine of the first part.

From the historiographic point of view some question could be raised concerning the very features of the landscape. At times differences (both in quality and in weight) are sacrificed to fanciness. It is not uncommon in recent scholarship to be partial to *trouvailles*—but, for instance, it is simply not true that Condillac's *Dissertation sur les monades* starts the move of Leibniz's ideas to France, at least because it is apparent that no one reacted to it. Similarly, one might feel just a tad of fastidium in seeing, not only in the Author's ultimately appropriative but mostly measured approach, how historically marginal debates—like that between Leibniz and Stahl—rise to some essential status because they raise the interest, or rather meet the present expectations of historians. But this is marginal. The book is uncommonly rich in information, and in acute discussions thereof. Language barriers apart, it will stay a must-read for long.



4 PIETRO OMODEO, *Amerigo Vespucci: The Historical Context of His Explorations and Scientific Contribution* ("Knowledge Hegemonies in the Early Modern World", 1), edited by Pietro Daniel Omodeo, Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari—Digital Publishing 2020, 227 pp. ISBN 9788869694028, 9788869694035. Licensed as CC: BY.

Pietro Omodeo, who turned 100 last year, is among Italy's preeminent historians of science. His grandson Pietro Daniel, who is precisely 60 years younger and teaches history and philosophy of science in Venice, has edited for publication this book, available at <http://doi.org/10.30687/978-88-6969-402-8>, that is in a way an appropriate homage to a lineage of great scholarship initiated by the Author's father, historian Adolfo Omodeo. A portrait of Pietro Omodeo sketched by the renowned Chinese artist Huang Yongyu can be found in the volume.

The Author had already presented the main outcomes of this research in a *Nuncius* paper of 2014 and an Italian book of 2017:¹ that the first translator of Vespucci's letters had been the tireless polymath Giovanni Giocondo da Verona; that the letters were not deceptive, although Amerigo hyperbolized a bit (just like the other explorers would do), while the translator himself exaggerated appealing facts; that for various reasons Vespucci omitted some facts, without this impairing the overall truthfulness of his writings; that Waldseemüller's world map contained important information that originated straight from Vespucci.

The book does not disclose any new sources: it is an exhaustive effort of re-assessment and re-interpretation of available data and documents, some of which are reproduced among the copious illustrations. Thus the work amounts *prima facie* to an extensive biography of Vespucci: his education, studies, first expeditions and main voyages are presented on the background, and in the aftermath, of Columbus', de Gama's, Cabot's, and Pacheco Pereira's successful enterprises, and of the ensuing economical and political developments. The Author's intention is clearly to uphold the consistency of Vespucci's biography as it is known, against the dismissive tendency that characterized many studies of the 19th and 20th century. But polemics are kept to a minimum—these sections are very readable, and will provide the reader unacquainted with the matter with a helpful introduction.

The presence of an overall likable narrative should not distract too much: in the end the purpose of the book is to show, against the tenets of a mistrustful historiography, not only that transmitted knowledge of Vespucci's life is sound,

¹ P. Omodeo, The Authenticity of Amerigo Vespucci's *Mundus Novus* and Information Untold about His Third Journey. *Nuncius* 29(2014): 359-388 (<https://doi-org/10.1163/18253911-02902001>); Id., *Amerigo Vespucci e l'annuncio del nuovo mondo* (Roma: Artemide, 2017).

but also that the documents and texts that Vespucci purportedly produced and were circulated among his contemporaries, and eventually were transmitted to posterity are authentic, reliable, indeed veracious. Restorative historiography, as often can follow revisionist waves, is thus provided here, and mostly with quite solid foundations, and not without some surprising use of sources, like when Omodeo compares Vespucci's and Darwin's observations concerning the Tierra del Fuego and its inhabitants.

From the point of view of intellectual history, the most relevant chapters are possibly n. 13, "Vespucci and the Coterie of Saint-Dié-des-Vosges", and 14, "The Final Years of Vespucci and His Scientific Merits". The latter is a classical history of reception, and is very informative. Chapter 13 is the most original and concerns itself with the *Cosmographiae Introductio cum quibusdam geometriae ac astronomiae principiis ad eam rem necessariis. Insuper quatuor Americi Vespuccii Navigationes*, authored by Matthias Ringmann, Johannes Adelphus, and the not-yet-distinguished cartographer Martin Waldseemüller, that appeared in St-Dié in 1507 and was reprinted in Strassburg in 1509. This section is surely impressive, in that its backbone is a very detailed and precise analysis of the cartographic/cosmographic aspects of the St-Dié booklet and map, that fully supports the author's theses on their dependence upon information provided, directly or indirectly, by Vespucci himself. At the same time, the reconstruction of the historical context and of the dynamics of collaboration and networking of the group that produced the *Introductio*, seems to be rather conjectural and slightly schematic, and no references or documental sources are clearly provided.¹ Yet even if this side of the story is quite out of focus in the author's approach, indeed, as regards its principal motif, this book is a welcome contribution to the English-language debates on Vespucci, his context, and his legacy.

Enrico Pasini

¹ The reader may be referred to D. Baldi, M. Maggini, M. Marrani (eds.), *Le origini toscane della Cosmografia di Matthias Ringmann e Martin Waldseemüller* (Firenze: Comitato Vespucci 2015); M. Lehmann, *Die Cosmographiae Introductio Matthias Ringmanns und die Weltkarte Martin Waldseemüllers aus dem Jahre 1507: ein Meilenstein frühneuzeitlicher Kartographie* (München: Meidenbauer 2010); and O. Duntje, *Ein Verleger sucht sein Publikum: die Strassburger Offizin des Matthias Hupfuff (1497/98-1520)* (Berlin: de Gruyter 2007), on the Strassburg printer who in 1505 first published Vespucci's letters edited by Ringmann, in Giocondo's translation as well as in German.

Riferire all'autorità



Denuncia e delazione
tra Medioevo ed Età moderna

a cura di Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli

viella