

Book Reviews

municates the will of God, the supernatural existence of prodigies occurs less frequently than many of his contemporaries assumed. As a consequence Spencer, who assumes that God maintains an ordered universe, is slow to ascribe divine inspiration to prodigies; instead, he looks toward ways in which presumed prodigies could be interpreted with natural explanations.

The third part applies the question of providence to some of the more prominent new developments within science—that of atomism and theories of the earth. As he notes, oftentimes these new scientific developments are heralded as a shift toward a mechanistic and deterministic cosmos. What Jordan contends, however, is that this was not necessarily the case. For instance, with regard to atomism, Jordan analyzes the Epicurean Walter Charleton and shows how Charleton simultaneously upheld atomism and God's providence. Among many important points, Jordan highlights Charleton's view that God providentially moved atoms in creation to establish an order to the universe which operated according to the patterns that God desired. The task of the natural philosopher, then, was to interpret God's ordered universe. A similar emphasis of establishing God's providence in the created order is noticeable in Thomas Burnet's explanation of creation, in which Burnet minimizes the miraculous nature of creation, opting instead to emphasize the providential foresight which God had from the beginning.

In the final part Jordan offers his conclusions. It is here that one clearly recognizes the merit of Jordan's work, as he articulates a significance for the study that locates it not merely within the world of the seventeenth century, but also today. For, as he explains, the explanations of providential naturalism that he analyzed in the early modern period challenge contemporary notions that science and religion exist as two distinct subjects. Instead, as his book argues, naturalistic explanations flow from an understanding of providence, which depends on who God is and how God maintains the world. As a result, this book will prove useful not merely to specialists in the history of early modern science and religion, but also to those interested in the same questions today.

In a book of such merits, and there are many, it is worth noting one important limitation: the scope of the study. As mentioned above, the question of providence and science proves particularly interesting among English Protestants on account of the importance of the doctrine of providence for this religious group. Yet, the world of early modern science and religion was diverse, and it is important to remember that this book provides a window into only one part of this world, but by no means the entirety of it. So, while the topic of providence

proved influential in early modern England, it should be remembered that this line of thought does not necessarily represent all early modern thinking on the topic of science and religion. As a consequence, it is hoped that future research will pursue Jordan's framework across geographical and denominational divides to determine the degree to which his general thesis might be extended even beyond early modern England.

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MAKING SENSE OF DISEASES AND DISASTERS: Reflections of Political Theory from Antiquity to the Age of COVID by Lee Trepanier, ed. New York: Routledge, 2022. 248 pages. Hardcover; \$170.00. ISBN: 9781032053950. E-book; \$47.65. ISBN: 9781003197379.

Political theorist Lee Trepanier has assembled a collection of scholars to address the political—and human—questions that arise from what he describes as “liminal events” such as pandemics, natural disasters, and the like. In this book, “disaster” includes not only natural but humanly generated disasters, such as the Sack of Rome. Such liminal events can generate considerable political uncertainty, significant social change, and even political collapse. Trepanier states that “These events offer us lessons about the nature of political order and illuminate what political theory can offer in our understanding about politics itself” (p. 1). How do societies respond to these events? Do these events create (or reveal) solidarity or the lack of it? Do governments gain or lose legitimacy based on how they handle these events? More deeply, what do these events reveal about human nature and human behavior when political structures are under strain or broken? Trepanier and contributors work with an expansive, more classical conception of politics; in this conception political theory explores the broad questions of how we live together and how the political order both reflects and shapes our human nature.

The book is organized into Trepanier's introduction and four sections. Section I, “In the Time of COVID,” engages the recent pandemic. Section II, “Modern Solutions, Modern Problems,” moves to the early modern period with studies of key figures such as John Locke and Francis Bacon. Section III, “God, Plagues, and Empires in Antiquity,” moves to the ancient world engaging authors such as Augustine, Thucydides, and Sophocles. The final section, “Reflections on Surviving Disasters,” brings us forward again to the present day with studies of how contemporary authors grapple with early twenty-first century disasters such as the Fukushima Earthquake of 2011 or Hurricane Katrina.

Aside from the introduction, there are twenty chapters. Some chapters are densely written, while others are quite accessible. The authors come at their topics from a variety of methodological angles, such as historical analysis, literature, and post-modernist theory. All chapters are quite short, rendering them as tasters for exploring the ideas in greater depth. A particular point of interest is the extensive use of works of literature as a lens for exploring these liminal events; several chapters use this lens.

One takeaway of the book is that dealing with diseases and disasters is not just a matter of “following the science”—we need to understand the political, social, cultural, and intellectual context of the society in question. Disease and disaster reveal human interconnectedness in its physical, social, and spiritual aspects.

A recurrent theme in the collection is the ambiguity of globalization: not only does globalization enable the spread of ideas, people, goods, and services, but it also enables the spread of disease and the movement of terrorists. Furthermore, given that this is so, how should polities deal with these problems? Are they best dealt with at a more local level or more at the national level?

Arpad Szakolczai’s lead-off chapter, “The Permanen-tisation of Emergencies: COVID Understood through Liminality,” may be the most challenging for readers, both in the sense of the difficulty of its prose and in its challenge to what he sees as a pernicious attempt at rule by technocratic “experts.” By “experts,” Szakolczai does not simply mean those who are knowledgeable about a particular topic, but additionally those who have been intellectually shaped by a problematic conception of nature, a conception that does not adequately grasp what capital-N Nature truly is: a gift. He notes that this does not rule out a God who is doing the giving, but he doesn’t explicitly affirm one either. Either way, we receive Nature, but, he claims, the experts fail to respect Nature as a gift; they are actually hostile to Nature and the natural. Szakolczai seems to be gesturing at “technology-as-idolatry” critiques of contemporary society: our experts have been detached from a true notion of the natural. Because of this, the experts see the COVID epidemic as an opportunity to expand their influence. His argument is provocative but extremely compressed and hence to me unclear.

Jordon Barkalow uses James Madison’s concept of faction to analyze the varied reactions to government efforts to respond to COVID. A faction as Madison defines it is a group that has an interest or passion adverse to the interests of the whole political community. In “Federalist No. 10,” Madison famously argues that a large republic will dilute the power of factions

by way of multiplying them.¹ However, Barkalow suggests, “The ability of personal factions to negatively affect national efforts to combat the spread of COVID suggests that the benefits Madison associates with the extended size of a republic might no longer apply to a technologically advanced 21st century” (p. 41). Factions have become national in scope.

Another common theme is that of apocalypse, in the sense of unveiling; diseases and disasters rip away veils and expose aspects of human nature and behavior that ordinarily lie under the surface. The chapters involving literature do a particularly good job of exploring this area. For example, Catherine Craig discusses James Lee Burke’s 2007 novel *The Tin Roof Blowdown*, set in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.² Craig contends that

the novel shows hope for the possibility of redemption and the presence of goodness even when all established order is brought to chaos. This possibility depends on human freedom to choose and pursue a transcendent good. While this freedom can be fostered or neglected by political institutions, it ultimately precedes and transcends them. (p. 198)

The hardcover edition of this book is unfortunately ludicrously expensive, apparently priced only for library collections. (The e-book version is less expensive.) That being said, I would recommend this book as a source book for beginning to explore the political and social implications of disease and disaster.

Notes

¹James Madison, “Federalist No. 10,” in *The Federalist*, ed. George W. Carey and James McClellan (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2001), 42–49.

²James Lee Burke, *The Tin Roof Blowdown* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007).

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IN THE SHADOW OF THE PALMS: The Selected Works of David Eugene Smith by Tristan Abbey, ed. Alexandria, VA: Science Venerable Press, 2022. xii + 155 pages, including a Glossary of Biosketches. Paperback; \$22.69. ISBN: 9781959976004.

David Eugene Smith (1860–1944) may not be a household name for readers of this journal, but he deserves to be better known. An early-twentieth-century world traveler and antiquarian, his collaboration with publisher and bibliophile George Arthur Plimpton led to establishing the large Plimpton and Smith collections of rare books, manuscripts, letters, and artefacts at Columbia University in 1936. He was one of the founders (1924) and an early president (1927) of the History