

BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTEs RENDUS

The Creation of the World or Globalization

Jean-Luc Nancy

Translated with an Introduction by François Raffoul and David Pettrigrew, New York: SUNY Press, 2007; 129 pages

In *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, first published in 2002 as *La création du monde ou la mondialisation*, Jean-Luc Nancy brings Marxist notions of commodification as well as Heidegger's critique of representationalist accounts of the world to bear on the unworldly, uninhabitable spaces of modernity. Nancy's arguments against a certain globalization are not new. The fact that his descriptions of globalization are mundane is itself a symptom of the idea of the *mundus* and the mundane that he wants to describe.

This is a necessary work. Though the title and Nancy's rethinking of the Christian *ex nihilo sumum* might for some mark a return in Nancy's thought to his very early work in Catholic theology, it is clear that Nancy is staking out a space for a philosophical work beyond the current "theological" turn in deconstruction and post-Levinasian Continental philosophy, deconstructing from within the thought of a beyond-world that would mark the place of the Other in contemporary discourse. Prior to any negotiation with the Other as such, Nancy has long argued for a thinking of the very relation, the very being-with equiprimordial, as Heidegger argued, with our being-in-the-world. Nancy argues for a worldly thinking unencumbered by ontotheological conceptions that serve to occlude praxis and lead to political quietism. (If the other is always violently assailed in any work of praxis, then, perhaps, a retreat from the political is in order.) This is Nancy's most incisive work to date, using his work on community and the original being-with of existence to ask if there is a space for thinking anew a world outside of the homogenizing forces of globalization, what he calls the "world-forming" of *mondialisation*.

The Creation of the World or Globalization is structured around three main essays and a series of complements that deal directly with globalization, as well as the possibility of thinking the Christian *ex nihilo* as a motif for thinking a praxis of creativity that would deconstruct the presumed world order

of globalization from within. The productive destruction of capitalistic globalization produces an “im-monde,” Nancy notes, an “unworld” in which the globe, indeed the cosmos, is mastered under the sovereignty of capital. At least since his early work on Descartes’ notion of mundus in an essay called “*Mundus Est Fabula*” (1976), Nancy has followed up on various conceptions of the *mundus*, of the proper and ordered world, first, in Descartes, then, in Spinoza, Leibniz and a host of other thinkers in the modern tradition, that is, not incidentally, thinkers writing on the ordering of the world at the beginnings of colonialism. This work bears fruit in the tight and breathtakingly adept review of the ontotheological conceptions of the world to be found in middle sections of *The Creation of the World or Globalization*.

Nancy can often be ponderous. He asks in one of the appendices, without context, “And if sovereignty were a revolt of the people?” And, if not? In the opening essays of the book, he shows an ability to move across a variety of thinkers on the question of world with a facility matched by few contemporary thinkers. The relation between a certain order and the world, and its anchoring in a transcendent subject (as in Descartes) or an immanent God (Spinoza), deconstructs from within, Nancy argues, ontotheological conceptions of the world that assume an ordering of the world from the vantage point of another world, a fabulous tale that nevertheless remains with us: *mundus est fabula*. That is to say, the 90s talk of a “new world order”—enforced via American hegemony—is a not-so-new fable; it is the necessary fiction at the heart of the performances of power in modernity. This fable has been integral to the West’s self-conception *at least* since the beginnings of modernity. The political import of this ordering of the world, of giving it sense from the outside, is a gesture repeated in the rise of capitalism. Nancy argues that the hyper-accumulation of capital marks an “agglomeration,” a word he uses to set off the tightening ball of threads (*glomus*) of a certain global network from its untying in the world-forming *mondialisation*. More importantly, the “fact,” he writes, that the “world is destroying itself is not a hypothesis; it is in a sense the fact from which any thinking of the world follows, to the point, however, that we do not exactly know what ‘to destroy’ means, nor which world is destroying itself” (35). It is in the revolving of this globe that one can find the hope for what Nancy, following Marx, calls a true revolution, one which would be marked not by providing the world, finally, with its *telos*, but would rather be the revolution that would not know which way to turn. To put it another way, for Nancy, one cannot suppose that globalization will lead inexora-

bly to the world-forming of *mondialisation*, the creativity arising out of the nihilism, the nothingness of globalization.

Nevertheless, without falling into an unfounded optimism, Nancy argues that there is in globalization the chance for a rethinking of the world *as such*. After the death of God, after His auto-deconstruction in the immanentisms that foreclosed all thinking of an other-worldly deity, and the rise of capital, the question of both world and sense (and their interconnection) come to the fore. If the world is not given its sense *from outside of it* in terms of a transcendent God or other forms of transcendent Others, if the mundane is not to be thought as the barren *there* of a fallen nature or as a predetermined order, then this means that the world as it is, *as all there is* and as the “there” of the “there is” (*il y a*), comes to the fore. Concomitantly, the very equivalence of values of global agglomeration for Nancy makes apparent the very question of value itself, of an absolute value beyond commodified equivalence. Thus, Nancy connects his interest in the question of *sens*, that is, the sense, direction, and meaning, and the question of the world and globalization.

As such, the utter nihilism of globalization is but the fertile ground, Nancy argues, out of which the creation of the world can occur, bringing sense to the world, that is, new and multiple directions for it beyond the death drive of capitalism. Out of the desolation of capitalist alienation and commodity fetishism, there is nevertheless a chance for the “impossible,” a chance for a world that might begin to make sense, but whose direction cannot and should not be foretold. For those looking to this work for just such an answer, just such a political, indeed world-historical program, Nancy’s work will be found wanting. Importantly, this is all not to reduce the world to the political or vice-versa. “Willing the world, but not willing a subject of the world (neither substance nor author nor master),” Nancy writes, “is the only way to escape the *immonde*” (49). But this “willing the world” is a “passion” not assignable to the political, which would risk overdetermining both the political and the non-political at once. For those looking to Nancy for a political project, all of this might appear to venture onto the ground of another political retreat, that is, a thinking of the world that is “curious,” indeed “passionate” about the world but accepting of the world and creation as they are. This “passion” for the world begins, alas, from *within* a thinking of the West and its vicissitudes, no matter how “deconstructed” and, thus, from a thinking of the world already inhabited in a particular way, however dis-ordered in Nancy’s writing. As Nancy puts it, the task of *mondialisation* is a “struggle of the West against itself” (53). Again, this is the fabulous tale of a certain *mundus*—but Nancy is right that the task

for thought is to think the limits between “extortion and exposition,” and also between Marx’s revolution and the “one in which we are perhaps underway without our knowledge” (53).

Readers of this work will greatly benefit—not often the case with Nancy’s works—from an excellent translation and introduction by François Raffoul and David Pettigrew. The introduction sets the stage for Nancy’s essays by casting them against his work on the deconstruction of Christianity and the more general concerns in recent Continental thought with deconstructing the history of onto-theology. The original text is, at parts, all but untranslatable, but Raffoul and Pettigrew manage to keep the tone of Nancy’s style without rendering the work unreadable and unclear in English—quite a challenge given the work at hand.

“How you engage the world?,” Nancy asks, a refrain that Raffoul and Pettigrew take up in their introduction. Abandoned to it and from it, Nancy’s thought marks a need for another thinking of creation, another thinking of the world than that bequeathed by the onto-theological tradition.

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Profanations

Giorgio Agamben

Tr. Jeff Fort, New York: Zone Books, 2007; 99 pages

Agamben’s central concerns in *Profanations* are happiness and the problems lying in wait for the future political task of securing it. It can be read as a sequel to *The Coming Community* (1990; tr. 1993) for the proximity of concerns and manner of their constellation. Although there is no topic here that Agamben has not touched upon elsewhere in a different way, this collection is singular among Agamben’s books for its personal and congenial tone. Agamben begins the first essay with the topic of *Genius*, the Latin name for that divine and most personal part within every person that is also the most impersonal, something that exceeds the ego; that pre-individual element that accompanies us from birth to death; a residue that is part of “a certain non-individuated share of reality” (12).

“Indulging the *Genius*” constitutes the secret in the secret relationship each person must maintain with his own *Genius*; and it is not a matter of claiming or pretending to be one, but a matter of ‘having a relationship with’