


book. In addition, the narrow focus on Bauman's intellectual development should be of great interest to Bauman scholars. As a theoretical text, the book is unlikely to appeal to a general audience, or contemporary scholars and theorists of culture given that the understanding of culture has moved on significantly since the time of Bauman's early work.

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The Greek imaginary: From Homer to Heraclitus. Seminars 1982–1983, by Cornelius Castoriadis, with supplementary essay by Pierre Vidal-Naquet, edited by Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas, and Pascal Vernay, translated by John V. Garner and Maria-Constanza Garrido Sierralta, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2023, 307 pp., £95 (hardback), ISBN: 9781474475327

With Castoriadis's 'roads beyond Marx', ancient Greek thought became increasingly important to his intellectual trajectory. It became a central source for his elaboration of the project of autonomy, and, from 1970 onwards, there were repeated waves of systematic immersion in central works of key thinkers that shaped his social theory and political philosophy. Castoriadis found sources of inspiration in Aristotle (and, more implicitly, in Protagoras) but he pursued a trenchant critical engagement with Plato, who figured as not only anti-democratic but whose thought was considered the antithesis of all that made Greece. We see this already in Castoriadis's best-known work, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (first published in 1975) in which he critiqued Plato's

Timaeus as epitomising ontologies of determinacy that could not account for the time of human creation.

A further immersion in ancient Greek sources in the late 1970s, in the wake of an invitation to visit the Ionian Centre of Chios (p. 249), saw Castoriadis excavating new paths in the labyrinth and deepening his approach to the project of autonomy and its historical emergence. He set out to understand the archaic pre-figuration of the breakthrough to politics and philosophy in classical Greece. The early fruit of these reflections was already evident in essays drafted in the late 1970s, such as ‘The Institution of Society and Religion’, ‘The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy’, and ‘Political Thought’. Castoriadis continued to develop this line of analysis, resulting in a series of seminars on ‘What makes Greece?’ at the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* in the early 1980s (published posthumously as *Ce qui fait la Grèce*, translated into English as *The Greek Imaginary*).

The book under review – *The Greek imaginary: From Homer to Heraclitus. Seminars 1982–1983* – is the first of the three posthumously published volumes on ancient Greece (seminars from 1982 to 1985). First published in French in 2004, the English language translation is very welcome (the only previously published seminars of Castoriadis that have been translated into English are *On Plato’s Statesman* more than twenty years ago now).¹ *The Greek Imaginary* originally consisted of thirteen seminars. Only twelve could be published, however, as the transcript for the ninth seminar (on Hesiod) was unfortunately lost. This first volume includes three appendices: Castoriadis’s ‘Report on Teaching’ for the first cluster of years at the EHESS; the above-mentioned essay ‘Political Thought’; and Pierre Vidal-Naquet’s memorial essay, entitled ‘Castoriadis and Ancient Greece’.

As indicated in the title, *The Greek Imaginary* spans reflections from Homer to Heraclitus, thus signalling a focus on archaic rather than classical Greek thought. Castoriadis seeks to unearth the precursors to the ancient Greek breakthrough to autonomy (as the twin birth of politics and philosophy, in the strong sense) in the archaic (or from a different perspective: pre-Platonic) Greek ‘grasp of the world’ (*saisie du monde*) before it was thematised in properly philosophical or political discourse. He begins with preliminary and contextual questions, for instance: why is the Greek world of interest for us?; how can we understand other forms of social life?; can we have an active relationship with the past?; and, why investigate the origin of democracy? He then moves onto the mythic-poetic works of Homer and Hesiod and ends with the more properly philosophical sources of the Pre-Socratics (specifically, Anaximander and Heraclitus). In building his argument, Castoriadis situates the ancient Greek imaginary and the breakthrough to autonomy in strong contrast to monotheistic traditions and, more generally, unitary ontologies (such as that by Plato) as ‘essentially linked’ to heteronomy (p. 3). Further in the background lurks his ongoing critical engagement with Heidegger’s interpretation of ancient Greece.

Castoriadis’s overall argument is that the startling historical invention of the project of autonomy in ancient Greece (from the seventh—fifth centuries BCE) was prefigured in the archaic Greek articulation of the world, institutions, and

forms of social doing. That is, it had a specific cultural background. In this way, *The Greek Imaginary* travels to the roots of the Greek world, to the 'primary grasp of the being of the world and of human existence in the world' prior to all philosophical or political thematisation (p. 3). Castoriadis argues that in this 'first imaginary grasp of the world' as articulated via myths and religion, there are already discernible 'germs' (p. 247) of the later breakthrough to autonomy (he uses the term 'germ' as a way of distinguishing the ancient Greek world as a 'model', however, the biological, developmental overtones of 'germs' seems contrary to Castoriadis's emphasis on the realm of human creation). These nascent innovations and deposit of a magma of social imaginaries would over time become explicit and instituted with the later emergence of the polis and the concomitant institutions supporting collective life and interrogation of social institutions.

Castoriadis focuses in particular on the prefiguring of three, central oppositions that are characteristic of ancient Greek thought: being and appearance; truth and opinion; and nature and law (the *physis/nomos* distinction, although it emerged later than the first two). He addresses the creation of the polis as that particular form of collective life that embraces a self-governing body of citizens; the problematic of Greek religion as a civic religion (p. 97 ff); and finally the question of democracy itself. Some of the problematics he raised in relation to democracy include the question of self-limitation; the emergence of historiography; tragedy as a 'properly political institution'; and the question of equality.


Castoriadis's interpretation of the ancient Greek world is distinctive. Unlike more traditional approaches, Castoriadis argues that what is most significant is not the Greek insight into being but *non-being*; it is not the accepted image of harmony and balance for which Greece is known, but the recognition of the chaos at the underside of human existence and its only ever partial organisation of and by the world (*kosmos*) as an order of meaning. In the human domain, the counterpart to the interplay of chaos/*kosmos* is found in the *hybris* of human existence qua existence overseen by an impersonal *dike* (as seen in the Athenian tragedies) (p. 162 ff). It was further facilitated by the acceptance of the utter mortality of humans (no transcendence or salvation after life; contra Kant, there is *nothing* to hope for); the lack of an established canon of religious texts or religious revelation that opened a space for reality as a plurality; the arbitrary and thus transitory nature of power (including the power of the gods) (p. 247); the human relationship to the gods who themselves were disorderly, competitive and in incomplete control of their fate; on the connection between agonistic and communitarian values; and the question of collective self-limitation. This is what makes Greece, for Castoriadis. The acceptance of an only partially ordered world facing the ever-present abyss of the groundlessness of the human condition, without meaning, without hope of an afterlife, with an acceptance of the diversity and plurality of the real (the rejection of univocity and the 'One'). This opened a field where the problematisation of the social institution and the search for the truth not given became not only possible but an historical reality.

There are points of possible critique, of course. If Greek myths are true, as Castoriadis argues (p. 157) then what makes them myths? Do hermeneutics really have no place in elaborating the social imaginaries of past societies? Although Castoriadis pays more attention in these seminars to Greek religion as a polis-religion than he does elsewhere, the question of the religio-political nexus remains open. The historical breakthrough to autonomy was arguably less a rupture and more a ‘long revolution’; this does not always sit well within Castoriadis’s framework of analysis. But these criticisms are best thought of as entry points into new pathways in the labyrinth – to question, to reflect, to discuss – rather than shortcomings to overcome.

These seminars showcase Castoriadis as a captivating and extremely learned interlocutor with a distinctive and original interpretation of what makes Greece. Whilst sometimes provocative, his insights into the ancient Greek ‘grasp of the world’ are always erudite, thoughtful, compelling. They are valuable not only for the new perspectives they elaborate or for their relevance for the contemporary world, but also as a practical example of historical analysis that is centred on understanding the social imaginary significations of a particular society. Throughout these seminars, Castoriadis seeks to uncover the social imaginary significations embedded in (instituting) institutions as history-in-the-making.

Note

1. *On Plato’s Statesman* was the first posthumously published volume drawn from the EHESS seminars on ancient Greece. Castoriadis presented those seminars in 1986. *On Plato’s Statesman* was published in English in 2002 but not under the banner title of *Ce qui fait la Grèce*.

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Deserved. Economic memories after the fall of the Iron Curtain, by Till Hilmar, New York, Columbia University Press, 2023, 227 pp., \$35.00 (Paperback), ISBN: 9780231209793

In Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), the 1990s, especially its first half, are sometimes referred to as the ‘time of dimmed lights’ or the ‘wild years.’ This moniker alludes to the fragile normative framework that accompanied the transition from socialism to capitalism. The ultimate objective of the transformation – democracy, the free market and the rule of law – was believed to be of supreme