

BOOK REVIEW**LEFT AGAINST RIGHTS****COSTAS DOUZINAS'S HUMAN RIGHTS AND EMPIRE:
THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF COSMOPOLITANISM
(Routledge-Cavendish 2007)**

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Costas Douzinas² has written a book that has something to infuriate just about everyone—human rights activists, neo-cons, liberals, cosmopolitans, anti-globalizationists, international lawyers, proponents of NATO's intervention in Kosovo, supporters of the American intervention in Iraq, and everyone else in between. And I mean that as high praise.

In 2000, the author published a book titled *The End of Human Rights*,³ which stirred up considerable controversy among the ranks of human rights advocates. One went so far as to call it “repugnant.” (p. 8)⁴ Douzinas proclaims that in retrospect, the last lines of that work were prophetic: “When the apologists of pragmatism pronounce the end of ideology, of history or utopia, they do not mark the triumph of human rights; on the contrary, they bring human rights to an end. The end of human rights comes when they lose their end.”⁵ (p. 4) Obviously since then the atrocity of September 11, 2001, the declaration by President George W. Bush of the War on Terror and the commencement of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have occurred. Infamously, then White House Counsel and later Attorney General Alberto Gonzales opined that when viewed from this “new paradigm,” some aspects of the Geneva Convention now seem “quaint.”⁶

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³ COSTAS DOUZINAS, *THE END OF HUMAN RIGHTS: CRITICAL LEGAL THOUGHT AT THE END OF THE CENTURY* (2000).

⁴ Quoting John R. Morass, *Saving Human Rights From its Friends: A Critique of the Imaginary Justice of Costas Douzinas*, 27 MELB. U. L. REV. 889, 890 (2003).

⁵ DOUZINAS, *supra* note 3, at 380.

⁶ Tim Golden, *After Terror, A Secret Rewriting of Military Law*, N.Y. TIMES,

Even liberals such as Michael Ignatieff and Alan Dershowitz adopted a “pragmatic” view toward rights that contemplate such previously unthinkable practices as torture for the sake of security. (pp. 4-5)

Douzinas, however, is neither adopting a pragmatic limitation on rights or making the type of simplistic attacks on rights that is associated with the American Critical Legal Studies movement of the 1980s. To the contrary, Douzinas passionately desires rights. “This is a time for good people to defend rights against attacks by fearful and fear-exploiting governments, indeed to defend them against liberals, such as Ignatieff, who have been seduced by the inducements of power and are prepared to jettison the cardinal principle of liberalism.” (p. 6) He believes, however, that human-rights talk as it has developed, is itself part of the problem. Being both intellectually vacuous and philosophically incoherent, it serves as a tool for rationalizing the exercise of power. “There is nothing at the core of the onion, no centre or kernel that gives human rights their overall shape.” (p. 14) Consequently, “apologists expect from human rights much more than is realistic and neglect their side-effects.” (p. 8) This might help explain why “[a]n air of self-satisfied irrelevance is the permanent characteristic of human rights conferences. The only human rights violation most human rights experts, international lawyers, and diplomats have ever experienced is being served a bad bottle of wine at their working lunches.” (p. 14)

The rhetoric of human rights seems to have triumphed because it can be adopted by left and right, the north and the south, the state and the pulpit, the minister and the rebel. . . . But this ‘broad church’ allure of human rights is also their weakness. . . . [H]uman rights were conceived as a defence against the dominations of power and the arrogance and oppression of wealth. After their institutional inauguration, they were hijacked by governments that understood the benefits of moral-sounding policy.

(p. 33) Indeed, Douzinas cites with favor “one critical commentator” who has declared that “international law has all the

characteristics of kitsch.” (p. 234)⁷ Nevertheless, Douzinas believes that “a residue of transcendence remains” (p. 33) to the notion of rights, despite this hijacking. Consequently, he is not giving up on the notion of rights. He is trying to save rights from human rights. This is an impassioned but rigorous philosophical exploration of what rights might mean in a post-modern, post-9/11 world.

First, a disclaimer. I am not a student of international law. Perhaps I fall into that self-righteous class of critics whose views Douzinas characterizes as follows:

International lawyers are often treated as apologists who add a veneer of unworthy respectability to base motives and low campaigns. As a renowned international lawyer puts it, it is quite usual “for legal academics from other fields to think the internationalist jurisprudentially naive and politically suspect” In short, it is a commonly held view that international law is an intellectually indifferent discipline pursued in the main by smooth-talkers more interested in world travel than in the hard graft of the library and the seminar room.

(citations omitted) (pp. 198-199) I personally found the author’s scathing critique of human rights discourse and international law to be dead-on, but I essentially shared the author’s opinions on these matters before reading his book. Accordingly, it is hard for me to judge how persuasive his arguments would be to a reader who believes, or hopes, that human-rights discourse and/or international law can be more than rhetorical tools wielded by powerful nations to rationalize their political agendas. Nevertheless, his arguments are clear and readers should find them to be—if not convincing—surely thought-provoking.

One of the author’s greatest talents—which he has revealed in his previous books and which are on display here—is the ability to epitomize complex theoretical ideas in clear, jargon-free language. Douzinas is familiar with, and discusses, most of the major political theoretical works on the post-Cold War era.

⁷ Citing Martti Koskeniemi, *International Law in Europe: Between Tradition and Renewal*, 16 EUR. J. INT’L L. 113, 119 (2005).

However, almost half of the book consists of brief histories of ideas starting from ancient Greece and Rome, through the middle ages and enlightenment, and continuing through to contemporary thought. Among the topics covered are not only human rights and empire, as the title suggests, but natural law and other conceptions of rights, subjectivity, the relationship of law to violence, and sovereignty. As a European,⁸ he is concerned primarily with the continental tradition of speculative or critical theory, not the analytic philosophy that tends to dominate Anglophone jurisprudence. Consequently, he references Kant, Hegel, Lacan, Habermas, Žižek and, most prominently, Derrida. H.L.A. Hart, however, is nowhere to be found. Positivism is, instead, represented by Kelsen. The most prominent American jurists he discusses are probably Ronald Dworkin and David Kennedy. These discussions are extremely interesting in their own right and would make valuable reading standing alone. They not only serve as excellent introductions for readers who are not already familiar with critical thought, but are also subtle and insightful and have much to teach readers, such as myself, who work within this tradition.

More importantly, they are essential to supporting a belief that underlies the author's position—that political theory and moral philosophy are not mere abstractions or intellectual game. Rather, they have concrete implications and applications. The author is particularly successful in showing how the internal incoherence of human-rights talk springs at least in part from the fact that it is an attempt to graft ideas from traditional natural law theory onto a modern positivist law regime. (pp. 15-26) As such, the supposed "universality" of human rights may, in fact, be nothing but a contingent empirical consensus, and therefore, an empty trope that "turns . . . a lofty, albeit impossible, ideal into the lowest common denominator of state interests and rivalries." (p. 181)

Similarly, international "law," unhinged from its earlier theological precedents of just-war doctrine, (pp. 244-50) seems doomed to be a combination of formalism and victor's justice.⁹ In both of these regards, the author's discussion of the fraught

⁸ Douzinas is a Greek teaching in London.

⁹ He particularly notes that the "War Crimes Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia decided not to investigate the claims that NATO had engaged in violations of international humanitarian law." (p. 188)

relationship—or lack thereof—between law and morality is forceful. In a *tour de force* he demonstrates how lawyers tend to assume that moral theory can solve the limitations of law, whereas non-lawyers hope that law can solve the limitations of morality. (pp. 207-09)

SPECULATION

Douzinas's critique derives from the speculative tradition of philosophy, which adopts an understanding of rights that is diverse from those of the natural law and positivist theories, which underlie most human rights discourse and international law. Like positivism, speculative theory rejects the proposition that rights are natural. However, unlike most schools of positivism, it also rejects its liberal assumptions of the legal subject¹⁰ as the free, autonomous individual.¹¹ Instead, it speculates that an individual only becomes a subject through social relations—by being recognized as such by another subject.¹² According to Hegel, the most primitive way of doing this is through the creation of rights that are granted to another person.¹³ Accordingly, speculative theory agrees with naturalism in the sense that rights are not arbitrary but are intimately related to our humanity.

The problem of speculative theory is that, because it holds that both rights and subjectivity are human creations, it cannot tell you what rights *should* exist or *who* is entitled to rights because these two questions are seen as two sides of the same coin. Hegel tried to give some substance to rights by examining the function they served in the culture at the time he was writing. He argued that the creation of certain legal rights was the first step in creating the type of person who could serve as a free citizen

¹⁰ A legal subject, for example, is a person who is capable of bearing legal duties and recognizing legal rights.

¹¹ JEANNE LORRAINE SCHROEDER, *THE VESTAL AND THE FASCES: HEGEL, LACAN, PROPERTY AND THE FEMININE* 20-24 (1998) [hereinafter, SCHROEDER, VESTAL].

¹² *Id.* at 19-20; 31-34.

¹³ Hegel discusses this process in the first section of his book, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, which examines the logical function of the lowest form of rights that he calls “abstract rights” – roughly equivalent to what contemporary jurists would call “private law.” G.W.F. HEGEL, *ELEMENTS OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT* 67-114 (Allen W. Wood ed. & H.B. Nisbet trans. 1991). I also explain this process in JEANNE LORRAINE SCHROEDER, *THE TRIUMPH OF VENUS: THE EROTICS OF THE MARKET* 43-64 (2004) and SCHROEDER, VESTAL, *supra* note 11, at 15-52.

in such a state.¹⁴ The concept of rights would be incoherent if they failed to fulfill this function. Unfortunately, because Hegel's logic operates at a stratospherically high level of abstraction, he could posit only that it was functionally necessary for the modern state to institute *some* regime of private property and contract. Logic could not further specify the details of such a regime.¹⁵ The creation of rights is understood as a step in the process of the actualization of freedom. Consequently, the choice of rights must itself be free.

This analysis threatens to become viciously circular when we try to extend it beyond a specific culture and into a particular stage of history in order to try to make human rights universal. In Douzinas's words:

Human rights do not belong to humans and do not follow the dictates of humanity; they construct humans. A human being is someone who can successfully claim human rights and the group of rights we have determines how 'human' we are; our identity depends on the bunch of rights we can successfully mobilise in relations with others.

(p. 45) That is, rights are not something that naturally coheres to members of the species *homo sapiens*, but rather to those creatures the law recognizes as being entitled to, or more accurately, capable of bearing, human rights. We do not find rights, we *create* and bestow them.

In an attempt to give more substance to the concept of rights, Douzinas turns "[f]rom the heights of Hegelian dialectics . . . to the much darker territory of Freudian psychoanalysis." (p. 45) Douzinas recognizes that Lacanian psychoanalysis can be read as

¹⁴ In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel argues that more complex aspects of personality are developed through the higher stages of right, i.e., morality and ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). HEGEL, *supra* note 13.

¹⁵ Hegel argues that logic cannot solve practical problems. *Id.* at 21. Consequently, pragmatic reasoning is always logic's necessary corollary. For example, he explains how copyrights *could* be analyzed in terms of property as he understands it and offers one pragmatic reason why a society *might* want to adopt such a regime as a matter of positive law (i.e., incentivizing literary production), but refuses to give any advice as to whether society *must* do so. *Id.* at 99-101. See also Jeanne L. Schroeder, *Unnatural Rights: Hegel and Intellectual Property*, 60 U. MIAMI L. REV. 453, 498-303 (2006).

an extension of Hegelian rights theory to its most radical extreme.

As mentioned previously, speculative theory argues that an individual can only achieve higher stages of personality and actualize her freedom through social relations—including legal relations and the creation of rights. Although crucial to the actualization of freedom, rights and legal subjectivity are therefore not natural but created. Because the rational individual determines that logic demands that she actualize her freedom, she passionately desires relationships with others.

Psychoanalysis is, of course, a theory of desire. The psychoanalytic subject, like Hegel's legal subject, implicitly understands that she can only become a subject through relations with others. In Lacan's formulation, this means that the subject's "desire is the desire of the Other,"¹⁶ with all the ambiguity that the phrase connotes. We can now see that Lacan and Hegel's subject is in a constant state of internal contradiction, split by her desire to be free and boundless and the desire to actualize her desire by binding herself to others.

Psychoanalysis posits that the split subject tries to explain her sense of self-alienation by retroactively writing a false

¹⁶ As Lacan elaborates:

To put it in a nutshell, nowhere does it appear more clearly that man's desire finds its meaning in the desire of the other, not so much because the other holds the key to the object desired, as because the first object of desire is to be recognized by the other.

JACQUES LACAN, *SPEECH AND LANGUAGE IN PSYCHOANALYSIS* 31 (Anthony Wilden trans., 1981). As Žižek explains:

In other words, when Lacan claims that there is no desire without an object-cause, this does not amount to the banality according to which every desire is attached to its objective correlative: the "lost object" which sets the subject's desire in motion is ultimately *the subject herself*, and the lack in question concerns her uncertainty as to her status for the Other's desire. In this precise sense, desire is always desire of the Other: the subject's desire is the desire to ascertain her status as object of the Other's desire.

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, *THE INDIVISIBLE REMAINDER: AN ESSAY ON SCHELLING AND RELATED MATTERS* 164 (1996).

autobiography. She incorrectly infers that the fact that she feels split now means that there must have been a time when she was whole.¹⁷ Desire is, therefore, interpreted as the longing for a lost state of original completeness. Such completeness is definitionally impossible.¹⁸ One can only become a subject through the relationships that split the subject. That is, subjectivity is nothing *but* desire.¹⁹ To sate desire is to destroy subjectivity.

Consequently, the psychoanalytic subject uses fantasies to avoid confronting this impossibility. The subject tries to find substitutes to stand in for that which she feels she has lost. This leads to Lacan's notoriously difficult concept of the *objet petit a*—the little other object that can act as the object's cause of desire.²⁰ To oversimplify, in the order of the "imaginary," the subject identifies the little object with actual things in the world that seem attainable.²¹ This is a tactic that is necessary but also necessarily unsuccessful for the obvious reason that this object is not what the subject truly desires. Thus, fulfilling any specific goal always proves disappointing, such that the subject must immediately

¹⁷ JEANNE LORRAINE SCHROEDER: THE FOUR LACANIAN DISCOURSES OR TURNING LAW INSIDE OUT 14-15 (2008) [hereinafter SCHROEDER, LACANIAN DISCOURSES].

¹⁸ *Id.* at 15, 18.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 18.

²⁰ In the words of Bruce Fink, one of the official translators of Lacan's work,

With object *a*, Lacan felt he had made his most significant contribution to psychoanalysis. Few concepts in the Lacanian opus are elaborated so extensively, revised so significantly . . . , [and] worked over from so many different perspectives"

BRUCE FINK, THE LACANIAN SUBJECT: BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND JOUISSANCE 83 (1995). See also SCHROEDER, LACANIAN DISCOURSES, *supra* note 17, at 18.

²¹ That is, "the subject calls for recognition on the appropriate level of authentic symbolic exchange—which is not so easy to attain since it's always interfered with—is replaced by a recognition of the imaginary, of fantasy." JACQUES LACAN, THE SEMINAR OF JACQUES LACAN BOOK III: THE PSYCHOSES 1955-1956 15 (Jacques-Alain Miller ed. & Russell Grigg trans. with notes, W.W. Norton & Co. 1997) (1993). See also SCHROEDER, VESTAL, *supra* note 11, at 108-109. In Lacan's words, "[t]he phantasy is the support of desire; it is not the object that is the support of desire." JACQUES LACAN, THE FOUR FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF PSYCHOANALYSIS: THE SEMINAR OF JACQUES LACAN BOOK XI 185 (Jacques-Alain Miller ed. & Alan Sheridan trans., W.W. Norton & Co. 1998) (1973). In Douzinas's formulation "[b]ecause the real object of desire cannot be present, it is displaced into inadequate identifications and imaginary constructions raised on the ground of repressed desire." (p. 47)

replace it in her imagination with another goal.²²

Finally, the subject fantasizes that the reason she feels split now, but dreams that she was once whole, is because someone did something to her—that is, she is split because somebody split her.²³ Subjectivity is not recognized as a gift that others have bestowed upon her, but rather mis-perceived as an injury done to her. Consequently, desire is reinterpreted as a demand for restitution—a claim against others to return to her the object of desire.

RIGHTS AS *OBJET PETIT A*

In Douzinas's reading, *human rights* have become a *objet petit a*. (p. 48) They are imaginary stand-ins for our true desire for “true” rights—that is, perfect social relationships that would make us whole. As such, no human right can ever be satisfactory. Consequently, there can be no end to the invocation of new human rights.

A human rights claim involves two demands addressed to the other: a specific request . . . to one aspect of the claimant's personality or status [quo] . . . but, second, a much wider demand to have one's whole identity recognised in its specific characteristics Every right, therefore, links a need of a part of the body or personality with what exceeds need, the desire that the claimant be recognised and loved as a whole and complete person.

(p. 48) As such, human rights can never be satisfying.

The subject of rights tries incessantly to find in the desire of the other the missing *objet* that will fill lack and turn him into a complete integral being. But this object does not exist and cannot be possessed. The impossibility of fulfilling desire leads into ever-increasing demands for recognition[,] and every

²² SCHROEDER, LACANIAN, *supra* note 17, at 43. As Žižek explains, in order for an object to serve the function of the *objet petit a*, it must necessarily be a missing object (which is why it is desired). SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, THE TICKLISH SUBJECT: THE ABSENT CENTRE OF POLITICAL ONTOLOGY 107 (1999).

²³ SCHROEDER, LACANIAN, *supra* note 17, at 18.

acknowledgment of right leads to a spiralling escalation of further claims Human rights become expressions of the unattainable ‘right to be loved.’

(pp. 48-49) Rather than seeing rights as something to be created and bestowed upon others, human rights are something to be demanded from others. As a result, “[h]uman rights keep desire going. Every success in the struggle for new rights leads to new and further claims in a spiral of demands that cannot be fulfilled.” (p. 49) This does not mean that we should reject rights because, as we have seen, speculative theory thinks rights are necessary for the actualization of freedom. It also explains the appeal of the term *human* rights. But it means that the mere invocation of human rights is itself hollow. “Humanity”—the personhood imagined by human rights advocates—

cannot act as the a priori nihilistic or mythological source of legal and moral rules. Let me repeat: humanity’s function lies not in a philosophical essence but in its non-essence, in the endless process of redefinition and the necessary but impossible attempt to escape external determination. Humanity has no foundation and no ends, it is the definition of groundlessness.

(p. 290) Douzinas continues even more strongly that “if humanity has no ends, it can never become a sovereign value and war fought in its name will always be fake.” (p. 290)

This is, perhaps, Douzinas’s overriding point. Because the term “human rights” is empty and international law impotent, their invocation has had the opposite effect than that intended by their proponents. They have become tools of empire. That is, the powerful states—primarily the United States—have successfully claimed “the protection of human rights” as justification and rationalization for their interference in other countries. (pp. 138-41) Invocations of human rights are used to justify the imposition of free trade and laissez-faire capitalism, which favor developed countries over developing countries. (pp. 185-86) Appeals to international law are made by the powerful against the weak. (pp. 32-33, 224-25) When international law would impede the powerful, the powerful argue that it does not apply because it is trumped by human rights. (p. 253-57) “Government-operated

international human rights law is the best illustration of the poacher turned gamekeeper.” (p. 180)

TOPICALITY

One of the dangers of writing a philosophical critique of politics is topicality. How does one demonstrate the concrete aspect of theory through application to specific current events without risking immediate obsolescence? For example, at first blush, I presumed that the chapter entitled “The Brief Glory and the Long Crisis of International Law,” which describes the temporary interest of London intellectuals in international law during the lead-up to the Iraqi adventure, was both too temporal and too parochial for a book—limiting it in both time and locale. This seemed like a topic better left to an Op-Ed or a blog. My presumption turned out to be mistaken.

This is in fact one of the most interesting chapters in the book and beautifully illustrates Douzinas’s point. According to his account, many self-identified progressives voiced their opposition to the invasion of Iraq on the grounds that it was “illegal.” (pp. 209, 211) And yet, the very same progressives generally approved the Kosovo intervention even though it was also “illegal under international law and contrary to the United Nations Charter.” (p. 202) Moreover, it is difficult to believe that the same progressives would have supported the Iraqi war even if the U.S. had waited for U.N. approval before invading. Thus, the true reasons proponents and opponents of these two military actions approved or disapproved of the pursuits had nothing to do with their legality or illegality *per se*.

Apologists for both the Kosovo and Iraqi interventions justified their deviation from international law on the grounds of human rights. (pp. 203-07, 210-14) No doubt the intellectuals Douzinas critiques would argue that “we” were right in the case of Kosovo but that President Bush’s invocation of human rights was mere pretense in the case of Iraq. Douzinas has little good to say about the Iraqi invasion (although I suggest that most supporters of this war had sincere, if misguided, motives). However, perhaps reflecting a traditional Greek sympathy with Serbia, Douzinas implies that things were nowhere as black-and-white in the former Yugoslavia as his interlocutors would like to suggest. He is particularly persuasive on the cruelty of the NATO offensive,

which, to further the goal of zero military casualties, engaged almost entirely in aerial bombing from high altitude which was guaranteed to result in significantly “increased . . . civilian ‘collateral damage.’” (p. 260)

[A] war in which a soldier’s life is more valuable than that of many civilians cannot be moral or humanitarian. In valuing an allied life at hundreds of Serbian Afghan or Iraqi lives, the declaration that all are equal in dignity and enjoy an equal right to life was comprehensively discredited.

(p. 262) These are human rights without human beings.

NEO-COSMOPOLITANISM

Douzinias, of course, hopes not merely to critique standard human rights/international law discourse, but to offer an alternative. In his brief concluding chapter, he declares a call to arms. “Against imperial arrogance and cosmopolitan naivety, we must insist that global neo-liberal capitalism and human-rights-for-export are part of the same project. The two must be uncoupled.” (p. 293) He invokes Derrida’s idea of a new form of cosmopolitanism—a “*cosmopolitanism to come*”—(293) distinct from the current cosmopolitanism that is coupled with globalization and empire. “The cosmopolitanism to come extends beyond nations and states, beyond the nation-state.” (p. 294) “But we must be aware that we cannot fight sovereignty and the nation-state in general without risking giving up the principles of equality and self-determination to the emerging super-sovereignty.” (p. 295)

What binds me to an Iraqi or a Palestinian is not a membership of humanity, citizenship of the world or of a community but a protest against citizenship, against nationality and thick community What binds my world to that of others is our absolute singularity and total responsibility beyond citizen and human, beyond national and international. The cosmos to come is the world of each unique one, of whoever or anyone; the polis, the infinite number of encounters of singularities. The cosmopolitanism to come is neither the achievement of humanity nor a federation of nations; neither a constitutional

arrangement nor an alliance of classes The principle of the cosmopolitanism to come: the other as singular, unique finite being putting me in touch with infinite otherness, the other in me and myself in the other.

(pp. 295-96). What would such a world look like? Douzinas admits that “Derrida’s ‘democracy to come’ is closely linked with the utopian tradition.” (p. 296) Accordingly, at this point, he has little to say about it specifically. He ends the book:

Following . . . the utopian tradition, the ‘cosmopolitanism to come’, this being together of singularities, is constructed here and now with friends, in acts of hospitality, in cities of resistance. This cosmopolis brings together here and now the just *polis* and the principles of resistance of the *cosmos* already incarnate in our cities.

(p. 298) This might seem like weak tea to human-rights proponents who would argue that you need a theory to beat a theory, but this is wrong. Douzinas is not merely saying that human rights and international law theory are inaccurate. He is arguing that they have had a harmful, perverse effect that is destructive of the goals their advocates wish to achieve. Consequently, if human-rights proponents are sincere in their wish to help others, as opposed to merely convincing themselves of the purity of their own hearts, they must find a new way of analyzing the problems of inequality and suffering. From this perspective, pointing out that Douzinas himself has not yet completed this project is just not an answer to his critique. If Douzinas is correct, doing business as usual might be affirmatively harmful.

More importantly, from a speculative position, it might not be possible to come to a more specific polity recommendation based on political philosophy, as opposed to politics and practical reasoning. The implication of the speculative proposition that rights are both human creations as well as the pre-conditions of freedom is that no specific set of rights can be logically mandated. If any specific set of rights were mandated, then they both would not be creations, and we would be limited in our freedom. This is why the creation of rights is seen as an ethical act—we do so not

out of coercion, but as an exercise of free will that deeply affects others.

CONCLUSIONS

Douzinas's book is heavily influenced by Derrida. As a Lacanian, I am not likely to be persuaded by invocations of postmodern ethical theories derived from this position. Nevertheless, this book is powerful and thought provoking.

The manuscript is beautifully and clearly written, indeed so much so, that given that English is not Douzinas's first language, it is a reproach to the skills of many native speakers such as myself. The topic could easily tend toward the ponderous, if not the lugubrious, but the author's combination of erudition, passion, and lively style makes the work a consistently fascinating read. The manuscript is sprinkled with turns of phrases that reveal genuine wit, without descending into jokiness.

If I had to make one minor comment, it would be that on occasion the author's strong prose threatens to crossover from polemic to stridency. Some might find that this takes away from the persuasiveness of the author's overall careful and subtle analysis. On the one hand, I personally believe that much of Douzinas's criticism of American foreign policy is, unfortunately, accurate. On the other, I found other sections to reveal a fashionably stereotypical "Old-Europe" anti-Americanism.

Of course, I am writing as an American. The book is aimed primarily at a European intellectual audience, which already leans towards the critical left and is likely to share many of the author's political instincts. Many of these same readers may, however, uncritically assume that human rights discourse and international law further their progressive agenda. As such, although the book is unlikely (and presumably, does not aspire) to move any reader from the right to the left, it could make an important contribution to progressive politics. For writers who do not agree with Douzinas's political perspective, the book is nevertheless a worthwhile introduction to the history of political philosophy.