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Perceiving the Other: Case Studies and Theories of Respectful Action

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the other 300,000 are declared atheists or privately religious. When Gest discusses why there is a deficit of political engagement among Muslims, he considers two aspects: first, the discriminatory structures that immigrant groups in general and Muslims in particular are affected by in the West and, secondly, the role of religious belief as an obstacle to greater political commitment.

The book consists of four parts. In the first part, Gest analyses how Muslims differ from other ethnic and religious groups in Europe. The second part contains the theoretical framework. Here, the author looks at different perspectives to understand civic engagement. Depending on whether one wears Marxist, Durkheimian or liberal 'glasses', one gets different answers to what leads to alienation, commitment, and anti-system behaviour. The author discusses both the socio-economic explanations and the explanations that take into account the ideological-theological context. The third section is the book's main part, consisting of empirical studies of Bangladeshis in London and South Moroccans in Madrid. Here, the author examines under what premises ethnic and religious groups could establish a more partisan stance, with a worldview that stands in stark contrast to that of the mainstream society. On the other hand, he also discusses what social conditions make groups more integrated. The fourth and last part of the book is forward looking. Here, Gest makes suggestions on how Western society can relate to religious groups so that their believers do not develop a separatist anti-democratic approach.

A strength of Gest's book is that the social analysis is based on empirical studies, in which Muslims have their say. If I have any negative comment, it is that it is mainly men who have their voices heard. But, just as the majority of Muslims living in Europe feel negative towards allowing religious leaders, often conservative imams or Islamist theologians, to represent them in politics, women do not want to be represented by men. As social scientists, we always have to keep in mind in what way our sample influences the analysis and the general conclusions we can draw. Gest could have clarified the selection and the representativeness of the sample. But to ask for more from a researcher who is so nuanced and lucid in the way he navigated a field which it is far from being an idyll would be presumptuous. Rather we should thank the author—and ask ourselves the question what place religious groups may have in secular democracies.

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Perceiving the Other: Case Studies and Theories of Respectful Action

TRYGVE WYLLER & HANS-GÜNTER HEIMBROCK, eds., 2010

Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

207 pp., €39,95

ISBN: 978-3-525-57007-4

How can professionals in health care and social work become more aware of, and respectful towards, the concrete others they encounter in their professional

situations? What ethical, empirical, and theological sources can be used in formulating a less objectifying and manipulative praxis of care givers active within different professional contexts where otherness is encountered on a daily basis? By drawing on recent research within ethics and theology, phenomenological research methods, and in-depth case study analyses, the book *Perceiving the Other: Case Studies and Theories of Respectful Action* strives to formulate an approach where the 'other' is perceived precisely as other—not merely as a reflection of the self or as an object for care and help.

The editors, Trygve Wyller from the University of Oslo and Hans-Günter Heimbrock from the Goethe-University in Frankfurt/Main, have engaged their respective research teams in a German–Norwegian co-operation on theological ethics and social care and praxis. The approach is interdisciplinary in character and its intended readership includes students and researchers within different academic fields (theology, social sciences, humanities) or professional training programmes, such as counselling, nursing or teaching.

The book is divided into three sections with several chapters written by the contributors in each. The first section (written by Wyller, Heimbrock, and Peter Meyer) introduces the theme of the book and presents a critical reading of traditional research strategies within the fields of ethics and professional praxis. The authors underline an important shift in focus in contemporary ethics: from viewing the ethical demand as grounded primarily in valid norms, principles, and values to a view of the ethical demand as arising from interpersonal connectedness. The authors clearly position themselves within the latter perspective, claiming that the source of ethics is found not in abstract rules, but in concrete, relational encounters with the Other. From this fundamental starting point, an epistemological frame is developed, including theoretical influences from phenomenology and methodological ideals of ethnographic and reflexive case study analysis. Additional approaches of importance for the entire book include the concept of life-world, Foucault's notion of *heterotopia*, Levinas's analysis of alterity and the Face of the Other, and Knud E. Løgstrup's understanding of the ethical demand.

Section two presents a number of case studies and dimensions relevant to the relational ethics and focus on praxis developed in section one. The themes vary from encounters in a hospice ward (Lisbeth Thoresen), a teacher–student encounter (Silke Leonhard), social work with youth (Solveig Botnen Eide), city mission among people with HIV/AIDS (Ingvil Lønning), and encounters in refugee accommodation at Frankfurt Airport (Kerstin Söderblom). The relevant dimensions, which are treated in each chapter, are body (Leonhard/Thoresen), language (Meyer), and space (Jonas Bauer). The case studies are all rich in contextual detail and self-reflexive analysis, but also demonstrate a close connection to the mutual theoretical framework. As a result, reading this section is very engaging and the use of shared structures and concepts makes the book a coherent and co-ordinated contribution to the field. The authors' unanimity can, however, also be seen as a disadvantage; a book which focuses on perceiving the other *as* other would, in my opinion, also benefit from creative disagreements in its theoretical frame. The thematic chapters are valuable and well written, carefully delineating complex concepts in a concrete yet not simplifying manner. Readers who do not master the German language may,

however, find it hard to follow up the references, as some chapters list almost exclusively German sources.

Section three, finally, summarises the themes and lines of argument presented in the book and relates them to wider discussions within the field of contemporary theology and religious studies. The reflection on how post-secular discourses today challenge perceptions of otherness is especially important. Overall, the book makes a clear and challenging contribution to the research field of religious otherness and is relevant for all researchers interested in the ethics of the Other.

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Engaging with Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: A Model of Interfaith Dialogue

IAN S. MARKHAM, 2009

Farnham, Surrey & Burlington, VT: Ashgate

viii + 179 pp., £50.00, US\$71.95 (hb)

ISBN 978-0-7546-6931-9 (hb)

This book, by the President of Virginia Theological Seminary, is an attempt to outline a possible way forward for inter-religious dialogue, based on an engagement with the thought of a Turkish Muslim thinker, Said Nursi, the founder of the Nurcu (literally 'Light') movement; his life straddled the crucially important period in the development of modern Turkey when the old multi-religious and multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire metamorphosed into the more uniform modern Turkish Republic, in the aftermath of the First World War.

Said Nursi died in 1960, so the author's engagement with his thought is not direct, but has rather been mediated through a number of Muslim colleagues, of whom Dr Faris Kaya, to whom the book is dedicated, is given special mention in the acknowledgements. A number of colleagues at the author's previous institution, Hartford Seminary, and several Turkish students are also given individual acknowledgement.

The book consists of two parts, of not quite equal length. Part One, "Learning from Said Nursi", investigates—after an introductory chapter on "Christian Theology and Islam"—a number of the important themes of his work, usually in dialogue with a significant Western thinker. Thus Chapter 2, "Religious Basis for Ethics", engages with 'the Enlightenment project' of Descartes, Hume, Kant, Kierkegaard, Locke, and Mill. Chapter 3, "Challenging Atheism", focuses on Bertrand Russell in particular. Chapter 4, "Living Life Accountable", has brief references to Augustine, Milton, E. B. Pusey, and John Hick. The focus of Chapter 5, "Faith First, Politics Second", is Richard John Neuhaus. John Hick returns as the main focus of Chapter 6, "Engaging Religious Diversity". Chapter 7, "Coping with Globalization", looks at the views of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. Chapter 8, "Grounded Spirituality", looks at the views of Larry and Lauri Fahlberg, two advocates of the engagement with spirituality in the realm