

Stefan Gosepath, Wilfried Hinsch, Beate Rössler (Hrsg.)

Handbuch der Politischen Philosophie und Sozialphilosophie. (Handbook of Political Philosophy and Social Philosophy.) De Gruyter, Berlin u. a. 2008, 2 Vols., 1569 pp.

The aim of this handbook is to provide a comprehensive but concise overview of current political philosophy and social philosophy in alphabetical order. But it is not confined to these topics since it considers corresponding topics of practical philosophy if necessary, e.g. emotions, luck, game theory, virtue etc, some of which even without stressing the relevance for political or social philosophy. In view of this scope it is only consequent to include questions, methods and results of non-philosophical but related areas: social sciences and law studies as well as empiric natural and technical sciences. This thematic scope is reflected in the number of contributors (nearly 300) all of which are experts in the field and often have worked extensively on the topic they wrote about. While the emphasis lies on methods, theoretical approaches and problems and therefore on the systematical discussion, the entries contain historical information (especially concerning conceptual history and history of ideas) as well. Thus, the spectrum ranges from entries on voting procedures to art and politics over international relations to media, reformation and reification. The entries deal not only with topics but also with persons, the latter containing a short biography, information on the genesis and a systematical exposition of this person's work. Especially with philosophers like Aristotle, Plato, Thomas Aquinas, Kant, Hegel etc. this is restricted to their contribution to political and social philosophy and not a general account of their work. The lack of references between related entries is compensated by an extensive index of topics and persons.

Considering the impressive scope and aim of this work, it is somewhat surprising that the systematical entries and the entries on contemporaries deal nearly exclusively with German, Anglo-Saxon and French contributions and philosophers. Although there are entries dealing with political philosophy in Africa or China, e.g. Latin America is not mentioned at all – neither liberation philosophy in general nor important thinkers like Enrique Dussel. Even a philosopher like Giorgio Agamben with many works translated into German is only sporadically mentioned in some articles.

Besides this limitation, this handbook fulfils all requirements for becoming a standard handbook of political and social philosophy (at least for Western Europe and North America), since the articles are all well written and suited as well for an academical as a non-academical public without lessening quality standards. It offers concise and profound articles on the diverse topics and protagonists of political philosophy and social philosophy (and beyond) and can therefore be recommended as a valuable (and quite extensive) source of information.

(Thomas Fornet-Ponse)