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Lukas Kaelin

*Strong Family, Weak State:
Hegel's Political Philosophy and the Filipino Family*

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of chocolate within the convent showed that “chocolate had pervaded not only the Philippine way of life but also of the convent” (94). While it is quite easy to imagine friars enjoying some chocolate in the convent, to assume that chocolate was widely available or consumed by the rest of the islands’ population is stretching the point.

Given the absence of maps or visuals that may serve as references (only one map, labeled as pre-1941, is included), the book’s descriptions of location, layout, and orientation of the Dominican church and convent in relation to the rest of the city fail to make a strong impression on the reader. Should another edition be produced, consideration ought to be given to providing more cohesion between the narrative and the section on photos and illustrations found at the end of the book. As it currently stands, the relevance of this section is diminished by the lack of direct correspondence with the text, despite the visuals being numbered and accompanied by brief descriptions. It seems that the reader is left to discern the rationale for the selection and arrangement of images featured in this section.

A further round of editing would be beneficial as well. Among the simplest but most glaring oversights is the treatment of the topic “*Patio, Atrio, Cementerio*.” It is treated as chapter 3 when one goes through the book, but in the table of contents is listed as part of chapter 2, “The Foundation of the Convent.” Uneven use of language may be confusing for readers unfamiliar with the object of discussion. For instance: vacillation between the Spanish and English designations “*La Naval*” vs. “Our Lady of the Holy Rosary” vs. “*Nuestra Señora del Rosario*” (various pages); “Lady Chapel” vs. “chapel of Our Lady” (various pages); Dominican “convent” vs. “monastery” (the Dominicans were not monks); “Chapter” vs. “chapter” (47 and various pages); randomly referring to the Dominican Order as a “corporation” (18), which conjures modern meanings of a business enterprise that runs counter to the statement on the order’s dependence on alms, and so on. Providing brief explanations or perhaps a glossary of terms—*atacaranas* (32), *cabildo* (41), *caídas* (48), *quilason* (48), and so on—would also be helpful.

While the book renders a textured view of life in Spanish Manila, in the end it is precisely as the author describes it in the Introduction, that is, “a preliminary account of the historical evolution of the ecclesiastical complex” (9). What made life in Intramuros culturally distinct was not clearly articulated. It is apparent, however, that Santo Domingo was very much an active presence in the multifaceted society of the time. Through this work

Galang provides a springboard for further exploration and calls attention to the continued scholarship demanded to more fully illumine our colonial past.

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LUKAS KAELIN

Strong Family, Weak State: Hegel’s Political Philosophy and the Filipino Family

Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2012. 236 pages.

In this novel usage of the “family” in Philippine politics and society, *Strong Family, Weak State: Hegel’s Political Philosophy and the Filipino Family* presents an interesting take on the complex yet often taken for granted interplay between and among the existing, and perhaps even the emerging, modern institutions in the Philippines today. The novelty of Lukas Kaelin’s work comes from his convincing application of Hegelian political theory on these modern institutions: family, civil society, and the state. Using Hegelian concepts, the book reflects on the conceptual openings and concrete opportunities for social change that can be considered in light of the centrality of Filipino “family” in modern Philippine society.

The author, Lukas Kaelin, is a critical theorist and political philosopher. He was assistant professor in the Department of Philosophy of the Ateneo de Manila University from 2006 to 2008. He has written papers and commentaries on the Philippines, which cover topics such as the ethics of organ donation and the migration of nurses, and the family and political dynasties in the public sphere. In 2009 Kaelin became a research fellow at the Institute for Ethics and Law in Medicine of the University of Vienna. He is currently a visiting scholar at Stanford University.

Kaelin begins his work by locating the “family” in today’s political theory of modern political order. With the apparent dominance of the Social Contract theory, he interrogates the common understanding of the Social Contract tradition of political order, which privileges individualism, freedom, and constitutionalism in the structure and practice of modern politics, by understanding the unique role of the “family” in the emergence,

dynamics, and outcomes of modern political order. Despite the recognition of some thinkers of the family's role in structuring and laying the foundations of the state, he claims that the family "remains marginal and structurally insignificant" (12).

The author uses Hegel's political theory to engage and go beyond this Social Contract tradition by examining and understanding how social institutions shape norms or practices. Mindful of the inherent challenge that faces political theorists and philosophers—which speaks of the problem of applying one's theory to reality—his study contrasts Hegel's political theory with that of the modern Filipino family so that it "sets itself in the tradition of understanding ethical life in the context of concrete culture" (16). Kaelin saw the "family" in Hegel's political theory as a core social institution that is both necessary for the "reproduction of society" and "ability to foster freedom" (19), and he uses this political theory as his framework to think about the Philippines in terms of the "strong family, weak state" thesis.

The use of the Hegelian idealization of family, civil society, and state provides a philosophical grounding to the centrality of the Filipino family vis-à-vis the state. Readers will easily notice the structure of Kaelin's application of Hegel's political theory through two discussion points: first, the points of divergence between the empirical accounts of the twenty-first century Philippine case and the Hegelian conceptualization of a nineteenth-century European society; and, second, the points of convergence between the Filipino family–state–civil society relations and Hegelian thinking on family–state–civil society relations.

For the first point, Kaelin's creative conceptual comparison between contemporary Philippine society and Hegel's depiction of nineteenth-century European society involves the identification and elaboration of the differences in the institutions, dynamics, and outcomes of these two social orders. His intent is to draw insights from their unique and distinct characteristics, features, and tendencies, which to him might be useful in coming up with new possibilities and conceptualizations for modern-day society. As he points out,

we can identify seven more or less related points on which the Hegelian conception of social organization can be compared to the Filipino one. Almost all of them point to the different weight, arrangement and interaction of the basic social institutions. But also the institutions

identified are different, as can be gleaned, for example, from the Hegelian focus on the state and the Filipino discourse on nation-building. (134)

In this part of the book, readers will definitely enjoy how Kaelin sketches out some of the apparent differences between the Philippine case and Hegelian political theory. For instance, in discussing the differences between the two, Kaelin does not just describe Hegel's notion of a nuclear family and the hegemonic Filipino family (136–37), but he also deepens the discussion by guiding the reader in thinking about how these conceptualizations of the family relate to larger social institutions. As Kaelin argues,

The two pictures of the transition from family to larger society are thus different. While the Filipino picture sees a continuous transition from family to civil society where the "family logic" is not given up but simply modified and adapted, Hegel sees conflicting claims upon the individual generated by ultimately fundamentally different perspectives of the particular altruism in the family and the universal egoism in civil society. (139)

On the second point, Kaelin presents his imaginative and incisive philosophical reflections on the differences between Hegel's political theory and the Philippine case. His discussion invites readers to reflect on the conceptual possibilities that can be used in reframing the contemporary family–civil society–state relations. In doing so, he proposes the following reflective points:

1. The use of Hegel's political thought in the emergence of the ethical realm in Filipino society (148–49);
2. The prospect of introducing adjustments in the modern impersonal state institution into a state that is sensitive to pluralized rationalities (150);
3. The idea of using the lessons from the temporal difference between the Philippine case and Hegel's political theory in acknowledging the historical dynamism in society (152);
4. The potentiality of both the modern state and the family, with its "family logic," to tame or civilize the "economic logic" or market-oriented social relations (154); and

5. Lastly the positive effect of activating the corrective function of modern state, market, and family institutions (156).

Regrettably Kaelin's book contains some gaps, which hopefully future scholars can fill in. First, as regards the use of Hegel's political theory, the book is wanting in discussions on the institutionalized and noninstitutionalized effects, dynamics, and outcomes of the market vis-à-vis the Filipino family, civil society, and state. Given Hegel's emphasis on the market in analyzing the concept of civil society, it is quite surprising that Kaelin did not use this as an opportunity to go beyond the family model of doing business in the Philippines and problematize the concept of the market by treating it as a variable independent from the family. Second, the lack of distinction between family and kinship in the book may be an interesting area of research for scholars who want to interrogate the family-kinship nexus in the Philippines. Sociologists and anthropologists may want to revisit this relationship to further academic inquiries and analyses of the family as a structural concept and kinship as a relational concept. Lastly, the book relies on some outdated accounts and works on Filipino culture and society, which do not take into account the complex effects of globalization—global migrations, transnational capitalism, and social media—in transforming Filipino society. Future scholars might want to replicate or further Kaelin's work by investigating or examining the ambiguity of social media or the intensification of the effects of embodied globalization on the Filipino family.

The main strength of the book comes from its distinct and novel use of Hegelian political theory and its analysis of the family as a major social institution. This emphasis can guide future research projects that aim to reread and reappraise Hegel and his philosophy and return to the concept and reality of the family as an explanatory variable in understanding the complexities of contemporary society. The use of Hegel as a framework and the possibility of a theoretical turn can stimulate many fruitful studies in other fields.

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