

Philosophy and Resistance in the Crisis: Greece and the Future of Europe

Costas Douzinas – Polity 2013

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Costa Douzinas' *Philosophy and Resistance in the Crisis* explores the relation between austerity and radical movements in Greece and contributes essential insights to contemporary theories, reflections, and practices of resistance. The first of three parts, 'Crisis', sets the neo-liberal conditions and fields of political struggle in Greece. Part two, 'Philosophy', expands on this struggle by engaging its philosophical instruments and tensions. Finally, 'Resistance' examines practices and practitioners of radical disobedience in Greece; it relates them to one another, to resistance movements elsewhere, and examines their production of subjectivities. The operation is twofold: to apply radical philosophy to inspect contemporary movements, and to apply the experience of resistance to test and improve these methods. An essential value of Douzinas' project is the relationship between moral perception and political action. *Philosophy and Resistance in the Crisis* urges the reader to situate their morality not in an abstract and/or universal notion of justice, but in the struggle for political existences and expressions which are denied, assaulted, or prevented.

'Crisis' looks at the cultural, political, and economic characteristics of neo-liberal austerity in Greece. It reveals the crisis as a socio-political force exploited by elites to threaten the population into submitting to economic austerity and political impotence. Douzinas does not treat economic conditions as an objective reading, but as a contested field of interpretation that informs subjective positions. Acknowledging economics as a space of social and political struggle emphasizes the deceitful nature of characterizing austerity as a 'necessity'. It "is precisely to reduce workers' salaries, rights and social benefits" that austerity is imposed (Douzinas, 2013, 28). Popular fear of debt permits attacks on the political-economic positions of the working population (67). Austerity is not the solution to debt. On the contrary, debt serves as the

method of austerity. It reduces politics to pure market-based administration. Law becomes the mere regulation of populations under austerity. Disenchantment, fear, and aggressiveness arise as state and economic governance abandons the social ethos of “popular values, habits and understandings” (51). This leads to social alienation, cultural estrangement, and political cynicism. Images of revolving political inadequacies repeat, as the failures of austerity are attributed to “the state and resisting citizens,” whose “frustrations of expectations and failure” are replayed and reinforced in negotiations with Europe and the IMF (68).

In ‘Philosophy’, Douzinas turns to traditional and radical theories of law, rights, and resistance. He analyses the paradoxical role of resistance in traditional political and legal theory. While resistance is a foundational condition for the establishment of legal order, it is simultaneously confined by legal frameworks. Citizenship as “conflictual or nothing” expresses this paradox (Balibar cited in Douzinas, 94). By reconfiguring the spaces and operations of politics, those denied claims and stakes in official politics create new forms of citizenship. Distinctions between traditional and radical theories are primarily expressed in their respective formulations of political agents in this conflict. Whereas the former develops theories of democracy based on ‘the people’ as a unity constituted through the state, radical political theory turns to the many who refuse to transfer the legitimation of their “rights to the sovereign” (121). These subjectivities make up the basis for analyzing the form and success of resistance in radical theory.

In ‘Resistance’ Douzinas turns to the radical movements in Greece to inform and contribute to this approach. Douzinas explains how the Greek 2008 insurrection, the *sans papiers* hunger strike, and the Syntagma Square encampment produced unique forms of subjectivation. Subjectivation is the process in which individual’s perceptions of reality are shaped. Determinations of these truths are informed by experiences of events that can reaffirm or “change the parameters of a situation,” maintaining or altering the possibilities of political action (143). Obedient subjectivities are undermined or destroyed only by negating and refusing dominant political parameters which then give way to new possibilities of political becoming. Thus, the rejection of legal obligations in street riots (145), the solidarity with those denied documentation (150), and the reconfiguring of public space into collective political expression (163) create spaces of radical subjectivities. Douzinas’ primary concern is not those objectives which focus on particular political results.

Instead, he applies the concept of praxis to draw attention to objectives directed toward the performances themselves. In this self-referential and self-perfecting focus, individual praxis forms radical new subjectivities and collective praxis forms radical new communities (195).

Key to Douzinas' argument is the binding of politics and morality. He first points to how neo-liberal moralization controls populations and disciplines individuals. In Greece's prevailing political discourse, the collective duties of national modernization surpass regard for welfare and eclipse religious or 'oriental' cultural concerns. The fault for the national debt incurred in grandiose projects of modernization, such as the 2004 Olympics, are collectivized, despite most Greeks neither partaking in nor benefiting from such spending (35). The common recognition of these conditions leads to feelings of 'collective guilt' and 'guilty innocence' (39). As the moralization of politics excludes and condemns large numbers of people "to symbolic and physical death," individual and collective action arise in defence of their political existence (63). These actions go beyond merely rejecting neo-liberal moralization in favour of an alternative moralization of politics, on the contrary they demand a politicization of morality itself. Transferable subjective motivations are to be privileged over normative notions of justice and injustice (80). By transcending "local interest and specific identities," personal moral acts transform into collective forms of political resistance (99). The place-based and globally informed demos of Syntagma square demonstrates this, as the moral demands for friendship, dignity and hospitality, give rise to principles of autonomy, publicity and equality (194). Herein, political identity and commitment demonstrate themselves in consensus decision making (148), while "proximity and emotional intensity" create volunteer care (166) and production based on need and capabilities (167). All this shows the potency of morality in relation to praxis.

Situating morality from the stand point of personal and collective praxis accentuates the necessity of political reflections. Given recent events, one can fairly question Douzinas' optimism about Syriza's role and ability to represent these resistance movements (192).¹ However,

¹ Syriza has continued to implement austerity measures in Greece, as in accordance with their agreements with the EC, EU, and IMF for further loans. For a pessimistic take on Syriza's actions see: Costas Lapavistas, "One year on, Syriza has sold its soul for power," *The Guardian*, January 27th, 2016, accessed March 13th, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jan/25/one-year-on-syriza-radicalism-power-euro-alexis-tsipras>. For an optimistic take see: Slavoj Zizek, "How Alexis Tsipras

Douzinas' central plea is for a balanced approach of pragmatisms and "unwavering commitment to principle" (192). As demonstrated, the latter speaks not to attaching our morality or praxis to the success or failures of any political party, but to the demands for endurance of expression, unity, and dignity being performed in the streets and the squares. Therefore, it is in this moral and political praxis one ought to seek the future of Europe.

Douzinas, Costas, *Philosophy and Resistance in the Crisis: Greece and the Future of Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2013)

and Syriza Outmaneuvered Angela Merkel and the Eurocrats," *In These Times*, July 23, 2015, accessed March 13th, 2016, <http://inthesetimes.com/article/18229/slavoj-zizek-syriza-tsipras-merkel>.