

4-1-2014

## Robert L. Oprisko. Honor: A Phenomenology. New York: Routledge, 2012.

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### Recommended Citation

.DeRusha, Cristian L. (2014) "Robert L. Oprisko. Honor: A Phenomenology. New York: Routledge, 2012.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 5 : No. 2 , Article 23.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol5/iss2/23>

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**Robert L. Oprisko. *Honor: A Phenomenology*. New York: Routledge, 2012.**

“Honor enforces what it means to be an us and who represents a them and to what degree. The processes of honor are thus social processes of politics whereby such identifications continue and change” (p. 156).

Robert L. Oprisko is a young professor with a PhD in Political Science from Purdue University. He published his first book, *Honor: A Phenomenology*, in 2012 and has since taught various subjects, showing in them that honor has an overarching presence in all of our social realities. He is labeled as a post-structuralist and gains much of his inspiration from scholars in Political Theory such as Michael Weinstein, Hans Speier, Carl Schmitt, and Sergei Prozorov, among others. His take on honor within, *Honor: A Phenomenology*, conveys how processes of honor manipulate and shape our social reality. The necessity for one to gain social prestige constitutes a never-ending cycle of one’s value being reevaluated. Oprisko explains the inevitable, natural action for one to protect their social honor by any means possible. In, *Honor*, Oprisko is able to provide his readers with valuable knowledge that enables them to explore their social realms as they seek honor in their affiliated honor systems.

Oprisko writes from a perspective where all social reality in groups (affiliated) is contained in some form of hierarchy. In a social hierarchy the only way to keep your social value is to rid yourself of personal direction and adhere to the sovereign. The question of why you must bend the knee to this figure of sovereignty is hardly ever brought up in an individual’s mind. As Oprisko would say, “Prestige is a tool for reminding the masses who are the elite” (p. 63).

Members of society are all unique from one another. What is not unique is that one is always acting within his/her own social realities and is constantly under some code of honor. When one refers to an honor code, it is meant that the code one must follow will lead them to act in a way that the sovereign deems acceptable or excellent. Oprisko shows us the daunting truth that an individual’s actions in the system of honor will end with a decision by the sovereign to either accept or reject that individual based on an evaluation of their characteristics (Chapter 4). As you can see the individual is not so much a whole anymore, but a collection of the particular characteristics that the sovereign utilizes for evaluating the “goodness” of the group’s citizens. In this unending quest to obtain positive value, individuals discover anything can gain you honor depending upon which group is doing the evaluation. As anything can gain you honor, the same goes for things that can dishonor an individual, the list is infinite. Thus, reorganization of one’s image allows that individual to adapt better to the judgments that are waiting behind every corner of society.

A negative aspect of the teachings in *Honor* is that the language used to present these concepts seems to take away the human aspect of relationships. The majority of relationships found in life will have parallel happenings with the description in this book, but what is not mentioned is the unexplainable actions of others. Many questions brought up in this book seem to be “why” questions, that are obviously not rhetorical. These are questions that ask for an answer and although Oprisko does an outstanding job of structuring what the answer might be in situational form, it is nevertheless not an answer. “Honor is a complicated set of processes that weave persons together into peoples. There is a subtlety and nuance within honor-systems such that there appears to be no correct course of action in particular situations. Perhaps that reflects

the nature of life and communion: it is not possible to meet every expectation placed upon you at every given moment” (p. 155-156). Though this is seen as a weakness to Oprisko’s work, it can most certainly be seen as a priceless lesson in academic reading. The way to truly understand the teachings in the book is not to read about other individual’s situations, but to use *Honor: A Phenomenology* as a guidebook to navigate your own social reality.

*Honor: A Phenomenology* executes in telling the importance of honor in each individual’s reality. In Oprisko’s chapter titled “Prestige” one can use the information to understand why things happen in their own honor systems. Once an individual can accept that the sovereign chooses what is acceptable then it will be more understandable when the loss of honor comes with a change in what is then being valued (Chapter 4). In any social situation you can use this information to better change your characteristics to change with the time. One can either choose to not comply with the new regulations and go down a path of rebellion or one can choose to alter their “face” to better compliment the honor system of the sovereign. The decision making all stems to how internal you hold this connection with the whole of yourself. “People relate to their environment and desires to be of value, to be valued, and to produce a body of work that has meaning” (p. 41). When knowing how important the group or group’s honor system is to you, then you can choose how much of yourself you want to give up for the group. The internalization of one group will lead to the separation of one’s self from other groups.

After reading *Honor: A Phenomenology* we are left unsatisfied with the lingering questions about honor. What we are given is far more useful. Oprisko gives the reader the knowledge to find out the answers to their own questions, in their own social reality.

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