

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Between the Human and the Divine: Philosophical and Theological Hermeneutics

ANDRZEJ WIERCISKI, Ed.

Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2002; 623 pages.

A voluminous collection of forty-eight essays, written by prominent scholars in philosophy, theology, and religion, celebrates the birth of a new society: the International Institute for Hermeneutics (www.chass.utoronto.ca/iih), based in Canada. The essays gathered together in this collection were presented as conference papers at the first International Congress on Hermeneutics held at St. Bonaventure University, May 5–10, 2002. This volume, Vol. 1 in the Institute's Hermeneutic Series under the direction of Andrzej Wierciski, pursues the relation between philosophical and theological hermeneutics (1) by tracing the development of philosophical hermeneutics from Schleiermacher to Vattimo, (2) by examining the application and transformation of hermeneutics in theology, and (3) by addressing the future of philosophical and theological hermeneutics. Hence the question of the *between* is central to this discussion about which Gadamer said in his greeting to the conference participants that opens this collection: "The theme of this congress ... is an invitation to listen to the languages with which we speak ... to hear the resonances and discordances between them, and to hearken to what shows itself in that play of words." This work seriously addresses the question of the between by stepping beyond disciplinary, cultural, linguistic, and religious boundaries. The contributors to this collection come from twelve countries in the Americas and Europe and bring with them their unique horizons of time, place, and language by offering specific interpretations of those traditions to which we all belong. One of the book's explicit intentions is to present a variety of horizons and by bringing together current international debates in philosophical and religious hermeneutics, to open up to language as the infinite source of new possibilities.

Most of the authors pay special attention to Gadamer's and Ricoeur's work while addressing the guiding question of the volume: How can philosophical hermeneutics, being antifoundationalist, form the philosophical source of theology which in its very nature is foundational, since it is founded on revelation? As the deconstruction of the dichotomy between epistemological foundationalism and pessimistic antifoundationalism is central to hermeneutics, all the contributors suggest that we step beyond this metaphysical dichotomy. Revelation and hermeneutical insistence on the primacy of interpretation are not opposed to each other. The hermeneutical orientation in theology is a call for the abandonment of literalism and objectivism in regard to religious truths. Hence we should address a new question: Can these philosophical sources be translated by theological hermeneutics into the language of theology? Since a critical presentation of all the answers to this question exceeds the scope of this review, I shall single out a few essays and focus on the role, purpose, and significance of each part of the volume.

Paying central attention to Gadamer's claim that hermeneutics can be summarized as *verbum interius*, the president of the new society, Andrzej Wierciski, in his inaugural address interprets the rehabilitation of medieval thinking in philosophical hermeneutics. Tracing the development of the concept of language in Augustine and Thomas, Wierciski brings to light the reasons that allow Gadamer to insist, contra Heidegger, that the history of Western thought is not merely a history of the forgetfulness of Being, for medieval trinitarian theology opened up the hermeneutical horizons by stressing the priority of language. The crucial development in hermeneutics is the historical movement from the Platonic concept of language to the "full integration of incarnation of meaning" in Augustine's conception of the word. This is a movement from exclusively philosophical sources to new discoveries that lie in a rich mixture of philosophical and theological thought. Hence hermeneutics transcends disciplinary limitations; it essentially lies *in between*. With the help of another nonphilosophical source, Czeslaw Milosz's poetry, Wierciski convincingly explicates the crucial aspects of philosophical hermeneutics: the power and powerlessness of language, historicity, and linguisticity. The question of the between turns out to be not merely a question of how philosophical themes can ground theological thought, for these themes are already infused with nonphilosophical insights; hermeneutics is a mediation between philosophy and theology.

The book is divided into five parts: "Philosophical Hermeneutics," "Theological Hermeneutics," "Hermeneutic Praxis," "New Prospects in Hermeneutics" and a "Postscript" which deals with the significance of hermeneutics in the academic curriculum and addresses the question of the implications of hermeneutics for pedagogy.

Part One is comprised of two sections: "From Schleiermacher to Vattimo" and "Within the Horizon of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur." The essay by Gianni Vattimo defends four points: (1) the existential analytic of *Being and Time* makes us aware that knowledge is always interpretation; (2) interpretation is the only "fact" of which we can speak; (3) the more one attempts to grasp interpretation in its authenticity, the more it manifests itself in its historical character; and (4) interpretation can only be seen as an interested response to an historically determined situation. Vattimo stresses the third point in particular, which, he argues, uncovers the presuppositions that underlie the conception of the world-in-itself. The metaphysical conception of "natural reality" and "objectivity" is merely "ruinous realism" which produces its corollary: authoritarianism. Vattimo's paradoxical claims that Nietzsche and Heidegger speak from within the biblical tradition, that the claim of the death of God signifies the maturation of the Christian message, and that nihilism constitutes the truth of Christianity are dealt with in greater depth in *After Christianity* (Columbia University Press, 2002). For Vattimo, the hermeneutical approach to Christianity reveals the necessity of abandoning literalism and natural metaphysics and dissolving the Church's claims to objectivity, for the truth of Christianity is the dissolution of the metaphysical idea of truth; the truth of the scriptures is the

truth of love, of charity.

In his presentation, Gary Madison outlines the origins, tenets, and implications of philosophical hermeneutics by stressing its phenomenological heritage (hence its opposition to earlier hermeneutics) and its distance from both dogmatic scientism and interpretative anarchism. Claiming to be a universal discipline while at the same time accentuating the finite nature of understanding and the linguisticity and textuality of experience, philosophical hermeneutics rejects both foundationalism in philosophy and fundamentalism in religion and theology. Hermeneutics's persistent claim that understanding is essentially presuppositional is most radically opposed to the search for and return to "fundamentals"—"unvarnished, literal truths"—the characteristic traits of both foundationalism and fundamentalism. In contrast to religious fundamentalism, according to which, if the scriptures do not have a literal truth, there can be no truth in religion, hermeneutics sees the "either/or of relativism and absolutism" as an untenable metaphysical opposition. Paying close attention to the work of Augustine and Thomas, Madison convincingly shows that the medieval tradition itself saw this opposition as "foolish," as Augustine himself said. Madison brings to light a surprising relation of fundamentalism to modern science: although born out of the anxiety that is inherent in our "thrownness" into the technological world, religious fundamentalism is an attempt to "modernize" religion. However, the function of religious myth is not epistemological but rather existential, and thus "there is absolutely no 'mediation' possible between religion and science" (47). This, however, does not mean that religion is to abandon its claim to truth, for the ultimate implication of hermeneutics is that all being is interpreted being. Here we witness how hermeneutics re-establishes the place of religion in our secular world: supporting interpretive pluralism, hermeneutics provides a powerful means of combating the prejudice that only scientific propositions can lay claim to validity. By uncovering those presuppositions that underlie scientific claims, hermeneutics is capable of bringing a plurality of voices (scientific, religious, aesthetic, existential) into dialogue. When placed in the infinite "conversation that we are," religion speaks to us more clearly than before, for it is dialogue alone that can save us from the danger of limiting ourselves to a single voice.

Graeme Nicholson's essay shows how a Heideggerian conception of truth re-evaluates our relation to religious texts. To speak of the truth of the scriptures does not simply mean that the interpreter's claims should correspond to those of the texts; the interpreter is rather invited to allow what was originally spoken to be disclosed. This does not indicate the inferiority of religious truths with respect to scientific ones, for instance, for truth as *a-letheia* is more fundamental than truth as *homoiosis* or correctness. Furthermore, the interpreter cannot suppose that any single act of interpretation is a pre-eminent disclosure; the play of disclosedness and undisclosedness implicates the historical nature of the "self-interpretation of the text." Finally, the self-manifestation of the text cannot be isolated from its historical unconcealment, for its power to reach the hearer and reader and enhance our experience belongs to its own life.

Jean Grondin addresses the question of the proximity between theology and philosophy. According to Grondin, Heidegger was the last major philosopher to be thoroughly familiar with the theological issues. However, the brief "untheological" period in philosophy is coming to an end, which is most clearly discernible in the works of Vattimo and the more recent Derrida. Grondin suggests that the possible causes of the new proximity between theology and philosophy are indebted to the disappearance of the social, political, and ideological agenda of Marxist *vulgata*. The "disappearance" of religion is a very recent phenomenon, limited in time and space, for it constitutes only a limited interlude in the history of Western civilization. This new proximity between philosophy and theology is a call for both continental and analytic philosophers to overcome their provincial attitudes.

If culture, religion, and morality are not in need of support from philosophy, asks Andrzej Bronk, what remains for philosophy to do? The significance of philosophical hermeneutics to theology can be only subsidiary or ancillary, for even though theology is in need of foundations, the latter are first and foremost to be sought not in reason but in revelation. Yet theology is never practiced in a vacuum and is today carried out in a situation of antifundamentalism and antifoundationalism. By showing that the process of understanding theological texts develops from a certain preunderstanding, that there is no understanding that is complete, and that each new understanding brings forth new questions, philosophical hermeneutics is most helpful to the theologian who takes up the challenges of the present and who attempts to influence his or her age. Hermeneutics is helpful to theology in disclosing those presuppositions that influence the way the Christian faith is explained and proclaimed. By stressing the fusion of horizons between the ancient and the present world, hermeneutics can perform an important function in our meditation on the scriptures.

The purpose of the second part of the book is to address the issue of philosophy's place in Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic theology in an age of antifoundationalism and antifundamentalism. This part of the text falls into two sections: "Various Traditions of Interpretation" and "Transformation Through Reading." The articles are concerned with the future of the interaction between theology and hermeneutics (John Robertson), the relevance and application of an analogico-iconic hermeneutics in theology (Mauricio Beuchot), the hermeneutical interest in original sin (Michael Schulz) and in resurrection (Tomasz Wcawski). Samuel Ajzenstat offers an interpretation of the story of Jacob with the aim of showing how interpretation and text are inseparable, although from the point of view of rabbinic tradition our will and God's will are separable.

The guiding question of the third part of the text is the following: How do the problems and questions arising from the philosophical and theological hermeneutic traditions relate to concrete problems of application in the contemporary postmodern context? The articles are grouped into two sections: "The Postmodern Context" and "The Dynamics of Hermeneutic Applications." Readers interested in the early works of Heidegger will find this part particularly

rewarding. The resurrection of medieval philosophy in the passage to postmodern hermeneutics, issues concerning ethical/hermeneutic responsibility in the face of the other, questions concerning the risks and limits of the theological appropriation of hermeneutics, and the relevance of Chinese ontological hermeneutics are the central themes addressed in this part of the book.

The fourth part of the volume addresses the challenges that philosophical and theological hermeneutics face in the immediate future. Special focus is given to those traditions that emerge from feminism. The conceptions of systematic, eschatological, and metaphysical theology are brought into question under the headings of hermeneutics and critical theory.

The International Institute for Hermeneutics continues the conversation between philosophy and theology. It indeed is heartening to see this conversation taking place in North America, where, as Gadamer puts it, "the temptation to forsake the interpretive task in favor of apparently more profitable research can be almost irresistible." One of the leading aims of the Institute is to re-establish the place of thinking in a technological age. Launching an interdisciplinary and international forum for hermeneutic dialogue, bringing together forty-eight philosophers and theologians from thirty-four universities in twelve countries, this collection indeed creates a dialogue in which we are "far less the leaders than the led." *Between the Human and the Divine* is a superb introduction to current debates in philosophical and theological hermeneutics. By stressing the fragile historical moment of the beginning, the new society emphasizes the hermeneutical primacy of the question. The volume offers a variety of perspectives into hermeneutical history with the aim of uncovering the relevance of hermeneutics at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

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Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary

HANS-GEORG GADAMER

RICHARD E. PALMER, Ed. and Trans.

New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001; 174 pages.

Gadamer in Conversation is a translation of Carsten Dutt's *Hermeneutik-Ästhetik-Praktische Philosophie: Gadamer im Gespräch*, with the addition of three further interviews with Gadamer from 1989 to 1992. The volume includes an informative twenty-nine page introduction by Richard Palmer (a scholar well familiar to hermeneuticists) and an equally useful bibliography detailing books and collections in English by and about Gadamer and hermeneutics as well as information on finding articles, theses, etc. by and about Gadamer. Palmer's introduction provides a brief outline of Gadamer's academic career and major writings, highlighting in particular the dialogical

theme of philosophical hermeneutics, and introduces each of the conversations (and conversational partners) that follows. It is Palmer's hope that "these conversations could serve as an introduction to Gadamer for neophytes as well as a very interesting commentary for scholars familiar with the primary texts" (vii). The volume will certainly be of interest to all those in the latter category, and in view of the popularity of the interview genre—a genre to which Gadamer very naturally takes—it may indeed find an audience among those seeking acquaintance with Gadamer's thought for the first time.

The topics of the three interviews with Carsten Dutt are, as the title to the original German edition indicates, hermeneutics, aesthetics, and practical philosophy respectively. They are followed by conversations entitled "The Greeks, Our Teachers" with Glenn Most, "On Phenomenology" with Alfons Grieder, and "The real Nazis had no interest at all in us..." with Dörte von Westernhagen. The last in this list is certainly the most intriguing of the lot, if its philosophical interest is rather minimal. Unlike the five interviews that precede it, this one frequently takes on a confrontational, virtually inquisitorial, tone on the part of von Westernhagen, whose premise is that during the Nazi era German philosophy professors as a whole played a large role in bolstering that regime. The publication of this interview in English is timely in view of Teresa Orozco's *Platonische Gewalt: Gadamer's Politische Hermeneutik der NS-Zeit* (Hamburg: Argument Verlag, 1995), a dissertation indicting Gadamer for alleged complicity with the Nazis. Those interested in the subject would wish to read Gadamer's sixty-page "Reflections on a Philosophical Journey" (in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Library of Living Philosophers Vol. 24, ed. Lewis Hahn [Chicago: Open Court, 1997]), as well as this interview. As Palmer writes, "in my view, this interview may be seen as Gadamer's rebuttal of the charges and innuendos in Orozco's attempted exposé of Gadamer and also Richard Wolin's recent effort to discredit Gadamer" (27).

More philosophically important are the five preceding conversations, the first of which (simply entitled "Hermeneutics") takes up several hermeneutical themes arising from *Truth and Method*, including language, history, and method. Here Gadamer essentially summarizes previously stated positions, as perhaps befits the interview format. If there is little that is new here, Gadamer's discussion of his relation to Heidegger and replies to some of his critics warrant attention. The second interview ("Aesthetics") includes a lively discussion of Gadamer's ill-fated encounter with Jacques Derrida in 1980, an encounter that prompted some harsh words from Gadamer for his French colleague. Here is a sampling: "The question is whether Derrida is capable of engaging in a genuine conversation"—a question to which Gadamer replies in the negative (61–2). Again: "The difference between Derrida and me, I think, is that I myself would like to reach an understanding with him in which we can talk with one another. As you know, he was here in Heidelberg not long ago ... still it was the same as before: Derrida's incapacity for dialogue was once again manifest. Dialogue is not his strength" (62). The same interview finds Gadamer discussing his notion of the "eminent text," simultaneity, and related themes.

The third interview with Dutt concerns practical philosophy. Here Gadamer discusses once again the concepts of social reason, *phronesis*, *ethos*, and *praxis*, outlining in brief the place of such notions in a hermeneutical conception of ethics. It is followed by two conversations concerning the Greeks and phenomenology. These interviews bring out Gadamer's introduction early on in his career to these two fundamentally important strands in his thought, although again aside from the conversational and at times autobiographical genre there is not a great deal here with which readers of Gadamer will not already be familiar.

The interviews comprising this valuable collection do demonstrate a renowned conversationalist in his element. As interviews, they are not always characterizable as genuine hermeneutic dialogues, yet nor do they merely feature the Master Thinker holding court. *Gadamer in Conversation* belongs primarily to the genre of *Philosophical Apprenticeships* and "Reflections on a Philosophical Journey," and will be of primary interest to readers of these earlier texts.

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Political Philosophy (Fundamentals of Philosophy)

DUDLEY KNOWLES

Montreal & Kingston: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2001; 368 pages.

Dudley Knowles's interesting book exemplifies many of the virtues of twentieth-century British philosophical scholarship: his prose is clear and concise, his argumentation is acute, and his capacity for spotting the core of any subject is outstanding. Moreover, Knowles is a true champion of common sense: his *Political Philosophy* is a veritable manifesto of "the Reasonable Man," one of the most distinctive creations of the British tradition. Indeed, his approach explains and endeavors to settle many of the most crucial issues in the philosophy of politics. Knowles regularly presents two extreme options concerning a given problem and then outlines the *via media* to be followed for its resolution.

In this manner, political liberty (Chapter 3) becomes an issue of combining classical "negative freedoms" with modern "positive freedoms." Personal freedom (Chapters 3 and 4) turns into the mediation between rigorous Kantian autonomy and communitarian respect for inherited values. Democracy (Chapters 3 and 7) translates into the harmonization of liberalism and republicanism. Political rights (Chapter 4), which are at first scrupulously divided into "critical" and "positive," "privileges" and "claims," "powers" and "immunities," "*in rem*" and "*in personam*," "positive" and "negative," "special" and "general," "individual" and "of groups," are re-united successively under the umbrella of parliamentary decision making. General utility (Chapter 5) develops out of the mediation between shared needs and personal interest. As for political obligation

(Chapter 6), it represents the mitigation of "natural," ego-centered anarchism by means of the altruistic, communitarian constituents of the Western *ethos*.

While pervading Knowles's entire text, this all-embracing spirit of *medietas* is not declared as a theoretical commitment of the author. On the contrary, this preference for equilibrium appears to be an unconsciously endorsed frame of interpretation and evaluation. Utilitarianism is the only theoretical stance to which any tribute is openly paid by Knowles. In his view, no other doctrine has equal "strength and [equal] detail with which [it] has been articulated" (15). Utilitarianism remains "unrivalled in its sophistication," as no other theory "has been applied [so] resolutely in the domain of practical politics" (15–6).

A consequence of Knowles's commitment to utilitarianism is that democracy becomes the only political model that his reflections address in any serious way. From a historical point of view, the rise of the utilitarian doctrine has accompanied the rise of bourgeois, liberal democracy itself, at least in the Western world. From a theoretical point of view, only democracy seems capable of accommodating the diverging views arising from individual interests and individual interpretations of one's own utility or happiness—at least, this is what Knowles suggests (61–4). Democracy remains the only political conception that Knowles analyzes in his volume while theocracy, monarchy, despotism, fascism, the politics of the "common good," tribalism, military dictatorship, and anarchism are hardly touched upon at all.

The general lack of historical references—another distinguishing trait of much twentieth-century British philosophy—leads Knowles to neglect too many important political authors and ideas. The reader is thus deprived of the insights of pre- and nonliberal thinkers such as Aquinas, Machiavelli, DeMaistre, Bakunin, and Schmitt. Of course, these authors have little to do with utilitarianism and contemporary democracy, but their relevance for political philosophy should not be ignored, especially by a text marketed as a comprehensive study of fundamental political problems.

Furthermore, the utilitarian frame endorsed by Knowles leads him to a deeply conservative picture of political thinking and political deliberation. If, in order to do what is right, we must be able to predict with reasonable certainty the outcome of an action, then no revolutionary plan is likely to be taken into account by the utilitarian, for too many variables would be involved in such a plan; this renders moral computation implausible, if not impossible. Knowles is aware of this conservative implication of utilitarianism, but offers no solution. On the contrary, no trace of experimental or radical political thinking is examined in detail by Knowles, despite the fact that much of the history of political philosophy has been ripe with utopianism, the creation and interpretation of collective myths, the desire for change for change's sake, and messianic ideologies of all kinds.

Indeed, at the time of its inception utilitarianism itself was intended to be a revolutionary political model. Universal education, the annihilation of poverty, egalitarian participation in legislation, and the reformation of judicial power were among the main goals of Bentham's groundbreaking project, goals that

were non-computable in terms of expected utility. Who knew whether or how such structural reforms would have brought about tangible benefits and for whom? Faith and hope were at the core of the utilitarian project, not the rational prediction of future events; Knowles seems unaware of this aspect of the doctrine he endorses.

Naturally, as we know today, liberal democracy succeeded, and so thoroughly did it succeed that liberal democracy has become a political given, one that most of Knowles's readers will accept without much critical examination—as does Knowles himself. Knowles's text, however, does leave the reader with a clear, even enjoyable, picture of what we have around us *hinc et nunc*, but also with no picture whatsoever of what we ought to have.

GIORGIO BARUCHELLO, *Queen's University at Herstmonceux Castle*

The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion

RICHARD KEARNEY

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001; 192 pages.

This book is about God, not theology. Setting aside the traditional image of God as "esse," Richard Kearney sketches a hermeneutical retrieval of the Exodic name, revealing a God who is "pure passage" and "pure gift" (36). This book definitely gives its readers something to think about and sets out on an exhilarating new path for thought. Kearney provides textual support for a countertraditional view of God, one whose history is equally venerable as the traditional and is as shrouded in mystery at its "sources."

The glimpses Kearney gives us of "the God who may be" are fascinating. This is a transfiguring, desiring, and possibilizing God. It is also a possible God, who comes and goes, resonating with Kearney's earlier work on the imagination (see especially *The Wake of Imagination*). His interpretation of God's "play" indicates in what respect we may be said to be God's "images": the human imagination, as described in his *Poetics of Imagining* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), is also a "paradoxical phenomenon, now here, now gone. Something, as the poet said, 'more distant than stars and nearer than the eye.'" Like God's creation of the world *ex nihilo*, the human imagination "resolves to create its own meaning, out of nothing," being "the capacity to convert the given confines of the here and now into an open horizon of possibilities" (*Poetics of Imagining*, 5, 6, 2).

Kearney's thesis rests upon linking ancient understandings of the inaugural name of God in Exodus 3:14 with its more contemporary hermeneutic possibilities. Hence, he replaces the essentialist "I am Who I am" with the eschatological "I am Who will be." This God resists reduction to the status of an idol and repudiates those who would seek to use God's power by the knowledge of

God's name. The text reads like a novel. Retrieving eschatological meaning from four biblical texts, Kearney provides more tantalizing definition; he works his interpretation around four key biblical passages: the burning bush, the Shulamite's Song, the transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor, and God's pledge in Matthew 10 to make the impossible possible.

In developing his argument, Kearney addresses current debates on the notion of an eschatological God who transfigures and desires. He contrasts the fusionary sameness of the essentialist One against the eschatological universality of the Other. Glimpsing God as possibilizing our world from out of the future, i.e., from the eschaton promised by several religious traditions, keeps open the door to hope. This is a God who "happens upon us," lending to life a sense of "unpredictable surprise, serendipity, and grace" (26). This is a God who calls us from the future, from the eschaton, the call drawing "a recreated creation towards God" (43). Thus, we find ourselves drawn by desire for the possible God, a desire that is not deficiency, but is its own reward. It is a desire in the here and now for a consummation still to come. This is a God who is personal in a way that an abstract God could never be.

Kearney develops the theme of transfiguration in terms of a phenomenology of the persona, which he reads as "the capacity in each of us to receive and respond to the divine invitation" (2), one that is "radically intersubjective" (18). The transfiguration of an individual allows the persona to shine forth, as did Jesus's persona on Mount Tabor. Transfiguration involves both Creator and creature. God enters into history with us as we create. God needs us not only so that we can be who we may be, but in order for God to be "Who may be." This God in fact seeks us out and requests our assistance. We are ourselves inextricably involved in the work of enabling the kingdom, a process that involves our own as well as God's transfiguration.

Just who we may become may turn out to be a surprise for all concerned, given the divine fecundity visible in the potentiality and fecundity of history. For Kearney, the possible has "radical utopian power" (89). He liberates the notion of the possible from its traditional negative shackles which had confined its meaning to the "less than real" or "less than sufficient." Kearney incisively deploys the ways and means of hermeneutics to critique not only the traditional notion of God as "*esse*" but also the extremes of deconstruction opposing it—efforts that, Kearney argues, in their rush to free themselves of metaphysics, lead inevitably to aporias concerning ethical practice.

Kearney cuts the Gordian knot of deconstructive ethics to reveal what lies hidden by the intricate and fascinating knotwork. He argues that deconstructive approaches like Derrida's tend to strip faith of all names, stories, covenants, promises, alliances, and good works, leading to a view in which the Other "surpasses all our phenomenal horizons of experience" (76), and for this reason leaves us vulnerable. We can no longer tell good from evil. Kearney provides an extended discussion of Derrida's "aporetic logic" (95) concerning the possible/impossible rhetorical pair, including how it relates to the notion of pardon.

He also provides a lucid analysis of Levinas's view of God, questioning whether it is a "purely phenomenological description as he likes to claim" (69), and suggests that the "very hyperbolic excess of Levinas's ethics is, arguably, the very token of its impossibility" (69). In other words, Kearney argues that Levinas's ethics demands an "*impossible way of being*" (69).

In outlining his alternative interpretation of God, Kearney responds in the negative to one old and unresolved problem: whether God is (or must be, or should be) all-powerful. Not to give away too much, lest I spoil one of many delightful surprises for the reader, suffice it to say that this is also a democratizing God. Rejecting the "*esse*" God, Kearney charts a middle path between the eschatological and the onto-theological in his hermeneutical retrieval of an "onto-eschatological" understanding of God as "*Deus Adventurus*" (81), which, he suggests, is more suitable to a new millennium. In co-creating with God, humanity discovers a hermeneutical God, one who "persuades rather than coerces, invites rather than imposes, asks rather than impels" (30). Kearney's alternative interpretation of God is well supported by his interpretations of a wealth of textual sources and by those drawn from a venerable countertradition of interpretation of the four biblical passages.

It is somewhat disconcerting to come face to face with the realization of the extent to which the traditional notion of God has become an idol. For this reason alone the book is worth reading. There are, however, many other reasons. A brief work, it nonetheless manages to provide much fertile ground for thought. Although the index is too restricted, there is material for further research on the topic in its copious notes and bibliography.

INGRID HARRIS

The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty

ERIC MATTHEWS

Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001; 256 pages.

Merleau-Ponty's philosophical works are extremely rich. He is a provocative artist who works with a large pallet to reconfigure preconceptions and use new shades of meaning to express an original philosophical vision. He draws productively upon not only philosophers (eg., Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger) but a variety of psychologists as well, many of whom, regrettably, are infrequently studied today—a consequence of which is that Merleau-Ponty has received less acclaim than he deserves. Furthermore, even those steeped in the phenomenological tradition find it difficult to teach the works of Merleau-Ponty to their students since he presupposes so much. Assigning Merleau-Ponty's works to beginners is a bit like taking a child to a daring contemporary art exhibit; they need a word or two to help with orientation. It is not that they do not see

anything, it is just that they cannot appreciate what one wants them to appreciate. This is unfortunate since the general sensitivity of Merleau-Ponty's texts is energetic, timely, and attractive. Like any great artist, his works continue to evoke new meanings as trends change.

Certainly Merleau-Ponty's works continue to inspire the research of a variety of professionals (mostly philosophers, a few psychologists, some other social scientists, and even some architects and computer scientists). One can see this expressed in monographs and professional journals of all sorts. It is refreshing that Matthews has taken the time and effort to address the aforementioned problems. His goal is to explain carefully some of the central ideas from Merleau-Ponty's works in a way that is accessible for English-reading students who are beginners to Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology, and even to philosophy in general.

Matthews organizes his work topically in a way that roughly corresponds to a chronological overview of Merleau-Ponty's career. He begins with a chapter aiming to situate Merleau-Ponty within his philosophical and historical context. Next follow chapters on phenomenology, being-in-the-world, embodiment and human action, self and others, politics in theory and practice, the arts, and Merleau-Ponty's later thought. Matthews also includes a brief bibliography of primary and secondary sources available in English. Each chapter is brief (about twenty pages), and gives philosophical novices clues on how to appreciate this sophisticated *oeuvre*.

Matthews begins by informing the reader that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is relevant for thinking today. Matthews describes the continuous development of Merleau-Ponty's thought and effectively describes how this work recaptures and modifies themes from his earlier works, rather than positing radical ruptures in his career as some have mistakenly done. Matthews states that the general thesis of his interpretation is to understand Merleau-Ponty as a new sort of humanist. He argues that while Merleau-Ponty moves away from transcendental phenomenology and traditional humanism, with its enlightenment-era metaphysics of subjectivity, he does not abandon subjectivity altogether. Merleau-Ponty, Matthews argues, appropriates structuralism to creatively transform humanism rather than eschewing the latter altogether.

Chapter 2 provides a rudimentary account of phenomenology that should help students understand important texts like the preface to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. Matthews correctly notes, albeit briefly, the confluence of Hegel's and Husserl's senses of phenomenology in Merleau-Ponty's transformation of phenomenology (contra Spiegelberg). Matthews argues that Husserl's work was Merleau-Ponty's primary inspiration. He briefly discusses transcendental phenomenology, how Merleau-Ponty begins with Husserl's later thought, and finally how Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology differs from Heidegger's and Sartre's. This is all accomplished in just over twenty pages, so it would be a mistake to expect much depth here. But given the purpose of the book, this is a reasonable sacrifice.

There are a few minor errors here. For example, it is impossible to claim both that Merleau-Ponty heard Husserl's Paris lectures in 1929 and that Merleau-Ponty's first exposure to phenomenology was in Aron Gurwitsch's courses at the *École normale*. (Gurwitsch did not arrive in Paris until 1933.) Nonetheless, this chapter will serve to assist students in reading original phenomenological texts.

The three central chapters (3, 4, and 5) contextualize Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in different ways. Chapter 3 elaborates upon Merleau-Ponty's complicated relations with Heidegger's and Sartre's thought. Matthews focuses upon the embodiment of the body-subject as the principal divergence from Heidegger, and dwells almost exclusively upon Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* to accomplish his reading. Merleau-Ponty's ontology is unlike the early Heidegger's fundamental ontology. Instead, it is an implicit and indirect ontology with which Merleau-Ponty himself became increasingly aware throughout his career. He also situates Merleau-Ponty in the context of the historical debate between rationalism and empiricism, and the parallel psychological debate between mentalism and mechanism. In fact much of this chapter is an interesting exposition of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological project in the context of contemporary philosophical trends. Matthews erects some nice bridges between Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological project and analytic thought as well as empiricism.

The fourth chapter begins by retrieving the project of Merleau-Ponty's first book, *The Structure of Behavior*, in terms of the aforementioned dualism between which Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology worked. Matthews does a fine job of showing the continuity of Merleau-Ponty's first two books. Matthews carefully explains how Merleau-Ponty's account begins in, but departs from, Gestalt psychology as well as how Merleau-Ponty develops an analysis of the relation of consciousness and world into a phenomenology of perception. This chapter is an asset for students interested in the early work of Merleau-Ponty.

Chapter 5 addresses a specific aspect of Matthews's thesis that Merleau-Ponty was fashioning a new humanism. He adroitly explains how Merleau-Ponty continues phenomenology's struggle to escape the lonely world of Cartesian thought. Matthews even manages to include a brief excursus on temporality and lived experience. But the high point of this chapter is that Matthews features one of Merleau-Ponty's most important contributions to phenomenology—namely, the emphasis on the social world. All talk of the self and its relation with others is rooted in the social and the political. Another way of saying this (going slightly beyond Matthews's account) is that the subjectivity of Merleau-Ponty's new humanism displaces an abstract epistemological and metaphysical construct via its attention to social and political institution. Much more needs to be said about Merleau-Ponty's contribution to social and political philosophy, but this chapter effectively describes the manner in which this important aspect of his thought is entangled with his phenomenology of perception. Although Matthews emphasizes this point in his introduction more than here, his account here

demonstrates the way that different aspects of Merleau-Ponty's thought are intercalated without misrepresenting him as a system-builder.

Given this, it is odd that Matthews falters a bit when he explicitly addresses the political writings of Merleau-Ponty. He does not do justice to the interesting story of the collaboration, friendship, and eventual enmity between Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and de Beauvoir. Details of the estrangement are particularly misleading and occasionally incorrect. Also disappointing is the conspicuous absence of any discussion of the important influence upon Merleau-Ponty by his friend and mentor Jean Wahl. In fact, Wahl is mentioned only once in the book, and then only in passing. Finally, Matthews exaggerates the shifts in Merleau-Ponty's political thought and fails to link its later development to the turn toward ontology via a sort of phenomenology of history—a trend that was always present in Merleau-Ponty's thought. This is an important feature of the organic nature of Merleau-Ponty's later work. Nonetheless, this chapter does contain clear accounts of much of Merleau-Ponty's two major works on political philosophy, *Humanism and Terror* and *Adventures of the Dialectic*. Students will no doubt benefit from this chapter as well, though they will need to be alerted to its occasional shortcomings.

Merleau-Ponty's contribution to aesthetics emerged in counterpoint with his analysis of perception throughout his career. Matthews does a good job of drawing upon a variety of Merleau-Ponty's works dealing with different artistic media, including painting, film, photography, and literature, though of course Merleau-Ponty's favorite aesthetic medium to discuss was painting. Matthews does not provide much critical evaluation of Merleau-Ponty's work here, unfortunately. He only hints at the profound intimations of Merleau-Ponty's later ontology in *Eye and Mind*. One might think that is because he saves such reflections for the last chapter, which immediately follows this discussion. Alas, such is not the case.

In the final chapter of the book, Matthews addresses the unfinished manuscripts of *The Prose of the World* and *The Visible and the Invisible*, both of which were published posthumously. Although it is true that both were late works in the sense that their author was by then the *late* Merleau-Ponty, it is misleading to group them together this way. As Matthews himself somewhat begrudgingly admits ("if Claude Lefort is to be believed" [159]), *The Prose of the World* was abandoned long before the other text in question. So it should come as no surprise that *The Prose of the World* presents "a different view from that expressed in *Eye and Mind*" (158). Obviously, the proper contemporary of *The Visible and the Invisible* is *Eye and Mind*. But this grouping is more important for their complementary content than their temporal coincidence. *Eye and Mind* gives us our only glimpse at a completed aspect of his later work. Although I do not think it makes sense to posit radical ruptures in Merleau-Ponty's thought, he clearly was concerned with something quite new at the end of his life—developments he had not foreseen at the time he was working on *The Prose of the World*.

Although there is a nice summary in this chapter of parts of *The Prose of the World*, far more of the chapter is devoted to that work than to *The Visible and the Invisible*, although the latter work unquestionably is more consequential for contemporary philosophy. Indeed, Matthews might have achieved his goal more effectively (the goal of showing the relevance of Merleau-Ponty's thought today) by making more of the connections between contemporary French thinkers whose ideas emerge from Merleau-Ponty's innovative work.

All in all, this work does much of what it sets out to do. It will be very useful to help students appreciate the important but difficult works of Merleau-Ponty.

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Hegel: A Biography

TERRY PINKARD

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; 780 pages.

Philosophers, with rare exceptions, lead uninteresting lives. The bare bones of Hegel's sixty-one years are a case in point: birth in Stuttgart; education at Tübingen; a short-lived position as lecturer at Jena (and romantic dalliance); nine years of nonacademic work as newspaper editor and highschool principal; marriage and children; eventual achievement of longed-for university posts, first in Heidelberg and then in Berlin; sudden death of suspected cholera—nothing very dramatic, and all fitting a pattern typical of the modern academic life.

Hegel the intellectual figure, on the other hand, offers a wealth of material for the scholar: his oeuvre is large and wide-ranging; his *Phenomenology of Spirit* is one of the most abstruse works in the philosophical canon; his influence is as enormous as it is controversial. It is no surprise that most literature neglects Hegel-the-man in favor of Hegel-the-figure; this has long been the philosophical norm. What is surprising is the emergence of a new genre, the "intellectual biography," which attempts to combine the two. Terry Pinkard's contribution to this body of literature meets this challenge with limited success.

The book has obvious strengths, of which Pinkard's authority is the most important. Having published an excellent work on Hegel's *Phenomenology* in 1996, and with an account of German philosophy of the same general period (1760–1860) published this year (both by Cambridge University Press), he knows his material well. Further, Pinkard possesses that all too rare gift of being able to examine difficult philosophical ideas in accessible language and to provide novel and thought-provoking interpretations of unresolved textual problems while doing so.

Pinkard acknowledges from the outset the difficulty this type of volume presents and attempts to resolve it by breaking the book into sections that will appeal to different readers. Chapters 4, 5, 8, 11, and 14 are what Pinkard calls

"purely 'philosophical' chapters" which are of "primary interest mostly to Hegel scholars" (xvi); these presumably can be skipped by the more general reader—if any there be—without loss to the narrative structure of the whole. The text thus appears as three volumes in one: the scholarly work, the biographical story, and the I-want-it-all study of Hegel's life and work (although, of the third, Pinkard apologizes for its various omissions, claiming that a fully comprehensive story would be a "multi-volume affair" [xvii]).

Let me briefly review these three texts in one, beginning with the scholarly work. While Pinkard offers, in the eighty-five pages of Chapter 4, a detailed and enlightening discussion of the various philosophical trends that influenced Hegel's *Phenomenology* (and truly so, as Pinkard debunks the myth of the singularity of Hegel's thought), his following chapter on the text itself numbers only eighteen pages and reads as a summary of the systemization of those influences. The scholar would be better off with Pinkard's extensive study of this work. Similarly, the twenty pages on the *Logic* and the twenty-five pages on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (Chapters 8 and 11), written as they are in accessible language, lack the detail and depth expected of a good critical study, even given the consistent quality of Pinkard's writing. This is not an unfair criticism to make of an intellectual biography: why include these "skippable" chapters if they do not satisfy scholarly interest yet need not be consumed by the general reader? They comprise roughly 130 pages of an already lengthy volume, and are both less than the scholar needs and, as Pinkard himself acknowledges, probably more than the reader of a biography wants (xvi).

Of Hegel the biography proper, Pinkard tries to make up for the lack of drama in Hegel's life by situating it within the upheaval of the times: the birth and death of German Romanticism (Hegel knew all of the principal figures); the emergence of the German nation from a collection of principalities (the political uncertainties of which affected Hegel's life decisions); and the contribution of the French, American, and industrial revolutions to the development of modernity, with Hegel as the first truly modern thinker. Here again, Pinkard's research and authority shine through, and his depiction of the intellectual climate at Jena in Chapter 3 is (philosophically) riveting. But the general reader, looking for an engaging narrative, quickly becomes bogged down in the minutiae of accounts of the administration of a university, the political structure of a small principality, or the foundation and role of a newspaper to maintain interest. These sections read more as cultural and political history than biography. The two are not opposed, but a skilled biographer weaves them more seamlessly together than is evidenced here. The clarifying subheadings Pinkard provides within the chapters (seventeen of them in Chapter 10) add to this general feel of reading history rather than biography, and the relevance of these details becomes questionable and detracts from the narrative tension a good biography requires.

When these two partial texts are put together and the book is read as a whole, a problem of repetition occurs with three different results. The first is simple redundancy: page 109 (a "biographical" page) announces the details of the

publication of Hegel's first book; page 153 (a "philosophical" page) repeats these details almost verbatim before discussing its content in more depth. This irritating redundancy recurs throughout the text. Second, within a purely "philosophical" chapter, Pinkard will drop a personal detail (such as the birth of Hegel's illegitimate son, page 192) with which the biography has not yet dealt, thus spoiling any drama the subsequent biographical chapter may hold. Pinkard, for all his abilities, is not a skilled storyteller. Third, while a biographical chapter will discuss the influence of, say, Kantian or Schellingian thought on Hegel's development, it will not say what this thought was: the philosophical content is either missing or greatly reduced, only to be reprised in a later "skippable" philosophical chapter, with the attendant redundancy already noted. But if we are to read an intellectual biography, surely the intellectual content ought to be foremost; given Pinkard's ability to convey these ideas clearly, it is mystifying that he would choose to separate his historical and philosophical accounts. What can be gathered from the text as a whole is that the intellectual milieu in which Hegel lived was vitally important to the development of his system: would any reader want to miss this?

Significant rearrangement of the volume to make these sections cohere would have resulted in a text of more approachable length, eliminate needless repetition, maintain dramatic thrust, and move the philosophical material to the forefront where it belongs. Terry Pinkard surely has the skill to pull this off. In the meantime, I eagerly await his next philosophical volume.

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Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction

SIMON CRITCHLEY

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; 160 pages.

Continental philosophy, regarded in some analytic circles as an indulgence in what Stanley Rosen calls "wool-gathering and bathos," has often had a bad rap. In the respectable, if somewhat analytic, *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, we learn that existentialism, structuralism, and critical theory all "rely on dramatic, if not melodramatic, utterance rather than sustained, rational argument" (161), and that structuralism in particular has shot off "into intellectual outer space" with Derrida, whose deconstruction amounts to nothing less than "a *reductio ad absurdum* of philosophy" (162). The entry concludes that "there is really no perceptible convergence between the two philosophical worlds" (161), and intimates that this is all for the best.

In the face of such dismissal, it would be unsurprising if an English-language introduction to continental thought were to begin with a "set the record straight"

exculpatory agenda or somewhat defensive posture. But this is not the case with Simon Critchley's lovely little book. Critchley undertakes to explain why continental thought is itself an "area of dispute." While he argues that it nevertheless "constitutes a distinct set of philosophical traditions and practices ... too often ignored" (x) by analytic philosophers, he accomplishes this in a commendably even-handed and intelligent manner. Critchley writes of the dispute between continental and analytic schools of thought in a spirit of, if not reconciliation, at least mutual consideration and attention, unafraid to address what he sees as the weaknesses of each. His prose style is clear and engaging even when tackling complex ideas or presenting rigorous arguments. It is also touched by humor ("Heidegger and Derrida are great philosophers, but there is absolutely no point writing like them in English" [49]), which makes this book as inviting to those trained in philosophy as it is accessible to those who are not.

Critchley seeks to redraw the continental/analytic distinction along five thematic lines. Briefly, they are: (1) a genealogy of continental philosophy as emerging out of the German Idealist reception of Kant's critical project; (2) the centrality of the problem of nihilism and the theme of crisis; (3) a focus on the concepts of critique, emancipation, and praxis; (4) the notions of history and tradition as profoundly influencing argument and interpretation; and (5) an explanation and justification of antisecularism. These themes appear interwoven throughout the narrative of this volume, and it is impressive that Critchley manages to do them justice in such a short work.

The book characterizes continental thought as the two hundred year period from Kant to the present day. In Chapter 2, Critchley argues that an exclusive focus on the first *Critique* has led to a reading of Kant's major contributions as belonging to epistemology and "by implication" the philosophy of science. This reading, he claims, has "dominated the Anglo-American reception of Kant" (19). A shift to the third *Critique* brings with it a focus on the Kantian system as a whole, especially the relation between nature and freedom, theory and practice, and is the route followed by German Idealism and continental philosophy. This claim seems too easy when one considers the development of the idea of aesthetic autonomy from the *Critique of Judgment* and its centrality in analytic aesthetics through to the present day. But Critchley's point is not that the third *Critique* itself ushered in continental thought, but rather that a reading of all three *Critiques* leads to a sensitivity toward the systematic goals of the Kantian project, and these goals taken together have had a major influence on subsequent movements.

Critchley expands his argument by considering the reception of Kant's work and its criticism by such contemporaries as Hamann, Jacobi, and Fichte. The criticism was directed against the universality of reason—namely, that if reason can criticize all things, there must also be a metacritique of reason itself. But such a metacritique can lead to radical skepticism, nihilism, and doubt about everything, including the existence of God. This growing nihilism, Critchley

contends, is the idea that "best permits one to distinguish analytic and continental philosophy" (22).

Chapter 5 picks up this thread and attempts to demonstrate that recognition of the subject's freedom (inherited from Kant) goes hand in hand with that of the cognitive meaninglessness of the speculative claims of metaphysics and the collapse of moral certainty. But nihilism, as exemplified in Nietzsche's work, is "accompanied by the demand for" (84) its overcoming, and leads Critchley to examine both the theme of crisis and the centrality of the concepts of critique, emancipation, and praxis. Critchley argues that continental thought begins from an understanding of nihilism and the crisis of meaning; the response to this crisis is the "substantive problematic" (87) of continental philosophy.

Critchley enumerates various attempts to describe our existential predicament, from a crisis of faith (Kierkegaard) or the forgetfulness of Being (Heidegger) to a crisis of the sciences (Husserl and later Foucault) and the hegemony of instrumental rationality (Adorno and Horkheimer). He argues that these critiques led to the exploration of *non*-philosophical practices—Heidegger delved into poetic creation, Adorno into high modernist art, while Marx turned to political economy and Freud to the couch. It is indicative of continental thought, he concludes, that it "is concerned with relations to non-philosophy" (87). This contention is an oversimplification, however; Schopenhauer, for one, offered no emancipatory strategy, Nietzsche's could best be considered a two-edged sword, and nothing at all is said of Foucault or Derrida in this connection. Critchley at times sacrifices subtlety for the sake of painting a comprehensive picture of the whole. He should not be faulted for this, however. The role of an introduction is to encompass diverse thinkers and movements within the sweep of philosophical history and make seemingly disparate ideas cohere. Critchley excels at this task.

The goal of discussing nihilism is to return the reader to Chapter 1 (on the gap between knowledge and wisdom), and to prepare them for the final argument of Chapter 9 (on the marriage between theory and practice and the need for answers to the meaning of life within a scientific world). Critchley's concern is that "more than our personal peace of mind is at stake" (122) if we allow these gaps to grow, and that closing these gaps is the first step in any attempted meeting of the two philosophical worlds. Critchley's hope is that "philosophy might form an essential part of the life of a culture" (126), as it did for the ancients, and that achieving this requires dialogue and understanding between the disputatious realms of analytic and continental thought. This is a laudatory goal and it is executed with finesse. The present volume can serve as staple reading for students, and may equally serve as an intriguing model on which to design an introductory course in this area.

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