

BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDUS

Rethinking Facticity

Edited by François Raffoul and Eric Sean Nelson

Albany: SUNY Press, 2008; 383 pages.

This excellent book makes a notable addition to recent scholarship in hermeneutics, phenomenology, and contemporary continental thought. In particular, it enriches existing perspectives on Heidegger but also broaches new and unexplored lines of research by showing how “facticity,” a term coined by the young Heidegger, plays an important role in his early and late philosophy. More than a dozen original essays, some by foremost scholars in the area, trace the significance of facticity back to Dilthey and Husserl and forward to Sartre, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty, but also to Fanon and race theory, and current feminist, gender and post-colonial theory. As the editors put it, rethinking facticity means taking up a dimension of our being that “resists appropriation and reduction, whether theoretical or practical,” a region of experience that attests to an “alterity and passivity (i.e., finitude)” that is not constituted by, but challenges, transcendental subjectivity. (9) “Rethinking facticity” is thus a way of rethinking the very notion of experience in order to explore a wide range of ideas concerning language, history, birth and death, and the opacity and transparency of ethical being-in-the-world.

Readers familiar with *Being and Time* will recognise the term facticity (*Faktizität*) from the first division of the book, where it is understood as the thrownness of our existence in its three figures: moods, birth and ontological guilt. From Gadamer and Taminiaux to Habermas and Dreyfus, commentators have claimed that Heidegger privileges death over birth and mortality over natality, and that Dasein’s existence is oriented by its death. Contrary to such claims, this collection shows that Dasein’s facticity, as both self-explicating and as a “form of a habitual deep forgetting” (7), implies something far more ambiguous than aiming at one’s death as one’s own “end.” In facticity, “Dasein exists toward death, and Dasein exists toward birth”; “Dasein exists as stretching itself between birth and death such that it is the between of birth and death.” (8) In facticity, Dasein thus finds its life flowing outside of itself in birth and death, so facticity proves to be “the secret resource of appropria-

tion” even as it “indicates the *impossibility* and radical expropriation of the human being.” (8) The genuine contribution of this collection is its way of encouraging new work on Heidegger, by revealing facticity as a “veritable challenge to the very possibility of [identitarian] responsible agency and a free self-assumption of subjectivity in responsibility.” (7) This invites a revision to, and more in depth engagement with, Heidegger as a thinker of ethics.

The essays in this volume benefit from an excellent introduction by Raffoul and Nelson that surveys the problematic of facticity, showing its contemporary relevance and how it emerges as a philosophical idea of key importance for twentieth-century continental thought. The collection is divided into four parts, each offering an unique angle on Heidegger while engaging aspects of the multilayered notion of facticity. In the first part, “Phenomenology and Facticity,” Anthony J. Steinbock, Theodore Kisiel and François Raffoul defend Heidegger’s novel phenomenological concept of facticity. Steinbock’s detailed and careful work illuminates the late Husserl’s “tremendous preliminary work” on facticity, particularly the analysis of passive synthesis with its related emphasis on natality. Kisiel connects early Heidegger’s notion of facticity and formal indication to the later “formally indicative hermeneutics” of facticity that Heidegger develops in 1941, showing how Heidegger develops the latter against Fichte’s idealistic account of the “fact of consciousness.” Raffoul’s rich exegetical essay focuses on Heidegger’s course of 1928, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, emphasising the radical immanence of philosophy to life in the early Heidegger. Because of the immanence of philosophy to life, philosophy is not an external reflection on life but rather is immanent in life’s own movement outside of itself.

The second part, consisting of essays by Giorgio Agamben, Jean-Luc Nancy, Eric Sean Nelson and Rudi Visker, demonstrates how the hermeneutics of facticity in Heidegger’s thought of the 1920s influenced *Being and Time*. Agamben’s outstanding contribution draws a parallel between Dasein’s inauthentic and authentic being-toward-death and the disclosure and openness of what he calls the “passion of facticity.” (105) Notably, Agamben thus shows how, for Heidegger, finitude, fallenness and thrownness are not to be understood negatively, but positively as a distance from transcendence. Agamben does this by going back to the 1921–22 lecture course on Augustine to study the experience of existence’s movement of radical, “improper” expropriation, in which

Dasein thrusts itself outside of itself. Nancy's essay draws on *Being and Time*'s key formulation that for Dasein, to be does not mean to become what it is, but to be exposed to its having "to be." Nancy stresses Dasein as a "singular, unique possibility of forming/letting a proper meaning of the world...open." (114) Both Agamben and Nancy broach the question of originary ethics in Heidegger; the two concluding essays, by Nelson and Visker, further explore this possibility in relation to ethics in Levinas. Against Levinas' critique of the primacy of one's own death and the attack on the relationality of representational thinking in Heidegger, both Nelson and Visker go back to the structure of care to develop different arguments defending a non-normative ethics in Heidegger. For Nelson, *contra* Levinas, death is not "another relation," but a break that discloses an ethics of individuation and facticity: death as a "non-relational" possibility "cannot be ordered in the relationality of the world but places relationality itself into question." (136) For Visker, the key to Heidegger's response to Levinas is the questionability of Being, the "intransitive facticity" of Dasein that "'does not signify a what, (but) the way to be' of the being that it designates." (153–4)

Parts three and four explore facticity in ways that reveal its contemporary significance and offer a related critique of Heidegger. Robert Bernasconi's far reaching essay, which opens part three, thinks race in terms of facticity and reconsiders Sartre's and Fanon's existential theories of race, arguing that Sartre's concept of facticity is thicker and more encompassing than Heidegger's. Bernard Flynn's exegetical essay is devoted to the "fold" of the visible in Merleau-Ponty, arguing that the intertwining between "fact" and existence in his phenomenology of the visible resists the mastery of being that is still residual in Heidegger. Focusing further on Merleau-Ponty, Jacob Rogozinski argues that an "archifacticity" that inaugurates the intertwining of the body and the world is crucial to the phenomenology of perception. This intertwining is further elaborated as a universal tactile chiasm, a touch touching itself. In an excellent essay, David Pettigrew, following Lacanian psychoanalyst David Nasio, proposes that facticity connects the "unconscious body" with desire, *jouissance* and the *objet a*. Facticity, as immanent to the unattainability of the psychoanalytic "lost" object, limits desire and transforms the objects relating to the *objet a* into semantic figures. Yet, *contra* Lacan, these are not semblances of being, but involve an "unconscious

psychical tension,” which much like life itself, as a self-explicating fundamental fact, involves a hermeneutics of facticity.

In Part four, “Contemporary Perspectives,” Ed Casey, Namita Goswami, Patricia Huntington and Gregory Schufreider offer phenomenological reflections on facticity in critically responding to various dangers of epistemological objectification. Casey’s creative work on edges dwells on modes of facticity in art and aesthetics to show that an alternative temporality, which by its very nature obstructs “what is coming and to come”—the sudden, the surprising, the new—also constitutes artworks as edge-work: much like “cutting-edges,” artworks disturb set classifications. (274) Goswami’s careful and complex discussion of what she calls the “existence authoritarian” offers a strong parallel between Adorno and Heidegger on facticity. It opens new perspectives for exploring the facticity of Dasein, which not only provide a way of responding to Adorno’s critique of Heidegger but also permit a substantive critique of various strands of feminist and post-colonial constructivist theories that uncritically accept views of authentic representation (Spivak, Varadharajan, and Suleri). In a similar vein, Huntington’s intriguing essay turns to the practical aspects of living the hermeneutics of facticity as “life-embracing.” (325) Facticity is the indication of “life itself as something suffered,” for instance, the “facticity of being-thrown into a body, a sex, a family.” (324) Women’s responsibility for “imparting the shadowy legacy of irresolute bearing to children” (330) therefore opens Dasein’s existence as “being-exposed.” (325) Finally, Schufreider offers a lively discussion of the facticity of the sign and the facticity of writing itself showing how facticity depends on acts such as writing.

By showing how facticity is a positive resource for philosophy, this collection of works succeeds remarkably well in placing in a rich, new, and challenging context the much-debated Heideggerian problematic of inauthentic being and the lostness of the “they.” This is a lucid, intelligent and fruitful read for those interested in twentieth-century continental philosophy and Heidegger’s influence on it.

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Material Feminisms

Edited by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Heckman

Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008; 343 pages.

The ambitious project of *Material Feminisms* is to inaugurate a “material turn” in feminist theory. Reacting to the “linguistic turn” effected by poststructuralist feminist thought, this voluminous collection brings together a number of feminist luminaries to think through the possibilities for a “new settlement”: a new approach to theorising the interactions and “intra-actions” between nature and culture, materiality and signification, power and bodies, and the human and the more-than-human.

The editors diagnose a pervasive “retreat from materiality” in feminist theory. They attribute it, first, to the influence of poststructuralist thought, and second, to the more long-standing suspicion among feminist theorists toward “nature” (and naturalising arguments about gender, race, rights, and bodies). The contributors deftly engage these two clusters of arguments.

Their engagement with the first cluster seems animated by what Claire Colebrook calls the “scandal of Butler’s linguisticism” about the body—though arguments against Wendy Brown’s work on political identity and Joan W. Scott’s critique of evidentiary appeals to experience also figure prominently. (69) The editors note that “although there’s been a tremendous outpouring of scholarship about the body” in the last two decades, this work “has been confined to the analysis of discourses *about* the body.” (3) In light of this they ask, where is the material, lived, biological, or natural body in this research? Too much has been granted to language, and too little to matter. In widely varying ways, the authors contest the construction of what Karen Barad calls “materiality as either a given or a mere effect of human agency.” (145)

The second cause of the “retreat from materiality” is the deep suspicion of “nature” that pervades a great deal of feminist critique. As Vicki Kirby observes, it is “now axiomatic to eschew naturalizing arguments” in feminist theory. (217) These arguments are regarded as inherently conservative, essentialist, prescriptive, and normalising. But if “nature” has been deployed to oppressive ends, this is all the more reason to engage “with matter itself...[to] render biological determinism ‘nonsense.’” (241) Instead, the question of nature is “entirely displaced” in

feminist poststructuralist thought.” (220) The contributors in this collection argue that feminists need to reclaim materiality as a site of legitimate critical inquiry. That is, feminists need to ask after the agency of bodies and of more-than-human nature, if they are to engage the ethical and political questions facing us at a “toxic” historical moment.

Stacy Alaimo argues that all bodies are toxic at this point in history. (260) Produced by “science, industrialized culture, agribusiness, capitalist consumerism” (260), toxic bodies are an urgent problem for feminist theory: “the traffic in toxins reveals the interconnections” between political projects for environmental and social justice. (262) Lacking a feminist theory of materiality, or reducing the body’s inscription by power to a discursive process renders one unable to theorise this “traffic in toxins,” or its effects on human and more-than-human bodies. As Donna Haraway argues, at a time when techno-scientific projects like mapping—and therefore owning—the human genome constitute new frontiers for the logic of property, self-possession, and ownership, “the stakes are very unequal for life and death on the planet.” (173)

The essays are divided into three sections—though this division between “Material Theory,” “Material World,” and “Material Bodies” is undermined by the substantive arguments for recognising the “intra-action” between the more-than-human world and human bodies (especially in essays by Barad, Tuana, Siebers, Bost and Wilson). Given the highly theoretical tone of the whole collection, the appeal to “theory” as the unifying logic of the first section seems like an alibi for the vagueness of the essays in that section—Karen Barad’s remarkable essay on “Posthumanist Performativity,” reprinted here, is the exception. The subsequent essays, collected in sections two and three, evince that the project of “materializing feminism” is better served by careful, site-specific work than by generalisations about “matter,” evolution, and ontology. In this respect, the contributions of feminist theorists with training in the biological sciences prove edifying.

One of the strengths of the collection is its intensive engagement with previous feminist theory, demonstrating that feminist theory has matured beyond its early preoccupation with the masculine figures of the history of Western philosophy into a distinct, self-critical intellectual project. While some essays do engage Darwin, Bergson, Deleuze, and Latour, most respond to feminist thinkers like Anzaldúa, Barad, Brown, Butler, Gatens, Grosz, Haraway, Moraga, Scott, Sedgwick, and Wendell.

Material Feminisms consists of provocative essays that set out to push the limits of feminist thinking on materiality. Yet, I remain ambivalent about the extent to which the collection as a whole synthesises the best insights of poststructuralist critique and “materialism,” which remains nebulous and undefined as a methodology. Indeed, with a few exceptions, the collection reads like a poststructuralist treatment of “materiality,” rather than a materialist treatment of questions of feminist concern. This is a problem exacerbated by the lack of a sustained treatment of *materialist* feminism (in the Marxian sense), which is dismissed in the introduction as too narrow in its emphasis on “labor and class” to “encompass the materiality of human corporeality [and]...of nonhuman nature.” (6 n. 3) But questions of labour and class are not thematised in the collection, except for a few notable exceptions (for instance, Michael Hames-García’s “How Real Is Race.”) Indeed, “class” (which materialists argue is the most *material* of power relations) remains at the margins of this collection, perhaps because its connections to the body seem less “natural.” Readers who pick up the book seeking a contemporary, reinvigorated feminist materialism will be disappointed.

The iconoclastic tone of the collection may elide some important disagreements among its contributors. Indeed, the collection is inadequately reflexive about the lack of agreement or unity around important questions—Is “culture” inside “nature”? Or vice versa? Is ontology necessary for feminist politics? Is it possible to separate epistemological from ontological from ethical concerns? What is the status of biology in relation to lived bodies? In this sense, the collection exposes a problematic more than it decides it. Readers should not expect a coherent, consistent argument running throughout the fourteen chapters. On the other hand, the diversity makes it a highly teachable text (though a difficult one—it is hardly an accessible read for beginners!) for a graduate seminar in feminist theory, environmental philosophy, or contemporary continental thought.

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Meaning and Authenticity: Bernard Lonergan and Charles Taylor on the Drama of Authentic Human Existence

Brian Braman

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008; 138 pages.

In the introduction to *Meaning and Authenticity*, Brian Braman identifies as a prevalent cultural and philosophical problem the question of authenticity, or “whether we are indeed what we claim to be.” (58) Yet, this succinct book is not another interpretive reading of the usual authenticity suspects—the Romantics and the Existentialists—nor of the Frankfurt school and post-Heideggerians who drove the topic out of vogue in the mid-20th century. What makes Braman’s project unusual is his juxtaposition of two philosophers who are rarely considered together, comparing them on a topic for which neither is particularly well-known: Charles Taylor, one of Canada’s foremost philosophers, and Bernard Lonergan, a theologian with a small but devoted following. Both authors have something to say about authenticity, but the point of convergence is a Catholic orientation to ethics rather than a shared perspective on something like ontology. Braman’s book is divided into four chapters: the first explains the influential account of authenticity given by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, the middle two deal with each of the focus-authors in turn, and the fourth presents some comparison of Taylor and Lonergan.

Taylor is famous for his sweeping study of modern culture in *Sources of the Self* (1989), but delivers his most protracted musings on authenticity in the slim volume, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1991), which is much less a solution to a personal identity puzzle than it is a critique of moral relativism and the culture of narcissism. Taylor insists on the necessity of devoting one’s life to a self-transcending cause or norm. Lonergan discusses authenticity in the context of theology and moral obligation. He promotes five ethical imperatives, which if followed properly and consistently, are supposed to bring about authenticity: be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible, and be loving. Both Taylor and Lonergan diverge considerably from the Heideggerian account that is proposed as a backdrop, because Heidegger is concerned exclusively with the being of human beings, or “fundamental ontology.” The fact that neither author really wrestles with the problem of how to be oneself dogs Braman’s book in which he travels in concentric circles around an expected explanation of personal authenticity that never materialises. He

concludes on the penultimate page that “progress results from our being our true selves,” yet there has been little prior discussion of what it means actually to separate the “true” self from potential “false” interlopers. (98) Instead, Braman treats the quest for the authentic self as an ultimately religious experience akin to the quest for God, which is precisely what one would expect to find in Lonergan. Taylor, too, inflects his arguments with the religious, but not sufficiently for Braman, who favours Lonergan’s view because it is unabashedly religious, whereas Taylor’s is only “implicitly moral and religious.” (98)

A comparison between Taylor and Lonergan is Braman’s stated destination. The final chapter, “Dialogue and Dialectic,” contrasts the two thinkers with respect to several axes of inquiry that illuminate some of their similarities and differences: art, cognitional theory, and the human good. While there is an element of the dialogical in this comparison, I would not call it “dialectic”; this would imply that the two authors are somehow meaningfully opposed, yet complementary, to one another. On the contrary, Taylor and Lonergan overlap a good deal while remaining independent of one another. Lonergan’s account is correctly identified as the more thorough and specific one, but it seems to win Braman’s greater admiration at least as much by dint of its religiosity. Braman approvingly summarises Lonergan’s view as follows: “Falling in love with God is the fulfillment of what it means to be an authentic human being.” (69) Both supporters and detractors of the authenticity project in the 20th century would balk at this conclusion.

Braman is not unaware of the great scepticism with which many philosophers have approached authenticity. Some of the critiques of authenticity presented by the likes of Theodor Adorno are boldly stated in the Introduction and then hardly pursued. Braman skims over the devastating critiques of Heidegger to which his authors were reacting and declares that they “take seriously the...criticism of postmodernity” and triumph over it, without explaining how this is so. (7) For instance, to Adorno’s trenchant concern about the abstractness and pseudo-religiosity (or “aura”) any discussion of authenticity, Braman implies that Taylor’s and Lonergan’s accounts of authenticity escape this critique because they appeal to *actual* religiosity and specific religious commandments. Braman declares, siding with Lonergan, that “doing what is truly good finds its proper fulfillment in an act of love that finds itself expressed in families and communities, and in the response to the divine ground’s over-

whelming love that floods our hearts.” (59) Whatever the merits of this type of explanation, it hardly diffuses Adorno’s worry about concretising the meaning of authenticity.

Similarly, the threat of moral relativism and subjectivism, which Braman claims his authors skilfully circumvent, emerges all the more poignantly in his recounting of their views. In both cases, he says, authenticity is based on “inner conviction” (98)—a red flag for anyone concerned with substantiating an abstract term and escaping subjectivism. In Taylor, the attainment of authenticity depends on a non-descript “epiphany” whereby I come to be “moved” by some external good. This idea may have intuitive appeal, but only buttresses the view that the good and, consequently, authenticity, is subjective. Nonetheless Braman asserts that “the notion of a framing epiphany overcomes the relativism...of human reason.” (44) In Lonergan, meanwhile, authenticity happens “each time the person decides for what is truly worthwhile, what is truly good versus what is apparently good.” (66) Far from escaping it, Lonergan in fact ironically reprises the ungrounded decisionism and radical subjectivism of the French existentialists which were so maligned by later critics. Braman gives insufficient consideration to these tensions; he is strongly approving of Taylor and Lonergan without always acknowledging the strengths of their critics.

If one is to split hairs, there are also questionable uses of certain technical and translated terminology. For example, Braman uses “hermeneutic” or “empirical” when he appears to mean “phenomenological,” a move that obscures the significance of the “hermeneutic circle” that he mentions repeatedly; and, contrary to convention in Heidegger scholarship, he sometimes translates “*Angst*” as “dissolution,” and “*eigenste*” as “own most” (rather than “ownmost”), arguably botching the meaning of these key words. In part, these technicalities result from Braman’s choice of secondary sources, which are mostly selected from the fields of theological studies and Lonergan studies rather than from prominent mainstream historians of philosophy. There is nothing *ipso facto* objectionable about turning to a specific—even unconventional—literature for background, but perhaps Braman should be more forthcoming about his perspective.

Even as a secondary source lacking much critical analysis, there is of course something interesting and potentially valuable to be learned in this review of Lonergan’s and Taylor’s views on authenticity. While

it is clear that Lonergan's values are, for him, unachievable without faith in God, there is plenty of room for discussion of these virtues in more pluralistic terms, as well as of their relationship to personal identity and fulfillment. Taylor, meanwhile, has done more than almost any recent philosopher to stimulate discussion of the self in ethical and intersubjective terms. Taylor, Braman explains, "ends up grounding his notion of authenticity and his analysis of human intentionality in our common heritage. This social teleology is the horizon in which one finds one's ideal of authenticity." (86) Taylor is thus careful to evade the charges of solipsism and amorality that plagued some of his forerunners, and is able to champion ethical self-fulfillment in a society without a monolithic religion or moral code. Indeed, contrary to Braman's intuition, these pluralistic features of Taylor's thought make him far more instructive than Lonergan to many students of philosophy.

Meaning and Authenticity achieves some of what it sets out to do: it summarises and compares Taylor and Lonergan with a nod to Heidegger, even if it falls short of establishing a groundbreaking dialogue between them. Braman's project is interesting, but would perhaps be better executed under a different banner. The focus is not quite, as advertised, "whether we are what we claim to be," but to oversimplify, whether we believe in things that are bigger than ourselves. Ultimately, the metaphysical questions are deferred in favour of the ethical-religious, with the two featured authors providing different accounts of how to transcend oneself for the sake of some non-subjective good. Braman's explanation of these accounts poses more philosophical questions about the nature of the self than it resolves. *Meaning and Authenticity* may have limited appeal to a wider philosophical audience because of its marked departure from the traditional concerns that characterise most philosophical discussions of authenticity. Braman's uncritical approach to a religiously informed theory of ethics is a reasonable introduction to the thought of Taylor and Lonergan, but does little to advance scholarship on the problem of the self and how we ought to live.

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Concrete Reveries: Consciousness and the City
Mark Kingwell
Toronto: Viking, 2008; 292 pages.

With *Concrete Reveries* we have something of an anomaly. It is a book of philosophy with pictures and with active readers, whom the writer sometimes addresses in the second person. Its questions are also injunctions and its theses are suggestions that send us back toward our experience of urban reality. The reasons for such a renewed approach are offered in some of the opening claims: “Almost all of our models or metaphors for thinking about cities are inadequate” (11-2); “consider that cities are also, on this anti-inductive view, like persons. That is, they are forms of *embodied consciousness*.” (14) Embodiment is a central category of the book and it organises its subject matter. Just as, daily, we escape the design of the grid in cities like New York by walking the streets and entering into relationships with passersby and buildings, we escape the form of the book and the traditional form of philosophical writing by being constantly invited to reconsider our experience of the city and the ideas we use to reflect upon it.

Kingwell uses the notion of embodiment and adopts a phenomenological approach in order to convince us that just like the concrete we mould into square towers or flowing Guggenheims, cities are what we make them. Cities are only ruins when they are abandoned; but as their inhabitants, we constantly shape them. Against the tendency to abandon their planning to others, the author suggests, we should transform our cities to make them into public spaces where justice will become possible. There is a constant evolution in tone throughout *Concrete Reveries*, following the aesthetic, political and philosophical dimensions of our experience of the city and of our reflection upon it.

The first two chapters are lyrical, almost poetic. In the movement of Kingwell’s prose, it is urban life that is manifested. Cities *appear* to us in our embodied existence: they can stop us or help our movement from one place to the next; they can be orderly, be patrolled by one hundred thousand police officers, or leave sixteen percent of the world’s population out of the range of the State and its services. They can be violent and treacherous, or they can foster cooperation. Hard or soft like concrete or glass, they are also the shapes and patterns they take under the rain. Above all, they are public *places*, and Kingwell invites us to renew the

way we inhabit them. The ever-present echoes of Walter Benjamin suit the theme. While New York City is not historically layered like Paris, its depth still takes our gaze beyond the grid, beyond streets and the buildings, to a manner of experiencing them that Kingwell, following Benjamin, likens to dreams.

We can take as an example the activity of walking through New York City. There is energy everywhere around us and we barely control our own direction: “New York, like all cities, is a collective experiment in barely averted chaos, a play of vast possibility within the mapped order of the grid. It flows, and that is amazing, because it should not.” (36) There, the pace of walking and the constant bare avoidance of dangers have quickened far beyond the shocks registered in Paris by Benjamin. Kingwell repeats these experiences through his prose. As we read, we can *feel* how Paris is still the city of *flâneurs* and how New York has no place for them; we encounter the writer as we would were we to walk directly behind him around others and vehicles, espousing his path, passing into his body, in stride.

Benjamin is not the only philosophical figure lending material to our thinking about the city. In the third chapter, postmodernism reappears as an architectural movement with its own public reach, when museums erase the narrative of art history by becoming works of art themselves—as buildings that “might as well remain empty.” (73) Museums are but the most obvious illustration of a trend toward the monumental and the conceptual in architecture. Beyond postmodernism and its theoretical architecture lie the inhabitation of public space and the contribution of architecture to the good life. After all, buildings cannot be ignored like works of art, and they incessantly shape our social relations. Public space, Kingwell suggests, would then gain by being understood from the point of view of architecture: inhabited (rather than abstracted as is the case in the political philosophy of Habermas and Rawls, or even Arendt), embodied, felt, occupied—and although mastered only by some, lived by all. And so through this conceptualisation of an embodied public space, political philosophy would be able to finally come back to the world we inhabit, to what belongs to us all because it affects us all.

In the fourth chapter, Kingwell’s *Reveries* turn away from concrete experience as the author takes on the theme of the inventive possibilities opened by non-democratic states. The change of style in the description of rampant capitalism brings the focus onto the monstrous pos-

sibilities of architecture without constraints or rules and the emptiness of the space within and around the products of buildings that were never meant to be inhabited. And, again, the author's prose adapts to its subject in order to make us feel how Shanghai takes city life further still than New York by turning shocks into full-out collisions and how, with the emergence of Shanghai, non-democratic politics allowed for the apparition of a new form of urban life.

The following chapter, in a similar manner, loses the directedness of the first three. Dealing with consciousness, it turns toward the philosophical tradition, a new orientation that echoes and continues the criticism of postmodern architecture and of capitalism: "The contemporary discourses of consciousness, architecture and politics are almost completely unknown to one another, despite that their interdependence seems obvious." (152) With an explicit reference to philosophy, the author turns, against dualism, toward the idea of a spatially oriented self, and from there, jumps to the way consciousness shapes cities, before reverting back to the philosophical critique of unsatisfying streams of thought. In other words, philosophy becomes the topic, rather than being a way to approach the city. Yet here again, the approach fits the subject. Kingwell tells us how architecture tends to become the work of pure consciousness and to forget the embodied aspect of cities, that is, the fact that we not only live in them, but that *we live them*. Like the disembodied conscience of modern philosophers, we are becoming placeless as we lose our grip on urban space.

It is fitting, then, that the discussions on boundaries and thresholds that follow in the sixth chapter become so detached from the starting point of the book, that is, their illustrations have nothing to do with the city, but, for example, with baseball. However, it quickly becomes obvious that the move away from the concreteness of cities was merely a play on thresholds: through global capitalism, embodied consciousness, circles, psychoanalysis and porches, we come back to the experience of the city with a renewed perspective. In the seventh chapter, the figure of the threshold finally materialises. Exploring maps takes us back to the streets from which they were purposely abstracted: after all, we are thinking about turning spaces into embodied places.

According to Kingwell, we must find again our sense of threshold in order to perceive thresholds and finally cross them. We must find our likeness in the places we inhabit, defined like us by the crossing

of thresholds, those lines that only exist insofar as they are being crossed: “Limits squeeze us; they make us feel the edges of our interiority. Every interior you enter or inhabit challenges you to ask who you are, this apparently individual consciousness among others.” (211) Attempts to divide what is inside and outside no longer differ from the division between what is in sight and what has been put away; contamination, the return of the excluded over the threshold, is a constant possibility. In the face of the impossibility of purity, intellectual and political control shows its limits—as *those limits are being crossed*. Only then, when thresholds are recognised for what they are and when our space is finally shared, can we start talking about a just, non-exclusive city.

Closing the book, we can hope for further developments on what conceptual architecture can offer, as opposed to theoretical (or a-conceptual?) architecture; on the relation between thresholds and disgust in architecture and politics; or most importantly, as is only suggested in the eighth and last chapter, on the possibility of justice within cities, and on the possibilities for reflecting on justice based on our urban experiences. Nevertheless, Kingwell’s writing indicates that certain reflections demand we change directions and tone. As pedestrians we find ourselves in new neighbourhoods without warning, looking at something different yet related and tied to the streets where we were just walking; as readers, we find in Kingwell’s *Reveries* a concrete space with philosophers’ names as signposts and theories as storefronts, all of which orient us without ever pulling us out of our environment, all of which send us back to our tasks and our preoccupations. Throughout all such sketches and detours, *Concrete Reveries* calls for what is always only evoked in dreams: development, solidity. The resulting feeling of airiness and allusiveness allows Kingwell to capture something of the elusiveness of shared public spaces.

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The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière: Creating Equality

Todd May

University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2008; 224 pages.

Todd May has written, as he tells us in the closing paragraph, not a politics but a way of thinking about politics. This difference is important, for given the work's guiding distinction between passive equality and active equality, any programmatic statements about how politics should proceed would undermine the work's overall message that people themselves must decide the nature of struggle. May's project takes aim at a particularly American malady: the absence of real participation in the creation of common life. He traces this to a number of sources, but most of his energy is devoted to a critique of liberalism for the way it conceives of citizenship in negative terms, that is, according to a distributive paradigm where equality is something *given to* the people rather than actively created. In the first chapter, May reads Rawls, Nozick, and Amartya Sen to clear the ground for the active version of equality that follows. These readings are subtle and clear, even as they trace commonalities between these different thinkers. May critiques their suggestion that equality should be "guaranteed by the state rather than expressed by the people." (20) As May says several times, equality is not distributed, but taken. To receive equality is to be less than equal. "Distribution itself is of the police order of inequality." (73) His book, then, is designed to challenge the prevailing notions of equality, both in political theory and practice, and to construct an account wherein equality is conceived in radically democratic terms. This is the import of the work of Jacques Rancière, with whom May fashions his account: Rancière provides a deeper, more robust account of equality.

May's book has at least two major aims. On the one hand, it is an introduction to the political thought of Rancière, and, on the other, it is the attempt to bring these ideas to bear upon contemporary discourses and political struggles. May achieves these aims, however, in an unusual way. He introduces readers to Rancière's major ideas without constructing a commentary. Throughout, he discusses, among other things, the landscape of political philosophy, his own participation in struggles for racial equality in the American South, and the machinations of the Bush administration. This makes for a lively read, and an important original work. The combined effect is that May walks *with* readers through some

of Rancière's contributions, and thereby, one might argue, avoids instituting the position of the explicative master of whom Rancière is so critical. While from a political point of view this is commendable, it is questionable how well this strategy serves readers with little familiarity with Rancière's works. May relies upon some notions that for many may remain underdeveloped, for example, Rancière's theorisation of the equality of intelligences and his analysis of the exchanges between politics and aesthetics.

The former idea was developed in Rancière's book on the revolutionary pedagogue Joseph Jacotot, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, a text to which May alludes but all too briefly, given that it is the bedrock of Rancière's thoughts on equality. Jacotot, faced with desperate circumstances, developed a method for teaching what one does not know. In Rancière's telling, his practice provides the occasion for displacing forms of pedagogy that only succeed in impressing upon students their intellectual dependency. A closer reading of that work by May would provide a fuller picture of what is meant by active equality as well as some interesting material for thinking about political practices of equality. It is here, in the elaboration of this ethics, that Jacotot could further the contemporary political imagination by providing a richer sense of what becomes possible under the presupposition of equality. That said, May shows remarkable sensitivity to the risks intellectuals run when they struggle alongside oppressed peoples, and there are many compelling passages about what solidarity means when conceived from the standpoint of radical equality.

Given Rancière's analysis of the aesthetic dimensions of politics, and the role he ascribes to art in creating scenes of dissensus, many of Rancière's readers will be surprised to find little mention of these recent interventions in May's work. It is always somewhat specious to critique a book for what is not in it, and May's project is not intended to be a survey of Rancière's forty years of intellectual production. Nevertheless, I think a consideration of aesthetics is relevant to May's study. In the first instance, Rancière's writings on politics show how participation is, to some degree, an aesthetic question. Not to be confused with Benjamin's thesis about the aestheticisation of politics, the aesthetics of politics expresses the idea that politics is a struggle over what it means to have a voice. The *demos* become the subject of politics when they struggle against the oligarchs' refusal to acknowledge their full possession of the

logos, and thus their right to fully participate in community. As Rancière explains in *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (1999), “Politics is primarily conflict over the existence of a common stage and over the existence and status of those present on it.” (*Disagreement*, 26–7) For Rancière, politics consists of creating the conditions through which those thought to be unequal demonstrate their equality. May considers politics as a form of creation, but it would be interesting to hear him reflect upon what dissensus borrows from aesthetics and thus what art might contribute to contemporary political movements. Interestingly enough, Rancière frequently cites art as integral to the creation of equality. One of the lessons we can draw from his work, from *The Nights of Labor* to his most recent writings, is that aesthetic experience is one way marginalised peoples convince themselves and others of their equality. The important essay, “The Emancipated Spectator,” published in *Artforum* in March 2007, even argues that spectatorship itself is a type of *activity* that undoes hierarchical forms of community.

May develops Rancière’s contributions to political theory by placing his thought alongside various theoretical accounts of anarchism. His third chapter gives substance to the oft-repeated claim that Rancière’s politics is a type of anarchism. May’s central claim is not that Rancière is an anarchist, but that the trajectory of anarchism provides a means of understanding Rancière’s sense of equality, as well as the analytical priority he ascribes to the political concept of domination, rather than the economic category of exploitation. However, I wonder why, given that Rancière’s references are to Greek democracy and nineteenth-century workers’ movements, May does not cite these as sources and use them to fill out the conception of active equality. There are many instances where this would provide readers with a fuller sense of Rancière’s understanding of politics. It could bolster May’s efforts to resolve some of the normative questions—and here May is at his best—that arise with respect to Rancière’s work.

I was struck, in particular, by May’s discussion of whether or not Rancière can consistently claim the demos *should* act on the presupposition of equality. (117–21) If Rancière is simply describing democratic action, there is little problem but also little reason to act. If, however, he offers normative reasons for why people are obliged to struggle under the banner of equality, he runs the risk of reinstating the theoretical privilege rejected in his break with Althusser. May solves the dilemma by ar-

going, “There is no normative obligation to create democratic politics, but the existence of a democratic politics introduces norms into a situation where they did not previously exist.” (120) I agree that norms are created *in* the movement of politics and do not preexist it. Indeed, in Rancière’s presentation of Greek democracy, it is through the *demos*’ struggle that equality is invented to combat domination. I have never, however, been troubled by Rancière’s role in articulating this position because I have always viewed his efforts as a contribution to the *demos*’ continuing process of self-definition. Rancière does not speak to or for the *demos*, but with it. This is not to reduce his position to one of description, nor to ignore its normative claims. The universality that belongs to equality will re-emerge wherever a group is struggling against oppression because the part of those with no part possesses little else to deploy. Rancière’s theoretical clarity facilitates those struggles not by dictating the terms in which they must be waged, but by outfitting them with resources that emerge from the inside of the democratic struggle. He can, therefore, make these claims in the same fashion as all others who inscribe equality within Western institutions and discourses.

These differences by no means detract from a fine study that is a valuable contribution to our understanding of Rancière’s politics. It is remarkable for its ability to situate Rancière with respect to both European philosophical discussions and Anglo-American accounts of politics and meta-ethics. Rancière’s texts are deepened by these encounters. Throughout, May demonstrates a tremendous sensitivity to these debates and composes many nuanced arguments that extend the range of Rancière’s thought. His work develops Rancière’s own onto an activist plane, and May has written a timely book of ethics for those who struggle with and for equality.

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Contemporary Italian Philosophy: Crossing the Borders of Ethics, Politics, and Religion.

Edited by Silvia Benso and Brian Schroeder.

Albany: SUNY Press, 2007; 306 pages.

English-speaking philosophers have known for some time that they should pay more attention to Italian thinkers, that Italy represents an under-valued and often omitted perspective in the intellectual development of Europe after World War II, and that beyond the most familiar names (Eco, Agamben, Negri and Vattimo) there stands a rich and diverse body of work that only rarely receives its due in the English-speaking world. These concerns have been fully answered in a collected volume of work that is as overdue as it is timely: *Contemporary Italian Philosophy: Crossing the Borders of Ethics, Politics, and Religion* is the product of the diligence and expertise of its co-editors, Silvia Benso and Brian Schroeder.

The 306-page volume succeeds primarily in its ability to frame the scope and importance of Italian philosophy as practiced by the generation of scholars who came of age during the 1960s and who remain to this day the standard-bearers for Italian thinking. The editors' preface sets the tone of the work—describing the milieu from which this project emerges and outlining the rather daunting task of introducing an audience to a tradition of thinking that spans many decades and involves a multitude of motivations, ideals, and figures. While the editors willingly admit that this is neither the first attempt to introduce Italian philosophy nor a comprehensive one due to the absence of many key figures from the same generation (as well as younger thinkers), they are nonetheless successful in their primary goal—to introduce Italian philosophy in a manner that reflects its unique historical, cultural, and intellectual lineage. More than a document of the giants of Italian thought, this work sets the stage for continued research into the many contemporary Italian thinkers who are the worthy students and followers of the individuals collected in this volume.

The Introduction by Maurizio Pagano provides an essential historical rubric for understanding what happened to Italian philosophy after World War II and how this climate produced the thinkers whose essays are contained in this volume. One not only gains the information needed

to trace the broad historical arc from Croce, Gentile, and Gramsci to the present day, but more importantly one is introduced to the influential thinkers and teachers who would shape Italian philosophy after the war: Nicola Abbagnano, Norberto Bobbio, Enzo Paci, Augusto del Noce and Luigi Pareyson (to name a few). Pagano's essay identifies the conflict between religious and secular thought (a split that mirrors all of Italian culture) as integral to the development of Italian philosophy, one that in the convergence of philosophy and theology today faces the new challenge of the culture wars and globalisation. Pagano's assessment of this situation sets the conceptual tone of this volume, as it seems that in order for Italian thinking to confront the challenges of the globalised world, it can move forward only by engaging its own history.

The work is divided into three parts, each containing essays organised around a particular theme. While I cannot comment on each essay, it is worth noting that Benso and Schroeder have used the organisation of this volume to highlight some of the signature moments and methodologies in recent Italian thinking.

The first part, "Marking the Borders: Historical Legacies," exemplifies the highly theoretical approach that Italian thinkers take when reflecting upon the legacy of philosophy and the crisis that it faces today. Of note is Sergio Givone's first publication in English, "Philosophy, Poetry, and Dreaming," which engages the issue of "truth become fable" through a reading of Nietzsche back to Vico and forward to Adorno and Horkheimer. Likewise, Giovanni Ferretti's investigation of "Philosophy and Christian Theology Today" brings the unique Italian perspective—and philosophical lineage—to bear on problems that have once again become relevant in Continental engagements with religion and theology. These essays, along with the contributions by Vincenzo Vitiello and Carlo Sini, provide a rich background of ideas that accentuate the more well-known but often decontextualised hermeneutic theory of Gianni Vattimo, whose seminal essay, "The Ontology of Actuality," appears in this volume for the first time in English.

The second part, "Crossing the Borders: Current Thematizations," traces out the fragile and contentious space that the human inhabits between the finite and the transcendent. In so doing, the essays demonstrate the various ways that the lineage of Kant, Husserl, and Heidegger is both embraced and rejected in Italian thinking. In "Transcendental without Illusion," the late Marco Maria Olivetti presents his idea

of the “Third Person” that was central to his thinking before his untimely death in 2006. Olivetti reformulates transcendental metaphysics by replacing the interrogative “what?” with “who?” that responds to an anterior intersubjectivity and thereby points to our “responsibility for responsibility” in the figure of the absent third person. Salvatore Natoli, in his essay “Finitude and Responsibility,” meditates upon technics, risk, and the Aristotelean concept of the “mean” in an attempt to ground an ethics in the unique encounters that humans face in the day-to-day of this era.

The third part, “Opening the Borders: The Appeal of the World,” demonstrates the very powerful and diverging ways in which Italian thinkers bring their unique theoretical commitments to bear on what are the most politically inspired and relevant essays of the collection. While each touches upon issues of great importance today—delusion, globalisation, gender, justice and virtue—the overall effect of this part, and perhaps the entire collection, is one that is best addressed in the final essay of the book. Massimo Cacciari’s “Names of Place: Border” presents the *aporias* that surround the idea of border and place. To equate the two terms is to embrace the very positive dilemma that this book, and perhaps Italian philosophy as it is construed here, faces in relation to its neighbors, both Continental and analytic: that defining the place of Italian philosophy means, in one sense, to bring it finally into the fold of other, more identifiable traditions, to move its borders, to change its space.

Such a movement might truly be the essence of the Italian thinking: powerfully *attuale* or “of the times” while remaining theoretical and undeniably unique while nonetheless communal in that it understands philosophy as integral to the life and success of the finite individual engaged in the *polis*. In this sense, it is a truly political thinking at home in the public square rather than exiled from it. And yet, given the direction this volume ultimately takes, figures like Agamben and Negri seem to be the most obvious omissions in this collection. Moreover, despite the expansive view provided by the authors collected here, one might still long for the more recent excursions Italian thinkers have made into analytic philosophy and psychology, or even the exceptional work currently being done by the students of the contributors.

These concerns aside, Benso and Schroeder are to be commended for providing what is not the first, but certainly the most comprehensive and essential collection of Italian thinkers in English to date.

If we have yet to understand the valuable contributions made by Italian thinkers in the well-trodden paths of Continental philosophy, the essays provide a valuable set of new itineraries, and perhaps even a breath of *aria fresca* to enliven our older ones. This collection documents the wealth of a generation of Italian thinking and positions us eagerly on the border of new generations of thinking yet to come.

Robert T. Valgenti, Lebanon Valley College

Issues in Interpretation Theory

Edited by Pol Vandavelde

Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2006; 299 pages.

This volume offers a variety of loosely connected papers by scholars who participated in the seminar on phenomenology and hermeneutics at Marquette University over the past few years. The essays pertain in some cases to hermeneutic theory and in the rest to various issues on the general theme of interpretation. The title is slightly misleading; if one wishes to read a volume on what is new in hermeneutics, one will not find it here. It is, however, a rather good collection and relatively even in quality for a volume of this kind. It is better approached as a relatively thick journal issue than a volume with a clearly discernible theme. The contributors are Jacques Taminiaux, Stephen Watson, Ronald Bruzina, Hans Rainer Sepp, David Vessey, Keith D'Souza, Paul Gyllenhammer, David Ingram, D. R. Koukal, Kenneth Maly, and Anthony Steinbock. The essays cover a broad range of themes and figures, including Sartre, Beckett, Royce, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Vico, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and, of course, Heidegger. The volume also includes a rather perfunctory, two and a half page foreword by the editor, which serves no purpose that I can see.

The essays by Vessey, Maly, Gyllenhammer, and D'Souza are among the stronger contributions. In his well-written piece, "Engaging Across Traditions: Royce and Gadamer on Interpretation," David Vessey takes up a few questions regarding the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Josiah Royce and the relation between them. As Vessey explains, Royce explicitly took up the question of interpretation in *The Problem of Christianity* (1913) and gave a surprisingly nuanced, phenomenological ac-

count. While it never attracted Gadamer's notice, Royce's pragmatic conception of interpretation is not incommensurable with philosophical hermeneutics, Vessey argues. His essay pursues some areas of possible rapprochement between Royce and Gadamer without attempting any straightforward compatibilism. The essay also finds Vessey engaging in some well-reasoned criticism of Kenneth Stickers' treatment of the same theme.

D'Souza's paper interprets Gadamer in relation to a philosopher of more obvious affinity than Royce: Paul Ricoeur. D'Souza's contribution, titled "Ricoeur's Narrative Hermeneutics in Relationship with Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics: Continuity and Discontinuity," argues that Ricoeur's "triple-mimesis" in *Time and Narrative* can be read not only as consistent with related concepts in Gadamer's *Truth and Method* but as a reformulation of the same. Ricoeur's concept of "prefiguration" importantly resembles Gadamer's "effective history" while "configuration" for Ricoeur shares some features of Gadamer's "mimesis"; finally, Ricoeur's notion of "refiguration" may be compared to Gadamer's "application," although "in the area of application, Ricoeur takes structural, critical and morally normative criteria associated with practical action far more seriously than Gadamer." (163)

Throughout this paper, the author makes a more convincing, if unsurprising, case for continuity than discontinuity. The discontinuity D'Souza sees pertains in part to Ricoeur's sympathy for the hermeneutics of suspicion and to Gadamer's ostensible opposition to it. In speaking of suspicion and critique D'Souza repeats uncritically an old caricature of Gadamer as "averse to [critical] analysis." (161) As he writes, "unlike Gadamer, Ricoeur would maintain that any narrative should in principle be open to a critical assessment," while for the former texts may be treated only as "the repository of wisdom with which to dialogue." (161) It may be time to put this caricature to rest, but this essay does not do so.

Maly's paper, titled "Emergence and Interpretation," finds him engaging in some rather good Heidegger interpretation, particularly as it concerns "A Dialogue on Language" and *Contributions to Philosophy*. Maly's prose is impenetrable to anyone not well versed in Heidegger, but those who are will find it a significant contribution and accompaniment to his recent book, *Heidegger's Possibility: Language, Emergence—Saying Be-ing* (2008). Against certain postmodern critiques that continue to speak, as Maly puts it, of either "arbitrary 'construction' or interpreta-

tion,” he makes the case for “a more refined understanding of how things are, including the convergence of emergence and interpretation, convergence of what shows itself and the saying/showing of that showing.” (268–9) The theme of emergence and enowning is especially well treated in this essay, although in terms rather difficult to paraphrase. I therefore cite Maly again: “In the saying that hermeneutics does, ‘emergence *and* interpretation’ becomes the onefold of emergence that enowns the hermeneutic of enowned Da-sein. Be-ing as emergence and thinking/saying as hermeneutics *is the originary turning of enowning.*” (269)

Paul Gyllenhammer addresses “The Question of (In)Tolerance in Heidegger’s Account of World-Disclosure.” This paper is a step or two down from Maly’s in terms of originality. Gyllenhammer argues that “an engagement with foreign ways of existing is a necessary condition for becoming aware of one’s own historical limits and, consequently, for being authentic in Heidegger’s sense.” (168) Tolerance of and interaction with foreign ways of life are conditions of the possibility of an awareness of our hermeneutic situation. This suggests a Heideggerian affinity to virtue ethics, Gyllenhammer suggests. The virtue of tolerance “stems from its function in drawing us to an awareness of who we are: historically finite beings.” (196) With the exception of the quick reference to virtue ethics, this is not a startling hypothesis, although the author does at least an adequate job of demonstrating his case. In the event that any were in doubt about the value of tolerance, this essay advances a persuasive argument on its behalf.

Overall, this volume offers some very competent scholarship even while it does not provide a great deal that is new. Its contribution to phenomenology and hermeneutics may be modest, but as is so often the case with collections of this kind, the stronger essays make it worthwhile reading.

Paul Fairfield, Queen’s University

After Finitude

Quentin Meillassoux

Translated by Ray Brassier with an Introduction by Alain Badiou

London: Continuum, 2008; 148 pages.

Having only recently begun to grapple with the complex and demanding work of Alain Badiou, the English speaking philosophical world now faces an equally formidable challenge in the work of his students. Leading the pack in this regard is *After Finitude*, a short, conceptually dense work by Quentin Meillassoux. *After Finitude* rehearses a number of key Badiouan themes, most notably, the need for a resurrection of ontology. However, while Badiou looks to ontology as a means of grounding a theory of politics, Meillassoux looks to ontology, somewhat more traditionally perhaps, as a means of accounting for the possibility of objective knowledge.

Meillassoux's point of departure consists of a blanket characterisation of contemporary philosophy. His position is that all of contemporary philosophy is under the sway of what he calls "correlationism." This philosophical outlook is recognisable for its core conviction: the world is only insofar as it is related to us, and we are only insofar as we are related to the world. While relatively uncontroversial within the world of philosophy, Meillassoux argues that this viewpoint forces the philosopher into a confrontation with the world outside of philosophy. Specifically, he argues that to the extent that we endorse correlationism, we are obliged to reject the results of empirical science. Since empirical science aims at producing results concerning the world *as it really is*, one cannot dismiss the notion of an independently subsisting world without simultaneously dismissing everything that science tells us about that world. This problem, for Meillassoux, becomes particularly acute in the case of what he calls "ancestral statements" (10), that is, statements concerning the world as it existed prior to the emergence of human consciousness. Indeed, since there can be no question of an experience of the big bang, or the emergence of organic life, it would seem to follow from the correlationist position that such events are simply fictional.

Now, Meillassoux does admit there are philosophers for whom this apparent disjuncture between correlationism and empirical science does not represent a contradiction. Such philosophers would happily admit that science touches on ancestral realities. They would simply add

that these ancestral realities exist only *for us*. Thus, the big bang is not an event that took place 13 billion years ago. Rather, it is an event which is *given to us* as having taken place 13 billion years ago. For Meillassoux, though, this maneuver is insufficient, and not simply because it suggests that empirical scientists are fundamentally mistaken concerning the nature of their enterprise. Instead, it is insufficient in that it evades the central question: did the big bang happen or not? Or, more generally: are the events studied by the empirical sciences simply events *for* consciousness or do they have an independent validity? If the former, then the philosopher need not pay any kind of lip service to empirical science; she can continue to discount its apparent ontological insight as an illusion of the natural attitude. If the latter, however, the philosopher is obliged not simply to acknowledge the results of the empirical sciences, but to reflect on science's ability to produce statements about events that are divorced in principle from the possibility of experience. Seeing in the first of these alternatives an abdication of philosophical responsibility, and in the second an urgent summons to philosophical investigation, Meillassoux opts for the second.

In taking on this task, then, Meillassoux promises an answer to the question of how we are able to get outside of ourselves. For obvious reasons, Meillassoux cannot adopt a Cartesian solution to this problem and assert that our knowledge of the external world is guaranteed by a non-deceitful God. Nor can he ignore the correlationist challenge altogether and simply insist dogmatically on the legitimacy of our intuitive metaphysics. Instead, Meillassoux has to find a "post-correlationist" answer to this problem. He has to identify a principle that is consistent with correlationism, but which nevertheless allows for the elaboration of a reality external to the correlation. Given the paradoxical nature of this imperative, it is perhaps not surprising that Meillassoux's 'speculative' response is somewhat paradoxical in its own right. According to Meillassoux, the sole principle which can provide a foundation for the empirical sciences is the principle of absolute contingency. Only by affirming, as an ontological fact, the non-necessity of every law and every entity is it possible to account for science's purchase on external realities.

How, then, does the principle allow for a philosophical rehabilitation of the empirical sciences? Unfortunately, beyond showing that absolute contingency implies neither spiraling chaos nor absolute oblivion, and that it is, therefore, at least minimally consistent with the orderly

universe that is the object of the empirical sciences, Meillassoux offers little in the way of a response to this question, setting it aside for development in future work. This is regrettable, since the distance between the highly abstract principle of absolute contingency and the far more tangible results of empirical science is considerable, and one would like to have some indication of the means by which Meillassoux proposes to traverse it. This problem is compounded when we discover that this is not the only instance in which Meillassoux mortgages his entire philosophical project on an implausible future endeavor.

Despite having suspended the constructive aspect of his project, Meillassoux is nevertheless able to draw a number of significant deconstructive consequences from the principle of absolute contingency. Taking up a number of seemingly intractable philosophical problems, he shows how these problems “deflate” once we take this principle on board. Hume’s famous problem of induction, for example, remains a problem only insofar as we presume that causal necessity is real. Once we have allowed for the possibility that there is no necessary correlation between cause and effect (meaning that the correlation between cause and effect is *absolutely contingent*) then the problem of locating an epistemological or metaphysical ground for this correlation vanishes. Similarly, the question ‘why is there something rather than nothing?,’ which Wittgenstein placed in the category of the “mystical,” becomes redundant once we have abandoned the assumption that there is some reason underlying the existence of the universe.

To the problems raised by the related question “why this universe rather than another?,” Meillassoux offers a considerably less straightforward response. Like its counterpart, this question is generally invoked to motivate a providential conception of the universe. By raising the possibility that things might have turned out otherwise, it encourages us to wonder at the secret necessity that allowed our particular universe to prevail. Accordingly, Meillassoux’s first line of attack against this cosmological query consists in drawing attention to its unsubstantiated “necessitarian” premise. In this case, however, Meillassoux goes further, attempting to show that the very idea that things might have turned out otherwise is unsustainable—and that our universe must consequently be seen not as a miracle or a divine gift, but as an indifferent fact.

The mechanics of this demonstration can be glossed fairly succinctly, and will allow us to bring into view a potentially serious prob-

lem. First, Meillassoux shows that the question “why this universe rather than another?” implies a conception of possibility as absolutely unlimited. Then, appealing to axiomatic set theory, he shows that the idea of unlimited possibility is paradoxical. The problem that Meillassoux runs into here is that in the same moment that he invalidates unlimited possibility, he deprives the principle of absolute contingency of its necessary corollary: the principle that *anything is possible*. In other words, by demonstrating that possibility cannot be unlimited, he implies that *something* is necessary, which means that contingency cannot be absolute. Seeking to resolve this problem, Meillassoux issues another promissory note. Among other objectives, he proposes in future work to show that the kind of unlimited possibility proper to his philosophical system is simultaneously unlimited and non-paradoxical. Or, to use Meillassoux’s own rather mystifying language: he proposes to show that the “possible as such” corresponds to the “Cantorian non-all.”

Given that this avenue of research is not pursued in any detail, we can do little more here than assent. If Meillassoux is indeed able to show that the possible as such corresponds to the Cantorian non-all, then perhaps his philosophical system may escape contradiction. One worries, however, that by assenting to every logical escape hatch that Meillassoux devises, one is not also assenting to the elaboration of a somewhat *ad-hoc* philosophical system—an extended exercise in evading rival theories rather than a coherent system in its own right. This observation is, of course, aesthetically motivated to a certain extent: one expects a philosophical system to unfold gracefully, rather than in a jarring series of left turns. However, given that Meillassoux, following Badiou, has taken mathematics as his model of philosophical rigour, it is perhaps not unreasonable to expect from him a corresponding degree of mathematical elegance. That Meillassoux has pitched his enterprise against the eminently intuitive “correlationist” notion that we are “always already” bound up with the world makes this imperative all the more pressing.

Evan Clarke, Boston College

Fredric Jameson: Live Theory

Ian Buchanan

New York: Continuum, 2006; 140 pages.

Ian Buchanan's *Fredric Jameson: Live Theory* is one of the latest publications in Continuum's Live Theory series, which to date has featured, among others, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Slavoj Žižek, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, and Judith Butler. This volume is divided into five central chapters, each exploring a key concept in Jameson's critical repertoire, and a final chapter consisting of an original interview with Jameson focusing on the issues Buchanan has raised in the preceding sections. What might at first look like any other book whose purpose is to "introduce" a theorist, Buchanan's book proves to be much more. Indeed, Buchanan seems to have taken the series title seriously and set himself to bring Jameson's work to life, producing a volume of living theory that at various points takes on the task—one accomplished quite well in my view—of resuscitating aspects of Jameson's thought that may seem dated to some.

Buchanan's primary focus, what proves to be the animating pulse of Jameson's contributions to critical thought for half a century, is dialectical criticism, an idea first introduced in *Marxism and Form* (1971). Jameson's particular brand of dialectical criticism is the title and focus of the first chapter, though it structures most of Buchanan's book and continually returns either implicitly or explicitly. Dialectical criticism is criticism with a "twofold aim and purpose... which is to demystify the present, on the one hand, by revealing the ways in which a particular state of affairs is secretly organized so as to advantage one class fraction or another in a particular local struggle, and on the other hand to open up a space for thoughts of the future." (1–2) Dialectical criticism is thus not some attempt at showing things as they are, but at showing things in their specific context, even though this context is never homogenous nor easily apprehended.

Dialectical criticism creates a place from which to view things historically, allowing us to decipher a History which, on the one hand, has class conflict as its "ultimate reality" (2), and on the other, is always set on effacing itself. "Handled properly," Buchanan writes, "dialectical criticism should shock us;" it should "viscerally remind us of our role as participant observers in the world-historical situation we call everyday

life.” (1) As Jameson points out, shock is “constitutive of the dialectic as such: without this transformational moment, without this initial conscious transcendence of an older, more naïve position, there can be no question of any genuinely dialectical coming to consciousness.” (1) There is no doubt that parts of this proposition will set off critical alarm bells; “naïve,” “transcendence,” “coming to consciousness,” are words that do not fare well in critical vocabulary today. Yet, part of Buchanan’s project is to recover a position which has “passed through the gates of the dialectic” (1), a position from which we can think through Jameson’s work and situate it in a wider critical tradition.

Interestingly, the first chapter on dialectical criticism almost seems to fall short; one is left without feeling the shock that Buchanan insists is the moment of recognition. But, this would be to miss the point of the book: that dialectical criticism is the structuring principle of each chapter and the book as a whole. What seems unfinished in this first chapter is, in fact, merely the first step in a dialectical project that engages a living body of theory. In the same way as Jameson’s *Political Unconscious* sought to reconstruct the way in which diverse texts themselves offer us a vision of humanity as a single collective struggle, Buchanan creates a single story out of Jameson vast and seemingly disparate body of work. This is one of the most interesting aspects of Buchanan’s project: his search for a unity in Jameson’s critical concerns and contributions. Part of this entails reviewing Jameson’s own influences, particularly Sartre, Adorno, Brecht and Barthes. Buchanan spends a whole chapter examining in fairly succinct details the lessons that Jameson has found in each of these thinkers. This attention to individual thinkers shows precisely the ground Buchanan is treading in his dialectical historicising process, ground which is at once biographical and critical. The combination of the two places us in a position to engage the “conditions of possibility” of Jameson’s work and the different paths it has taken over the years.

Many of these paths have aroused controversy. Indeed, Buchanan recognises that he is not only writing about an ongoing body of work, but one that has given rise to its fair share of criticism and polemics. Crucial terms such as totality, national literature, allegory, and utopia are some of the major concepts that Buchanan not only presents, but also defends. National allegory, for instance, is discussed not in its more well-known and notorious manifestation in “Third-World Literature in

the Era of Multinational Capitalism” (1986), but in its original appearance in *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (1979). Buchanan quickly points out that “There is no more misunderstood term in all of Jameson’s many conceptual coinages” than this one. (22) He demonstrates how this concept presents “not merely a formal solution to a sheerly formal problem, it is also an attempt to use history homeopathically, that is to say it is an attempt to use history to solve the existential crises and dilemmas history itself throws us.” (23) The problems referred to here are, of course, those for which “the nation-state system is the objective precondition.” (23) In paying close attention to criticisms, Buchanan’s book proves less a cataloguing of Jameson’s ideas and eras than a patient engagement with the problems Jameson presents for theory—problems, we might add, that have not disappeared.

In historicising Jameson, Buchanan also connects each of his major concepts, showing how they can and must be read off of each other despite the time, polemics, and critical fads that separate them. Each major issue and term receives a genealogical analysis that ultimately connects it to everything else. Indeed, despite the conventional separation in chapters, problems and themes constantly return with new life, taking their place in the dialectic of Jameson’s thought. For example, Buchanan frames his approach to cognitive mapping as follows: “We might start by asking, then, what was cognitive mapping before it was cognitive mapping? ... If the concept really does span Jameson’s career, as I have asserted, then it must have had a life before it had a name, and if it continued to be significant even after its name stopped being used then it must have had several different names. Both of these answers are correct.” (107)

Cognitive mapping is thus best understood as part of the totality from which it arises, that is, as part of a nexus of problems which arise from others and in turn gives rise to new problems. We might say this of all Jameson’s critical categories: that they have all had a life before they had a name. Buchanan’s point—and it is one worth making—is that the problems facing critical thought do not go away. They remain even when their name changes, but they might also demand that we take up new concept and modify our approach—one might hear the Deleuze and Guattari of *What is Philosophy?*, who pointed out that concepts themselves are meant to change and remain continually open to modification. Jameson is the supreme example of this principle: the tools we have

might change and our particular approach may transform the issues themselves, but we are still working through the same basic problems, in Jameson's case, for example, the basic separation of the realm of Freedom from the realm of Necessity.

The final chapter of this volume consists of an interview with Jameson. Here things unfold along the same lines as the rest of the book: Buchanan's questions reflect his concerns and his overall methodological approach. At the same time, in his answers, Jameson makes the important point of both historicising himself and our own critical present. Jameson holds a unique perspective: he was a young scholar before "theory" had infiltrated the North American academy, and at the same time being the most important figures in ushering theory into this context. Jameson thus outlines theory's present by way of his own formative role in importing its ideas and problems onto the North American scene.

The only thing that is perhaps left wanting of both the final interview and the volume as a whole is Buchanan's lack of attention to Jameson's most current work in globalisation—work, we might point out, that has been carried on for some time now. This omission is understandable, however, not only because this work is still ongoing, but also because its unfolding follows a certain exigency of the times and hasn't contributed to the interpretive polemics or theory wars of the '70s and '80s, which are now fading. In any event, we might interpret this lack of an adequate critical narrative about globalization as merely Buchanan's final dialectical move, illustrating that "There is no one—or final—form of the dialectic" (12), that it is still with us as we interrogate the present and construct the future.

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In Defense of Lost Causes

Slavoj Žižek

London: Verso, 2008; 504 pages.

In Defense of Lost Causes may strike those familiar with Slavoj Žižek's *oeuvre* as a somewhat cursory treatment of problems he has explored elsewhere in much greater depth. Nonetheless, it is Žižek's most lengthy

meditation on the relationship between today's ideological and political landscape and the so-called revolutionary 'catastrophes' of modern history to date. Across events as diverse as the French Revolution, Mao's Cultural Revolution, Stalinism, Heidegger's engagement with Nazism, and Foucault's enthusiasm about the Iranian Revolution, Žižek argues that "there is in each of them a redemptive moment which gets lost in the liberal-democratic rejection." (7)

The book is in many ways the latest chapter in Žižek's struggle against the levelling-down of political possibility performed by contemporary (liberal-democratic) ideology, which Žižek perceives as suppressing the articulation or imagining of something truly new. To this end, his primary goal is to open up the space for a real alternative to the present situation to be imagined. Rather than attempting to begin this re-imagining from a blank slate, however, Žižek sets out to identify and reactivate the emancipatory potential of the revolutionary 'Events' that have been bracketed off and neutralised by the liberal-democratic rejection of 'terror' and 'totalitarianism.'

Parts One and Two examine in detail not only what is commonly understood but also misunderstood about these catastrophes; Part Three contains an engagement with Deleuze and (especially) Badiou in an attempt to establish what authentic 'fidelity' to these events might mean today. If the first two parts of the book can be described as his identification of their 'kernel' of truth, then the third and final part 'What Is To Be Done?' comprises his effort to suggest how contemporary politics can be changed or altered out of fidelity to these truths.

Žižek's meditation on 'Radical Intellectuals' is one of the most controversial sections of the book. He insists that by dismissing Heidegger's commitment to Nazism and, to a lesser extent, Foucault's enthusiasm about the Iranian Revolution as 'mistakes,' or reducing them to simply abhorrent political blunders, we miss their moments of authentic political involvement. Žižek's claim is that where Heidegger took the 'right step' in the 'wrong direction,' Foucault took the wrong steps in the 'right direction.' "What Heidegger was looking for in Nazism," argues Žižek, "was a revolutionary Event." (142) The fact that Heidegger saw in the ontic political reality of Nazi Germany the fulfillment of an ontological destiny is not, for Žižek, in itself reprehensible. There "is nothing 'inherently fascist' in the notions of decision, repetition, assuming one's destiny, and so forth..." (136) Heidegger's mistake was not that he iden-

tified too strongly with the destinal role of a political movement, but that he misrecognised Nazism as an Event. Thus, “in his Nazi engagement, he was not ‘totally wrong’—the tragedy is that he was *almost right*, deploying the structure of a revolutionary act and then distorting it by giving it a fascist twist.” (139) Foucault, conversely, was right to interpret the Iranian revolution as an Event, as a genuine utopian opening of possibility, but was excited about the wrong aspects of it, namely, the sheer sublimity of a revolutionary upheaval.

The Deleuzian concept of repetition figures centrally in the text, since it is only by ‘repeating’ past events that we can (re)create something authentically and radically new. Drawing from Deleuze, Žižek takes it as axiomatic that “[o]nly repetition brings out pure difference.” (141) Thus, he argues, “it is not only that repetition is (one of the modes of) the emergence of the New—*the New can only emerge through repetition.*” (140) *In Defense of Lost Causes* treats the past as a kind of virtual reservoir of potentiality, and the possibilities it opens up are varied and not always immediately understood.

In order to make sense of exactly how this potentiality comes to be cultivated, however, it is necessary to abandon a common-sense understanding of what the past is; “the past is not simply ‘what there was,’ it contains hidden, non-realized potentials, and the authentic future is the repetition/retrieval of *this* past, not of the past as it was, but of those elements in the past which the past itself, in its reality, betrayed, stifled, failed to realize.” (141) Žižek’s argument, then, is that by bracketing the radical Events of the past out of discussion because of the ‘terror’ involved in them, today’s ideology has effectively suspended their radical potential.

It makes sense, then, that one of the most salient features of this book is its sense of urgency. Žižek observes that, because it has been barred from tapping into the latent potentiality of its past, today’s Left has reached an impasse; while it cannot just take up the (legitimately) discontinued leftist projects like Soviet communism and Maoism, it needs to be able to draw inspiration and ideas from them. This impasse has resulted in an inability to (re)define a leftist dream and, therefore, to offer a *real* alternative to the capitalist dream and its ‘political supplement,’ liberal-democratic multiculturalism. And as long as the Left keeps trying to define a new dream within the ideological constraints of the lib-

eral imaginary, that is, without authentically relating to the so called 'revolutionary terror' of the Jacobins or Stalinism, it will remain paralysed. For Žižek, the consequences of this failure are as evident today as they are dangerous, and are most visible in the rise of what he calls 'fundamentalist populism.' Across the globe, "fundamentalist populism is filling the void of the absence of a leftist dream." (275) In our 'post-political' era, where politics is increasingly being reduced to mere administration and management, populism, with its appeal to nationalism, race, and tradition, and its xenophobic promotion of fear, is the only force investing contemporary politics with passion. For Žižek, then, "the main task of contemporary politics, its life-and-death problem, is to find a form of political mobilisation that, while (like populism) critical of institutionalised politics, will avoid the populist temptation." (269) Žižek does little, however, by way of suggesting what this new form of political mobilisation might be.

One of the most interesting aspects of *In Defense of Lost Causes* is that in spite of its blatant antipathy for contemporary liberal-democratic politics, the message of the book is not anti-democratic. The very tension that structures it is that between what he takes to be the two sides of 'Democracy': the first is Democracy as the uprising of the excluded, the intervention of the "supernumerary" in a social configuration in which they have no place/are not registered, what Žižek calls, following Rancière, "the part of no part." The second is the subsequent institutionalisation of the new order that this revolutionary upheaval demands. To this end, "[w]hat truly matters is precisely the degree to which the democratic explosion succeeds in becoming institutionalised, translated into social order." (265)

In the final chapter of the book, entitled "*Unbehagen in der Natur*," Žižek points to the sites of struggle, the 'evental sites,' which have the potential to alter radically contemporary politics. Today, he claims, it is the inhabitants of the urban slums of the 'megalopolises,' those "excluded from the benefits of citizenship, the uprooted and dispossessed..." that are the "part of no part." (425) In typical Žižek fashion, he ends the book without offering any suggestion of how to mobilise this emerging group nor of what kind of changes to the global order they can or ought to achieve.

This is perhaps forgivable, however, in view of the fact that Žižek's project in this book is above all an ideological one. It is not

meant to offer concrete political directions; rather, it opens up the space for these new, concrete directions to be *imagined*. And, with only a censored version of the past from which to draw, any attempt to imagine an alternative future is seriously hindered.

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Reading Jean-Luc Marion: Exceeding Metaphysics

Christina M. Gschwandtner

Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008; 344 pages.

Gschwandtner's book is the first comprehensive study of Jean-Luc Marion's thought. This is no small feat, at any rate, if one takes into consideration both the length and the complexity that Marion's work presents for the reader. Gschwandtner's study differs from other similar publications in another crucial aspect: where others see only fragmentation among Marion's various philosophical projects or, worse, the disingenuousness of a hidden (theological) agenda, Gschwandtner discovers in Marion's corpus a coherent vision and puts forward a strong argument in favour of continuity. Gschwandtner is right to have taken into account what has, for different reasons, been left largely unnoticed by other commentators, namely, Marion's early work on René Descartes. The difference is made not only by tracing the development of Marion's thought from the Cartesian trilogy to his later theological and phenomenological studies but also by arguing that many of Marion's later concerns and positions are already to be found, even if only *in nuce*, in his work on Descartes.

Reading Jean-Luc Marion follows a clear tripartite structure, a part being devoted to each of the following subjects: metaphysics, theology, and anthropology. Each part is prefaced by an introductory text that announces the Cartesian connection of the theme to be presented. Gschwandtner has ample opportunities throughout these conceptual itineraries to demonstrate that she is in command not only of Marion's work but of all the relevant secondary literature. This is a thoroughly documented study and one can expect that in time it will come to occupy its rightful place as a work of reference. Indeed, one could compare the scope and ambition of *Reading Jean-Luc Marion* to what William

Richardson's 1962 monograph accomplished, for example, for Heidegger scholarship. That being said, however, one cannot but think that a study like Gschwandtner's is subject to time and thus runs the serious risk of becoming outdated by Marion's own new work (this is in a sense already the case: Gschwandtner could not take into account Marion's 2008 *Au lieu de soi*, a long-awaited study on St. Augustine) as well as the work of Marion's other commentators and interlocutors.

Gschwandtner's study shows that Marion has achieved for the 20th century what St. Thomas did for the 13th. If this analogy is *mutatis mutandis* correct, then Descartes would hold a similar position in Marion's thought as Aristotle for St. Thomas's. Incidentally, both St. Thomas and Marion inherited Dionysius apophatic patrimony; only, in Marion's case, the Greek Patristic influence is reinforced through a particular reinterpretation of the phenomenological tradition, owing to both Husserlian and Heideggerian critiques of metaphysics and ontotheology. Further to the point, one could indeed say that Marion's work, as comprehensively presented and analysed by Gschwandtner, fulfills Edith Stein's dream of a dialogue between Thomism and phenomenology, a dialogue, however, that does not remain confined within the limits of a sterile comparison of similarities and differences, but seeks to reenact for our age's philosophical needs and demands what St. Thomas accomplished for his.

I am aware of the irony in comparing the founder of Christian metaphysics with the thinker who most persistently worked for its overcoming. As Gschwandtner rightly observes, overcoming metaphysics is the common thread that ties together Marion's three trilogies. Perhaps, overcoming metaphysics is for our age what the synthesis of Greek reason and Christian faith was for the Middle Ages. The clearest evidence for such a claim lies in Marion's own assertion that Christian revelation (that is, Revelation with a capital R) remains a form of logic. It is such a claim that enables Gschwandtner's treatment of Marion's philosophical and theological works as a coherent whole project and gives this book its innovative perspective. Indeed, there is a relationship of mutual dependency between the revelation of the phenomena and the phenomenon of Revelation. The latter ultimately grounds the former but must at the same time obey, insofar as it is a phenomenon, the logic of phenomenality (whether intentional or counter-intentional is of no importance here).

On the other hand, the question necessarily arises as to what Gschwandtner's master plan might be sacrificing in its insistence on an all-too-neatly arranged synthesis. The isomorphism between Marion's philosophical and theological work, which implies a parallel univocation between faith and reason, might be seen as undermining the asymmetry (insurmountable for Kierkegaard) between finitude and infinity. Is not the exception to the logic of phenomenality, which the phenomenon of Revelation should be allowed to constitute, undermined and does not the gift offered to *l'adonné* become thereby devalued?

Reading Jean-Luc Marion is, however, far more than an historical monograph on the work of one of France's leading philosophers. Gschwandtner's commentary offers to the reader a lesson on philosophical apprenticeship as it chronicles the advances of Marion's thought and traces the detours of the complex dialogue with his predecessors. More importantly, this is an apologetic work insofar as it answers confidently, and one hopes conclusively, to the recently growing number of critical voices. This study is valuable not only to understand one of France's leading thinkers but also the direction that Continental philosophy has taken since the work of Emmanuel Levinas.

John Panteleimon Manoussakis, College of the Holy Cross

Dialogue With Nietzsche

Gianni Vattimo

Translated by William McCuaig

New York: Columbia University Press, 2006; 247 pages.

Of the numerous (all too numerous) books on Nietzsche that appear every year, there are not a great many that one would describe as necessary reading for anyone with a serious interest in this figure. I can think of only a handful of exceptions to this; David Allison's *Reading the New Nietzsche*, Alexander Nehamas' *Nietzsche: Life As Literature*, and Walter Kaufmann's classic *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* are a few of them, but it is a short list. To this list I would add Vattimo's *Dialogue With Nietzsche*, which is a translation of the Italian text of 2000, *Dialogo con Nietzsche*. Vattimo endeavours to engage in a dialogue of sorts with Nietzsche, one that does not limit itself to exposition of

Nietzschean themes—never a straightforward matter in any case, of course. In doing so, Vattimo's Nietzsche occupies something of an intermediate ground between recent "French" interpretations that accentuate the aesthetic-literary dimension of his thought and currently less fashionable political interpretations.

The current ascendancy of the "French" Nietzsche, Vattimo argues, ultimately has less to do with the texts themselves than with sociological conditions of the present: "The reasons for the (not quite total) oblivion into which the political Nietzsche of Deleuze (and of Foucault and perhaps Lyotard as well) has fallen as compared to the aesthetic one are external to theory and have to do with the general sociology of culture. I am referring to what...we in Italy called '*il riflusso*' (the reverse flow) and a Hollywood film baptized 'the big chill': the end of the hope that a radical transformation of the capitalist system was imminent, the end of the (Chinese, Cuban) revolutionary dream. The current premium on the aesthetic Nietzsche seems to me to reflect this changed cultural climate more than anything else." (201) It is an intriguing hypothesis that the spirit of our time, or perhaps of a certain generation within it, is what has brought the "French" Nietzsche into being, at times in accordance with what is found in the texts and at times in spite of this. Vattimo mentions in particular the "high politics" for which Nietzsche appeared to call in his later writings, especially in the notes for *The Will to Power*.

Whether this untimely thinker has at long last become very timely indeed or whether, as Vattimo maintains, he remains untimely is one of the questions at stake in this "dialogue." As the author reminds us, "Nietzsche wanted to be the 'dynamite' of culture and indeed believed that he was. Are we really to imagine that the height of his ambition was nothing more than to theorize an artist's metaphysics, whether conceived in the form of Derridean deconstruction...or in that of the invention of redescriptions of the self and the world, as in Nehamas and Rorty?" (204) A synthesis of sorts between the aesthetic and political—albeit "not political in the strict sense"—readings is what Vattimo attempts. (204) That there is no "insurmountable gap between the aesthetic Nietzsche and the political one" is his hypothesis, although he insists that he has "caught no more than a glimpse" of this in the present text. (207)

The book's fifteen chapters, all but one of which have been previously published, cover an assortment of topics, from nihilism to truth, interpretation, aesthetics, the avant-garde, wisdom, and the *Übermensch*.

Among the more notable chapters are “Nietzsche and Contemporary Hermeneutics” and “The Wisdom of the Superman.” The former piece finds Vattimo arguing that the significance of the recent surge of interest in Nietzsche consists largely in the incorporation of his thought within contemporary hermeneutics, including hermeneutic ontology. Vattimo’s “radical” view in this regard is that “the only possible way of placing Nietzsche in the history of modern philosophy is to consider him as belonging to the ‘school’ of ontological hermeneutics.” (74)

Making this case involves more than pointing out clear affinities between several of Nietzsche’s theses on interpretation and twentieth-century hermeneutics. Beyond this, it involves the claim that Nietzsche is not only a properly hermeneutic thinker—in spite of the fact that Gadamer himself gave Nietzsche only brief mention in his treatment of the major precursors of philosophical hermeneutics in *Truth and Method*, while Heidegger also did not treat Nietzsche as a hermeneutic thinker—but that “the interpretation centered on hermeneutics comprehends (in the double sense of including and understanding) more aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophy than any other and avoids contradictions and ambiguities that undermine all the rest.” (75) Incorporating this figure within hermeneutic ontology carries implications both for Nietzsche scholarship and for hermeneutics, of course, and Vattimo goes some way toward spelling out these implications. Unfortunately, the chapter does not go as far as one would like, and is one of the book’s shorter pieces at ten pages.

“The Wisdom of the Superman” is another short chapter, of eight chapters. This one finds Vattimo discussing “the art of living and an ideal of wisdom we could use in today’s world”—a large topic, and one of which the author again provides a very interesting, if brief, account. (126) His argument here is that the *Übermensch* provides a model of wisdom appropriate for the times, with the rather un-Nietzschean qualification that this “will only be possible as a ‘mass overman,’ a new subject who does not stand out against the backdrop of a society of slaves but lives in a society of equals.” (132) If Nietzsche himself would strenuously resist this collectivised and egalitarian appropriation, this troubles Vattimo little or indeed not at all. Vattimo’s “mass overman” takes the idea of the *Übermensch* “with radical seriousness,” he insists, even while speaking “against the letter of Nietzsche’s text.” (132) Here one is reminded of the book’s title; this dialogue with Nietzsche is less an exposi-

tion than a creative interpretation and application, against the author's intentions if need be. Ours is indeed an age of nihilism, Vattimo maintains, and in such an age what is needed is a symbol of wisdom not unlike Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, or Vattimo's domesticated *Übermensch*. This is "an ideal of life and wisdom that ultimately sees the goal of moral refinement as a 'plural' subject capable of living his/her own interpretation of the world without needing to believe that it is 'true' in the metaphysical sense of the word: grounded in a secure and steadfast foundation." (131)

Other chapters find Vattimo arguing along similarly novel lines, often to good effect. Whether in the end one shares his interpretations or not, the book makes for compelling reading and may be recommended rather highly. Readers should be aware, however, that Vattimo's work on Nietzsche here as elsewhere, as he puts it, "has never been a straightforward exercise in the philological clarification, explication, or 'objective' reconstruction of Nietzsche's thought. If this implies that the essays collected here are limited in certain ways, that is something I am quite prepared to accept." (ix)

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Doing Philosophy: A Practical Guide for Students

Clare Saunders, David Mossley, George MacDonald Ross, Danielle Lamb

New York: Continuum, 2007; 184 pages.

The goal of *Doing Philosophy: A Practical Guide for Students* is to provide an introduction to and present useful strategies for doing philosophy. The book is intended for students who have never taken philosophy before, that is, primarily first-year undergraduates. While it does introduce some useful techniques for all undergraduates, this book is definitely for the serious student.

The book is divided into chapters on reading, note taking, writing, discussion and resources. Throughout the work, the authors not only provide methodological tips but also explain how these particular methods will aid in philosophy studies. While the introduction claims that the book is not a "how-to" manual (1), students will expect just that. The

authors feel the need to add often lengthy explanations and justifications for their methodological devices, which obscures the methods by surrounding them with a block of text the student must wade through to pick out the suggested method; the practical guidance that might actually prove useful to students could well be summarised in a volume a quarter of the size (the book totals 184 pages, a daunting length for a student looking for a brief introduction). For example, the chapter on “Reading Philosophy” includes a section on reading historical texts. The authors first emphasise the importance of studying historical texts, list some authors a student may encounter at some point in their studies, and explain the virtues of the Oxford English Dictionary, second edition (the 20-volume set). The recommendation in this section is less practical than most in the work (the authors suggest reading in the library near a copy of the OED, or using an electronic version, which may be available through the library; if not, the student would have to pay for an individual, very expensive, subscription).

They then provide a two-page analysis of six lines from Hobbes’ *Leviathan*. This seems more effort than the average first-year undergraduate will be willing to devote to the task of reading, and the analysis adds nothing other than emphasising the fact that the language used in the text is different from modern English, concluding that even should the student take advantage of all available resources, some parts of the passage are yet incomprehensible. On the whole, it makes the reading of historical philosophy seem like a tedious and perhaps even an impossible task.

In general, the authors seem conflicted, as they seem to want both to introduce particular methods they feel are helpful for studying philosophy and to stress that these methods are not universal. They consistently ask the student to refer to their department or their instructor for further guidance. For instance, in Chapter 5 on “Writing Philosophy,” the authors state, “We do not give detailed advice about how to give references here, because there are various systems, and different departments have different preferences”; yet, they add, “See Chapter 6 for more information on referencing systems” (117), where they actually do give detailed advice about the Harvard referencing format.

Sometimes, the examples provided seem peculiar to those schooled in the Canadian system. The authors refer to modules, tutors and grading according to classes. The most jarring example of this occurs

in the chapter on “Reading Philosophy,” where the authors go through a detailed examination of a sample reading list a student should expect to receive in a first-year philosophy course. Contrary to what one expects, the reading list includes primary and secondary literature, anthologies and journal articles in bibliographic format and covers one and a half pages in print. It seems either that the authors are working within a different system, where students are expected to select their readings from a larger, recommended list of readings, or that they are here providing advice for more advanced students.

The most valuable portion of the work is clearly the section on “Writing Philosophy.” The authors introduce some generally accepted expectations of a philosophy student and give the student some idea of how her work will be graded. This section is most directly applicable to a first-year student’s philosophy work and provides the most help to a student who is unsure of the expectations of the academic discipline of philosophy. The authors provide examples of writing exegetical, comparative and evaluative philosophy assignments, and work through these examples with respect to particular expectations, encouraging students to evaluate their own work. The only problem with this section is that the examples deal with particular philosophical works. Not only will this probably seem daunting, but if the student knows nothing about the texts and problems the authors are discussing, she will not know how to evaluate the examples the authors provide, nor will she see how one way of answering a particular question is better than another.

The final section of the book is on “Resources.” In addition to general advice on where to find resources specific to philosophy (e.g., the library), the authors provide specific references for philosophical dictionaries, other introductions to philosophy, study guides, logic books and some (British) philosophical societies. This section includes both print and online sources, and seems destined to become obsolete relatively soon. The section ends with relatively long explanations of a very short list of philosophical terms (8 of them, to be exact) and seems an odd way to end the book.

Throughout my reading, I searched for passages or sections that may be particularly helpful to my seminar sections for their assignments and class discussions. While the book does include chapters on both these topics, I failed to find something concise enough to justify recommending this book. An instructor may find the guide helpful if she is

looking for particular methods to recommend to students, but these recommendations would likely be better received if made to the students verbally, in class or in seminar, with significant paraphrasing.

Despite these problems and shortcomings, it must be emphasised that this guide will be helpful to the small number of students who are not merely looking for a quick way to raise their grade in an introductory philosophy course, but for the assurance that their methods are valuable and efficient. While the average student may not be keen to engage in an in-depth consideration of their note-taking techniques, the student who is will be very pleased with this text. I would not recommend using this guide in a course, but if approached by a student looking for some extra guidance, I might mention it.

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Hegel's Philosophy of Right: A Reader's Guide

David Rose

New York: Continuum, 2007; 159 pages.

What is valuable about David Rose's *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, a short reader's guide of fewer than 150 pages (not counting the notes and index)? The answer, I think, lies immediately under our eyes. More precisely, it is in this text's diminutive stature, limited scope, and simplification of a difficult topic, that I see its greatest strength. I approached Rose's text in much the same manner as I think scholars approach much of the scholarship on Hegel's philosophy: I was looking for bold assertions and grand insights. What the text offered me, alternatively, was a second look at a key Hegelian work. Amid scholarship that is often fit only for Hegel experts, which often rivals the original in density and difficulty, this little text stands out for its ease, its good nature, its comfort and its prudence. Having said this, however, I do not always agree with Rose's assessment of Hegel's work.

Rose's text is not intended as the representation of new discoveries. As a *Reader's Guide* it is simply a presentation of Hegel's ideas in an accessible manner. In Rose's own words (5–6), the text is meant as a guide, and does not aspire to be anything more. He refers to it as a crampon (a mountain climbing aid), a prop to ensure that the reader who

approaches the *Philosophy of Right* remains stoutly sure-footed throughout the ascent. Continuing with the mountaineering metaphors, Rose also compares his text to a base camp meant to supply confidence to the reader in their assault on Hegel's writings; and as a route guide it is meant to provide more of a viable passage up the mountain than it is an interpretive and comprehensive unpacking. This humility and scope is my favourite aspect of both this little text and its author.

The style of the text is informal and more or less follows the structure of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. It begins its engagement with the Hegelian text in Chapter 3, "The Preface," as an explanation of the task of philosophy. Rose continues in Chapter 4, "The Introduction," with a look at metaphysical freedom. Chapter 5, "Abstract Right," explores personal freedom, while Chapter 6, "Morality" is a look at moral freedom, and Chapter 7, "Ethical Life" examines Hegel's explanation of social freedom. Other chapters cover the context, provide an overview, and discuss the reception and influence of the *Philosophy of Right*. One qualifying *caveat*: Rose does not deal with all of the themes of the *Philosophy of Right*; rather, he intentionally passes over the third part of Hegel's work concerning the actual structure of the constitution and the social arrangements of the state. Rose does this in order to better focus on those parts of the text he deems more valuable to the overall exercise of grasping Hegel's work. Once the reader has the requisite understanding in place, he asserts, the discussions of the family, civil society and the state will fall into place. (6) Rose's aim is to provide his readers with the understanding requisite to making the text intelligible and familiar. To his credit, Rose also minimises much of the jargon that Hegel is notorious for using, opting for language more applicable to contemporary times and favourable to the capabilities of his intended readership.

With that said, one should guard against thinking too lightly of Rose's text merely because of its less-obscurant style. Rose provides as much fundamental insight into the *Philosophy of Right* as more renowned authors like R. Williams (*Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, University of California Press 1997), while his commentary is much more accessible than is the norm for Hegelian scholarship (consider for example E. Fackenheim's *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought*, Beacon Press 1967). This should not be surprising considering the fact that Rose's text is a reader's guide to the *Philosophy of Right*, which has as its premise clarity and basic insight.

Rose mentions that his ideal reader is the mature student who is taking a combined honours course or an evening class and wishes to understand Hegel better as part of the context of European political and/or philosophical thought. I will grant him this audience, but I also believe this little text is a worthwhile read for the more advanced student of Hegel as well—as a type of refresher or second look, or simply as another take on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. The text does what it promises: it serves as a worthwhile and simplified guide to the *Philosophy of Right*. Rose succeeds in making an enigmatic thinker and text less of an enigma; he succeeds in making a formidable subject more approachable.

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