

Book reviews / Comptes rendus

Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern

GERALD L. BRUNS

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Before hermeneutics became narrowly identified as a theory of textual or authorial interpretation (and thus falling into a primarily exegetical use), it lived in the common experience of making the past meaningful. Heidegger returned to hermeneutics this sense of lifeworld relevance, of having not merely a philosophical but an existential import. *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* seizes on and advances the existential core of Heidegger's project. Through a series of strikingly original analyses of the struggle for self-understanding, Bruns reclaims the concrete significance of hermeneutics. The philosophical value, however, is not strictly or merely comparative. Bruns attempts much more. Against the forces and institutions that police the free pursuit of meaningful forms of existence, Bruns means to reveal hermeneutics as a perennial mode of living philosophically.

Whether we are dealing with an individual person or a community, the issue facing our self-understanding is identical: to know oneself and the world one lives in (its values and traditions) is to translate that which is *prima facie* foreign into that which is familiar. In everyday life, the subject does not confront the world in a pseudo-objective fashion, but is a participant in the creation of a meaningful history, whether private or public. The old Socratic 'know thyself' takes on a special significance for Bruns. With its critical questioning of common opinion, practice and tradition, the Socratic figure reflects on the conditions of its own givenness. This way of approaching knowledge and understanding is very much in contrast to the Cartesian foundations of Modernity. For Bruns, Descartes launched a hermeneutical assumption — the disembodied, a-contextual subject, the Cogito — that formalized the horizons of knowledge and emptied them of any self-implication. Heidegger is crucial in this context because he gave back to the subject its historico-ontological depth.

Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern can be neatly divided into four parts: an Introduction, two parts (Ancient and Modern) each consisting of six chapters, and a Conclusion. The six chapters of "Part One: The Ancients" gives the historical origins of Bruns' theory of interpretation as appropriation. Ranging from studies of Socrates and Plato to Thucydides, from the Hebrew

Bible to midrashic interpretation, ending with the Islamic interpretation of the Qur'ân by al-Ghazâlî, they present a formidable challenge of scope. It is difficult to bring such disparate figures and traditions as these under a common perspective, even one so inclusive as hermeneutics. Bruns manages this task by framing the discussion in each chapter around the usefully limited opposition of textual and oral traditions. One can see rather clearly the influences of Heidegger and, especially, Derrida in the attention to the forms of language and their representational implications. Also present is the characteristic treatment of the written and spoken word as being in conflict, locked in a struggle that has religious, political, and historical implications. The word in all its varieties becomes a site for self-reflection.

The common focus of "Part One" is the general problem of how to give expression to experience. All understanding proceeds through the communication of meaning, whether in the guise of the Oracle's response to Socrates or in the religious prophecy of the Hebrew Scriptures. Certain difficulties arise when the form of this communication is written or oral. Dimensions of experience are not easily translated from one into another. Wittgenstein says they are grammatically different, the Thucydidean speeches raise this issue with respect to historical content (Chapter 2), and the canonizations of the Torah speak of this through issues of religious authority (Chapter 3). In each instance the competing claims of the written and spoken word make the articulation of Truth an event charged with public and private significance.

What we are to understand by the sense of Modernity in "Part Two: The Moderns" should be seen against the intervening period of medieval scholasticism. In scholastic hermeneutics Bruns finds an attempt to control and prohibit allegorical understanding and to limit the very possibility of interpretation itself. Meaning becomes not so much a communal affair but a canonical determination. The 'Modern Age' of hermeneutics began with Luther and his courses on the biblical Psalms at the University of Wittenberg. In Derridean style, Bruns takes note of Luther's use of the margins in the reprint of the biblical text. By requesting that there be wide spaces left for students' comments, Luther broke with the tradition of papal authority on matters of scriptural interpretation. As Bruns remarks,

At all events Luther produced for his students something like a modern, as opposed to medieval, text of the Bible — its modernity consisting precisely in the white space around the text. In a stroke Luther wiped the Sacred Page clean as if to begin the history of interpretation over again, this time to get it right (139-140).

Precisely what Luther 'got right' and what Bruns sees as fundamental to modern interpretation, is the turn toward an understanding of hermeneutics as "reflective and historical rather than formal and exegetical" (195). Descartes may have made the unfettered subject the prism of Modernity, but Bruns means to erect alongside it the hermeneutical category of self-implication.

The chapters that follow the pivotal discussion of Luther advance a theory of hermeneutics as openness and otherness. "Wordsworth at the Limits of Romantic Hermeneutics" presents the poetry of Wordsworth and the Romantics as an encounter with the otherness and alienness of another person's experience. The burning question that engaged them was: what does it mean to annihilate and reincarnate oneself as another with their categories of experience and understanding? For Bruns, Wordsworth composed his poems at the pitch of empathy (a state not entirely safe from the disruption of memory and identity that such a dispossession of the self can have). The dark and profound discovery of Romanticism is that the attempt to understand the other does not always gratifyingly enlarge our sense of what it means to be 'human' but, rather, can in fact problematize the very notion itself. In this sense, hermeneutics as openness is deeply concerned with realism but is suspicious of external limits placed on one's sense of identity.

The next chapter, "On the Tragedy of Hermeneutical Experience," develops this conception of a hermeneutics of unredeemed otherness, drawing out, through selections from Stanley Cavell and Hans-Georg Gadamer, the affirmative potential of interpretive self-exposure. The analogy between tragedy and hermeneutics is that both leave one in the position of risk. Like the hermeneutical, the tragic experience makes palpably clear that the world of events and actions cannot be appropriated, controlled, or even approached through a settled self-understanding. The singularity of existence requires one to loosen one's interpretive grip; responsivity not conceptual representation is key to understanding differently and tragically.

In "What is Tradition," Bruns considers Petrarch's engagement and encounter with classical traditions and historical figures. Tradition comes to be nothing at all like an inert inheritance of a dead letter. Instead, it represents the possibility of a cultural alternative, where, combined with the use of satire, the present milieu is stripped of its pretension of immanence. On this, Bruns makes the critically cogent remark: "I mean that from a hermeneutical standpoint the encounter with tradition is more likely to resemble satire than allegory, an unmasking of the present rather than translation of the past" (204).

The remainder of the book — "On the Radical Turn in Hermeneutics," "Against Poetry," and the "Conclusion" — shifts to the age-old debate between philosophy and poetry. Allegory, with its conceptualizing and appropriative powers, becomes the form of philosophy, while satire, with its

often playful disregard for order and structure and its courting of ambiguity, is transposed into poetry. Bruns succinctly moves through the texts of Heidegger, Derrida, and John Caputo (*Radical Hermeneutics*) to develop some questions about the work of art. Specifically, Bruns wants to know how to interpret the world that art discloses and what principle of rationality is disclosed therein. The radicality of hermeneutics in this regard is its appeal to the being-in-the-world of an event, text, or tradition, and to throw into reflection the forestructures of understanding. What Heidegger, in his theory of the poetic work, Derrida, in his deconstructive readings of philosophic and literary texts, and Caputo, in his immanent working through of the crisis of Enlightenment rationality, all reveal is the sense of hermeneutical excess and loss that plagues the conceptual resources of the Western philosophical project.

Bruns applauds these efforts toward a 'hermeneutics of freedom' (what he calls an 'approach' rather than a 'method' in an effort to avoid committing an overformalization) because they entail the study the modern subject and its self-understanding in both its allegorical and satirical possibilities. The necessity for both modes of understanding comes from Bruns' wish to avoid embracing a theory of rationality whose conceptual scheme is too inflexible or indulgent to profitably address the ethical diversity of modern culture. Since the entire enterprise of *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* is founded on the subtle and empathetic engagement with the being-in-the-world of others, this conclusive move to the rudiments of a social theory, although unexpected, is not entirely unjustified. Luther would not be such a pivotal figure for Bruns if there were no civil dimension to his hermeneutical project.

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Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition

KATHY EDEN

New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997, 119 p.

Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition is a compact but meticulous study of a somewhat neglected subject. In a series of short chapters that might serve better as appetizers than as main courses, Kathy Eden sets the table for an enjoyable sampling of ancient theories of rhetoric. But if the fare is on the light side, there can be no complaint about the presentation. The clarity with which Eden establishes an unbroken line of influence from Republican Rome to Reformation Europe is impressive and flawless. Beginning with Cicero, Quintillian, and Plutarch, Eden moves competently to Basil and Augustine, before linking up with Erasmus, Melancthon, and Flacius, all the while

maintaining a commonality of concern among the interpretive theories espoused by these respective thinkers. With skill and economy Eden locates the origin of modern hermeneutics in the ancients' understanding of the interpretive process.

Delineating the primary interests of the ancient rhetoricians, Eden defines the two main areas of debate over *interpretatio scripti*: "the discrepancy between a writer's words and intention — so-called *scriptum* versus *voluntas* — and ambiguity" (56). Debates over both necessarily required investigation into the context from which a piece of writing emerged. Despite not using the term 'historical context', the Romans, she maintains, had an acute interest in what Quintillian refers to as "*negotium*, defined as a *congregatio*, or congregation of persons, times, places, causes..." etc, which later come to be described by the term 'decorum'. Decorum, Eden argues, "is the productive counterpart to the receptive or interpretive principle of historical context" (17-18). Eden illustrates with a number of quotations from both Cicero and Quintillian that these ancient rhetoricians already prioritized the relation of the part to the whole, of the text to the tradition from whence it came.

To be fair, Gadamer, himself, in what is the magnum opus of contemporary hermeneutical theory, *Truth and Method*, gives more than the occasional nod of deference to some of the scholars of antiquity lauded by Eden, acknowledging from the outset of his project the indebtedness of his work to the ancients, especially Aristotle. Yet Gadamerian hermeneutics is more widely perceived to be part of a much more recent tradition which can be traced back to Heidegger, Dilthey, and ultimately Schleiermacher. Eden's project, it seems, is to ground contemporary hermeneutics unequivocally in the medieval and ancient sources she quotes by establishing a correspondence or equivalence among terms and concepts used by rhetoricians of old and contemporary hermeneutics alike. Gadamer's *Horizontverschmelzung* or 'fusion (literally 'melting') of horizons' is already articulated in Plutarch's understanding of the reader's experience as 'Odyssean' in nature, as a union of the foreign and familiar (35-40). Eden's argument is a strong one here, and establishes an incontrovertible connection that sets up the basis for further links.¹

Eden's book is welcome in the midst of a growing debate over the history of hermeneutics.² The slimness of the volume is countered by a sharp focus that consistently builds on an increasingly impregnable claim. Readers will be hard pressed to dispute the connections Eden makes between ancient rhetorical models of interpretation and those of the modern German tradition.

Notes

- 1 There are, however, many links that she misses (perhaps because they transcend the scope of her thesis). For example, Augustine's concern that

the reader seek out the *voluntas* (intention) of the *scriptor* (writer) is an early version of Schleiermacher's concern with authorial intention.

- 2 See, Jean Grondin's *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, for example, in which he proposes a non-linear history of hermeneutics.

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Die Normalität einer Berliner Republik

JÜRGEN HABERMAS

Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1995, 187 p.

Die Normalität einer Berliner Republik — La normalité d'une république berlinoise — est le titre des *Kleine Politische Schriften VIII*, les huitièmes et derniers écrits politiques de Jürgen Habermas. À l'image des écrits politiques précédents, Habermas abandonne ici le champ de la théorie fondamentale pour aborder des questions politiques d'actualité.

Ses premiers écrits politiques, couvrant les années 1960, portaient avant tout sur la question de la réforme des universités et sur les mouvements de protestation; les années 1970 et 1980 ont été l'occasion pour lui de s'en prendre au tournant néo-conservateur (*Tendenzwende*) qui s'opérait en Allemagne, comme dans plusieurs pays occidentaux. Les écrits politiques des années 1990 se tournent quant à eux vers la question de l'identité allemande, particulièrement à la lumière de la réunification des deux Allemagne. Ils tablent, cependant, sur des positions politiques qu'il avait développées durant les années 1980. En effet, Habermas s'était alors engagé dans ce qui sera connu comme la «querelle des historiens» (*Historikerstreit*), un débat qui porte essentiellement sur l'interprétation du passé nazi de l'Allemagne. Or, cette querelle des historiens constitue rien moins que le prolongement de la polémique entre le néo-conservatisme et le libéralisme social dont Habermas se fait l'avocat.

Dans le contexte du présent ouvrage, les tenants du néo-conservatisme cherchent à minimiser, au profit de la réunification allemande, le rôle de l'holocauste et de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, perçus désormais comme intermède fâcheux. Ils cherchent à mettre en valeur la continuité de l'identité nationale, du II^e Reich à aujourd'hui. Cette interprétation de l'histoire permettrait d'assurer une certaine «normalité» à l'Allemagne unifiée, et de promouvoir l'émergence d'une nation fière et puissante. Par opposition, Habermas postule une «dialectique de la normalisation» où l'accession à la normalité ne serait possible chez les Allemands qu'à travers la reconnaissance de l'a-normalité de leur histoire relativement aux voisins européens. Selon Habermas, Auschwitz doit être maintenu dans le discours identitaire en tant

que possibilité négative (ce que l'Allemagne *ne peut pas* être, *ne doit pas* être) qui contraint les Allemands à puiser dans la tradition des Lumières, embrassée par la RFA après 1945. La question «historique» n'apparaît alors qu'en tant que question politique, lato sensu, qu'en tant que question d'identité collective. En tant que telle, elle devient l'affaire de tous les Allemands, non pas seulement l'objet académique de quelques experts.

Voilà le dénominateur commun et la trame des différents essais et entrevues qui composent l'ouvrage. Le thème n'est donc pas nouveau: il poursuit des réflexions entamées dans le cinquième tome des écrits politiques (*Die neue Unübersichtlichkeit*), notamment dans «Entsorgung der Vergangenheit»¹, le sixième tome (*Eine Art Schadensabwicklung*), où la querelle des historiens bat son plein, et le septième tome (*Die nachholende Revolution*)² où sont abordées les questions de la réunification allemande et du nationalisme allemand. En fait, *Die Normalität...* reprend là où Habermas avait interrompu dans un autre petit ouvrage à caractère concrètement politique, *Vergangenheit als Zukunft* (1991), qui lui, n'est pas formellement inclus de la série des écrits politiques.

L'ouvrage représente donc, provisoirement sans doute, le dernier chapitre du débat des historiens qui, lui, poursuit la polémique contre les forces conservatrices. Il s'alimente des tout derniers événements qui ont marqué l'Allemagne réunifiée. Cependant, l'intérêt de cet ouvrage n'apparaît pas seulement à la lumière du débat qui l'a précédé. *Die Normalität...* documente de surcroît l'engagement politique et social de Habermas et ses prises de positions dans les questions d'actualité allemande. Il s'inscrit donc en faux contre tous ceux qui prétendent que Habermas se serait cantonné dans le théorique après la *Théorie de l'agir communicationnel*. Soit dit en passant, une telle critique formulée à l'endroit de Habermas ne manque pas d'étonner lorsque l'on considère ses incursions répétées dans les domaines de l'actualité politique et sociale, et ses interventions à titre d'essayiste et de critique depuis les années 1950 jusqu'aujourd'hui. Ces différentes incursions et interventions sont précisément colligées en partie — mais non exclusivement — dans les huit écrits politiques. En fait, il semble même préférable d'interpréter les écrits théoriques de Habermas comme de longs détours lui permettant de fonder les bases théoriques de sa critique à l'endroit du conservatisme (à cet effet, cf. «Dialektik der Rationalisierung», *Die neue Unübersichtlichkeit*, p. 180-181). La théorie fondamentale aurait donc été appelée par la pratique, à savoir la critique sociale et politique.

L'intérêt de l'ouvrage tient aussi au statut particulier que semblent posséder les écrits politiques dans l'économie de l'œuvre habermassienne. En effet, dans le prolongement de l'hypothèse de leur rôle central, formulée à l'instant, il est aussi permis de noter à quel point les écrits semblent suggérer une essence de la pensée habermassienne, c'est-à-dire à quel point ils semblent élaborer une unité de sa pensée à travers la pluralité de ses formes

et matières. Dans les écrits politiques, c'est le tout Habermas que l'on retrouve: l'élève de Rothacker, le disciple d'Adorno, le lecteur de Freud, l'*Aufklärer*, le théoricien et l'intellectuel engagé. Toutes les influences qui ont marqué son développement intellectuel s'y retrouvent dans leurs contours cristallins, que ce soit les influences de Gadamer ou de Marx, de Kohlberg ou de Kant. Les écrits politiques, dont celui qui nous intéresse ici, constituent un véritable palimpseste de la pensée habermassienne où les idées d'hier semblent cohabiter avec celles d'aujourd'hui. Cette convergence d'influences, s'étirant sur plusieurs décennies, en un discours organique concède une certaine vérité et une certaine richesse aux écrits politiques.

Il faudrait bien sûr étayer de telles hypothèses, ce qui n'est pas possible ici. Nous devons nous contenter d'indications sommaires lors de la présentation des différentes contributions. Or une telle présentation forme, en dernière analyse, le véritable propos de cette recension.

À travers des situations et des perspectives toujours renouvelées, Habermas réitère sa méfiance à l'égard d'une «normalité» de l'Allemagne réunifiée. Le premier essai aborde la question d'une perspective théorique. En effet, dans «Aus der Geschichte lernen?» — «Peut-on apprendre de l'histoire?» — Habermas expose trois positions théoriques qui déterminent autant de façons de percevoir l'histoire et son rapport à l'humain: La première, celle de la philosophie de l'histoire, postulerait l'action d'une raison universelle qui se déploierait «derrière notre dos», malgré nous. On reconnaît la position de l'idéalisme allemand. La deuxième, défendue par l'École historique allemande, ou l'historicisme, critique cette position en insistant sur l'unicité des différentes situations historiques. Selon cette perspective, il n'y aurait pas de progrès dans l'histoire, mais seulement une succession discontinue d'essors et de déclin. La troisième, enfin, l'herméneutique (philosophique), critique l'historicisme qui prétend contempler l'histoire comme s'il ne s'y trouvait pas toujours déjà inscrit. Il est intéressant de noter ici que par cette critique de l'herméneutique, le fameux débat entre Gadamer Habermas semble encore trouver un écho dans les travaux contemporains de ce dernier.

Habermas s'attaque à ces trois positions théoriques. Toutes les trois partageraient, selon lui, la prémisse selon laquelle on apprendrait de l'histoire que dans la mesure où elle présente quelque chose de positif, digne d'être imité. La thèse de Habermas dans cet essai se résume à ceci: on apprend de l'histoire que dans la mesure où celle-ci devient une instance critique sur laquelle achoppe ce que l'on tenait pour juste à travers la tradition. Si l'histoire ne nous confie aucune certitude sur ce que nous avons à faire, elle nous apprend ce qu'on ne doit pas faire: «nous devons être réceptifs aux expériences critiques»⁴ (17). Trop longtemps, prétend Habermas, l'Allemagne se serait distancée des idéaux des Lumières pour embrasser «la tradition des mandarins allemands»⁵. Habermas reconnaît cet obscurantisme à l'oeuvre

dans la politique de la droite allemande, particulièrement dans la question des tensions ethniques qui sévissent dans l'Allemagne contemporaine. Auschwitz devient alors pour lui le symbole d'une critique inspirée par l'histoire.

Dans le chapitre «Doppelte Vergangenheit» — «Double passé» —, Habermas aborde la question de la réévaluation critique du passé. Le chapitre reproduit un article qu'il avait rédigé pour *Die Zeit* et un rapport écrit pour une commission d'enquête du parlement allemand. Reprenant une ligne d'argumentation qu'on lui connaissait typiquement pendant la période de *Connaissance et intérêt*, Habermas compare l'entreprise de réévaluation critique du passé à une réflexion collective — entendue comme «critique des illusions» — qui aurait un effet thérapeutique de type psychanalytique (21-22). Il est étonnant de voir comment des lignes d'argumentations que l'on n'avait plus revues depuis la fin des années 1960 réapparaissent dans ses écrits politiques. C'est là sans doute la démonstration la plus éloquente du fait que Habermas n'ait pas tout simplement récusé ses positions antérieures, bien qu'il soit passé à d'autres débats théoriques.

Quoiqu'il en soit, Habermas condamne tout ce qui pourrait entraver le processus de réflexion collective et publique quant à la question du passé, comme par exemple la «personnalisation» et la «tribunalisation» des débats (35-36). Il note aussi les dangers structurels du débat public panallemand, à savoir l'asymétrie des deux parties en cause. En effet, les deux Allemagne sont, de l'avis de Habermas, inégales: économiquement (cela s'entend), politiquement (la réunification apparaît à plusieurs égards comme une annexion de la RDA par la RFA) et historiquement (la RDA doit entreprendre la réévaluation critique d'un double passé, nazi et staliniste). Or, vouloir simplement niveler ces inégalités entraîne selon lui de fausses symétries qui introduisent une distorsion dans le débat publique (43).

Enfin, Habermas met en garde contre le recours à des «experts» dans le débat public où chaque acteur social se trouve par principe à égalité avec ses pairs, et ce, même dans les questions historiques. Habermas distingue ici l'usage public de l'histoire de la recherche historique institutionnalisée (58-59)⁶. Selon lui, l'historien quitte le discours de la science lorsqu'il se tourne vers la publicité. Si l'historien fait figure d'autorité dans les questions factuelles, il devient un simple participant lorsque l'histoire est utilisée dans le débat identitaire, dans l'interprétation des aspirations, dans la détermination de la place d'une nation dans le monde. Ce sont là des positions cohérentes avec sa théorie communicationnelle.

Le troisième chapitre, «Deutsche Ungewißheiten» — «Incertitudes allemandes» —, reproduit trois entrevues accordées à des journaux différents. La première, publiée d'abord dans *Le Monde*, aborde les appréhensions françaises face à la réunification allemande. Habermas y poursuit sa critique d'une culture allemande anti-rationaliste, celle des «mandarins», laquelle mettrait en péril le processus de civilisation de l'Allemagne d'après-guerre.

La deuxième entrevue précise, souvent dans une perspective pratique, ces conceptions théoriques de la *Théorie de l'agir communicationnel* et de *Droit et démocratie*. En particulier, les précisions quant à sa conception de la démocratie et de l'État de droit sont particulièrement intéressantes, dans la mesure où elles ramènent à certaines formules essentielles les intuitions fondamentales de *Droit et démocratie*. La troisième entrevue poursuit dans cette veine, en mettant l'accent, cependant, sur les développements pratiques des mêmes idées. Il y présente notamment son concept de «patriotisme constitutionnel» — comme il l'a déjà fait auparavant dans ses écrits politiques — qu'il considère comme le seul ciment légitime de l'identité et de la solidarité nationales. D'ailleurs, si la place de l'Allemagne dans le monde passe nécessairement chez Habermas par l'Union européenne, qui devrait se substituer à une constitution ethnociste de l'identité allemande, c'est parce que cette superstructure politique permet qu'un tel patriotisme constitutionnel prenne le pas sur un patriotisme ethnique. Habermas a cependant en vue une Union européenne qui réussirait à réseauter les espaces publics nationaux, par opposition à l'Europe administrative d'aujourd'hui. Ici encore, il est conséquent avec son modèle communicationnel.

Le quatrième chapitre, «Das Bedürfnis nach deutschen Kontinuitäten» — «Le besoin de continuités allemandes» —, invoque à nouveau l'idée du double passé de la RDA alors qu'il critique les différentes formes que prennent les thèses de continuités de la nation allemande. D'abord la continuité telle qu'entrevue par l'intelligentsia est-allemande, dont l'auteure Christa Wolf. Dans une lettre que Habermas lui adresse, ce dernier répond à ceux qui cherchent à établir des symétries, fausses selon lui, entre les deux États allemands: de l'avis de Habermas, les deux Allemagne ne seraient pas assujetties à une même prévention qui les auraient éloignés d'un potentiel de tradition véritablement allemand. D'abord parce qu'il faut accepter la césure historique de 1945 et que tout éloignement de cette culture est bénéfique. Mais avant tout parce que la prévention et l'éloignement de la RFA s'est fait par l'adoption d'une culture libératrice, émancipatrice (102), qui accueille les acquis des Lumières. Cette idéologie n'a rien de contraignant (108). Selon Habermas, la réévaluation critique du passé doit se faire de façon différente dans les deux États.

Il s'en prend aussi à la continuité qui se réclame de la philosophie politique de Carl Schmitt. Habermas tente de comprendre, par une interprétation à saveur sociale-psychanalytique (120), l'importance du personnage Schmitt dans l'économie du nationalisme allemand de droite, pour mieux en critiquer la teneur anti-humaniste et anti-rationaliste. Et dans ce combat qu'il mène contre la droite allemande, il se réclame de Adorno, en qui il voit un acolyte, un penseur qui dénonce une fausse continuité de la nation allemande (131). En faisant ressortir l'ambiguïté de l'héritage humaniste de la tradition allemande, Adorno l'aurait mis au jour (*ibid*) de façon

circonscrite, sans occulter la césure que constitue Auschwitz.

L'ouvrage compte aussi, au cinquième chapitre, une entrevue portant sur sa philosophie politique, en particulier sur des questions se rapportant à *Droit et démocratie*. L'entrevue lui donne l'occasion de revenir sur les fondements de son analyse reconstructive, sur la question de la souveraineté populaire, la nature du démocratique, mais aussi sur des questions abordées plus tôt dans sa carrière, comme dans *La technique et la science comme idéologie* — notamment quant aux dangers de l'expertocratie —, ou dans la *Théorie de l'agir communicationnel* — relativement à la tension qui existe entre démocratie et capitalisme, ou au modèle d'une socialisation purement communicationnelle. L'entrevue lui permet de corriger certaines positions (p. 159), de les préciser, de les illustrer à l'aide d'exemples tirés de l'actualité allemande, européenne ou américaine.

Enfin, dans le dernier article de l'ouvrage, «1989 im Schatten von 1945: zur Normalität einer künftigen Berliner Republik» — «1989 dans l'ombre de 1945: Sur la normalité d'une future République berlinoise»⁷ —, Habermas s'en prend à la thèse conservatrice de la continuité de la «nation» allemande par une critique du concept même d'État-nation. Il contribue une fois de plus au débat des historiens, en exposant cette fois-ci les limites de l'État-nation dans le contexte de la globalisation. En effet, l'importance de 1989 repose sur l'idée de restauration de la nation allemande telle qu'elle se présentait à partir de l'empire guillaumien. Or, l'État national ne serait plus à la hauteur du défi qu'impose la globalisation des interactions sociales, politiques, culturelles et systémiques. Il lui faut, de l'avis de Habermas, se départir d'un reliquat d'ethnicité et de nationalisme pour épouser pleinement la dimension républicaine qui, elle, n'admet que le processus démocratique de délibération publique pour l'intégration sociale des individus. L'Union européenne, dans la mesure où elle restreint la souveraineté des nations qui la composent, permet justement d'accorder plus d'importance à l'héritage républicain au détriment du nationalisme allemand.

Notons en terminant que dans un discours prononcé dans le cadre des conférences Otto-von-Guericke à Magdebourg⁸ en 1998, Habermas est revenu de façon thématique sur la question de l'héritage des Lumières après la césure de 1945, de même que sur la problématique du danger néo-libéral qui pèse sur l'État social et des promesses républicaines de la globalisation. Ces thèmes ont été repris, par la suite, dans un discours tenu lors de la rencontre «Philosophie und Politik» à la maison Willy-Brandt à Berlin, où Gerhard Schröder a aussi prononcé une allocution⁹, et dans un article du *Zeit* (décembre 98). Ainsi, on voit comment les thèmes abordés dans *Die Normalität...* forment aujourd'hui encore, quelques années après la publication de cet ouvrage, les préoccupations principales de la pensée politique de Habermas.

Notes

- 1 Texte disponible en français sous le titre «Mettre le passé au rebut pour s'en affranchir», in: *Écrits politiques*, Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 1990.
- 2 Une sélection arbitraire de textes provenant des tomes 5, 6 et 7 sont disponibles en français dans Jürgen Habermas, *Écrits politiques*, Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 1990.
- 3 C'est la question que pose littéralement l'historien allemand Hans-Ulrich Wehler (*Aus der Geschichte lernen?: Essays*, Munich, Beck, 1988), que Habermas connaît bien. Le rapprochement n'est certes pas fortuit. Wehler a d'ailleurs pris parti pour Habermas dans le débat des historiens (cf. *Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit?: ein polemischer Essay zum »Historikerstreit«*, Munich, Beck, 1988).
- 4 « wir müssen uns für kritische Erfahrungen offenhalten ».
- 5 Expression que Habermas emprunte à Fritz Ringers (*The Decline of the German Mandarins 1890-1933*, Cambridge/Mass., 1969).
- 6 Thème abordé auparavant dans les *Politische Schriften VI*: Cf. Habermas, J., «Vom öffentlichen Gebrauch der Historie», *Eine Art Schadensabwicklung*, p. 137-148.
- 7 Une version française de cet article est publiée dans *Symposium*, Vol III, no1 (Printemps 1999), p.53-69.
- 8 «Aus Katastrophen lernen?», non publié. Pour un court résumé de ce discours, cf. *Philosophie*, Nr. 3 (August 1998), p. 138.
- 9 Sa conférence s'intitulait "Die postnationale Konstellation und die Zukunft der Philosophie" (Cf. *Information Philosophie*, 4, Oktober 1998).

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**Assembling (Post)modernism:
The Utopian Philosophy of Ernst Bloch**
JOHN MILLER JONES

New York, Peter Lang, 1995, 202 p.

Ernst Bloch (1885-1977) is a major twentieth-century European social thinker in the same league as Adorno, Benjamin or Gadamer, and arguably the greatest theoretician of Utopianism of any time. Yet, at least in recent years, he has not attracted anywhere near the same level of scholarly attention that has been accorded similar figures. Partly, this is because Bloch was an unrepentant, sometimes strident Marxist, and today of course Marx's ideas are decidedly out of favour. Bloch often robustly defended Stalin and the Soviet Union (and not always out of duress), long after his erstwhile

colleagues in the Frankfurt School had decided that 'really existing socialism' was an historical dead-end, an apotheosis of the repressive and authoritarian tendencies of twentieth-century modernity and therefore not substantially different than Nazi Germany. Furthermore, he chose to settle in Leipzig in East Germany after the Second World War, rather than stay in America (as did Marcuse), or return to the Federal Republic (the destination of Adorno and Horkheimer). (It is worth pointing out, however, that Bloch was never a Communist Party member, and that his tenure in the GDR became increasingly intolerable the longer he stayed there. Indeed, during a trip to West Germany in 1961, he and his wife decided not to return to Leipzig and accepted the offer of a university position at Tübingen, where he spent the rest of his days.) Outside of Germany, this situation of relative neglect has been compounded by the undeniable difficulty of Bloch's writings, the sheer diversity of his influences, the highly syncretic, even 'heretical' version of Marxism he promulgated, and also by the fact that the translation of his works into English has been a rather haphazard affair. (For instance, his magnum opus, the three-volume *The Principle of Hope* to which Bloch devoted some twenty years of his life, has only been available in English translation since 1986.) These factors, combined with the strongly messianic and apocalyptic tendencies of Bloch's writings, have conspired to make his ideas appear (at least on the surface) embarrassingly outmoded to many in these postmodern times.

Perhaps this explains why that when published in 1995, the rather slim volume under review here was only the third full-length study in English to deal exclusively with Bloch. (It has since been followed by Vincent Geoghegan's excellent, if more introductory study *Ernst Bloch* in 1996.) The author, John Miller Jones, is an American scholar of German philosophy and social thought who currently holds a post at the Universität Hannover in Germany. As stated in the acknowledgements, *Assembling (Post)modernism* grew out of his Phd research, in the course of which Jones was fortunate enough to have been able to gain access to documents and materials relating to Bloch's life and work that were unobtainable before the demise of the GDR in 1989 and its absorption into a unified German state. Accordingly, he provides us with some rich biographical information, particularly relating to his attitude towards the Communist regime in the East, which bears directly on the evolution of Bloch's *oeuvre*. Yet this study is neither a straightforward intellectual biography, nor a comprehensive exposition of Bloch's ideas. (The nod for the latter goes to Wayne Hudson's *The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch*, long out of print.) *Assembling (Post)modernism* is instead a refreshingly idiosyncratic text that engages certain Blochian themes with the current debate over modernism versus postmodernism. Some of these characteristic leitmotifs include: architecture, especially the recurring trope of the Tower of Babel, and related metaphors of space and construction; the

German concept of *Heimat* — roughly 'homeland', although it has no precise English equivalent; and the transgressive fecundity of the imagination, as registered in a plethora of dreams, fairy-tales, and narratives, which for Bloch concerns the peculiarly human capacity to transcend the immediately given in order to conceptualize a future that is not yet realized.

Jones' central argument can be summarized roughly as follows: modernist theories, especially that of Marx, envisaged the future, non-alienated society as something to be actively fabricated through human agency in concordance with a rational plan. Marxist theory was held to be 'scientific' in the sense that it grasped the essential qualities of human nature and the vicissitudes of history, and had therefore successfully located the immanent tendencies within society that heralded a transition to socialism. Although Marx explicitly railed against the 'Utopian socialists', it is often argued that his conception of communism (which was, after all, the 'riddle of history solved') implied a belief in a universalistic form of human emancipation, and was hence prototypically Utopian in the 'social engineering' sense of the term. Postmodern approaches, by contrast, have tended to regard this sort of Utopianism as incipiently totalitarian, because it imposes an abstract plan for human perfection on a complex, heterodox reality, and thereby destroys the qualitative and the particular. Accordingly, postmodernists such as Lyotard have eschewed the sort of monolithic universalism which they feel Marxism has actively promoted. They voice their preference for a multiplicity of agonistic and largely incommensurate language-games and perspectives that do not ride roughshod over gender, class, ethnic or sexual differences, and through which sociocultural diversity can be preserved. Postmodern theorists reject images of 'building' (as in the 'construction' of socialism), and instead prefer metaphors of 'play' and similar aesthetic or poetic notions. Although Bloch is typically lumped in with the Marxist modernists, Jones' assertion is that Bloch develops a much more subtle position that supersedes the sterile modernist/postmodernist dichotomy. Bloch retains the postmodernist emphasis on a plurality of traditions and the celebration of the local and the particular — for instance, his notion of *Heimat* is not any place but a specific location with particular meanings for individuals — yet, at the same time, he maintains a radical hope that humanity can move towards the construction of an emancipated, shared 'homeland' within which antagonisms and conflicts between groups and individuals can be resolved, yet where particularity can continue to flourish. To cite Jones, Bloch seems to envisage a

form of critique that would avoid both of the extreme positions of crass modernism and vulgar postmodernism — which might then be termed (post)modernism — ... a perspective that recognizes both similarities and differences. Such a viewpoint would not demand the

choice of either unity or diversity but would describe how these two categories intersect. Such a principle could incorporate the contribution of postmodern theorists within a paradigm of knowledge that recognizes at least the possibility of completing the edifice of enlightenment (36).

In undertaking to ratify this thesis, Jones engages Bloch with such thinkers as Derrida, Foucault, Habermas, Heidegger, Kant, and others, in relation to such themes as space, language, aesthetics, and so on. In the main, these engagements are highly successful and illuminating, and to my mind Jones effectively vindicates his argument that Bloch can be read as a (post)modern thinker who offers us a way out of the modernist/postmodernist impasse. His writing is lively and pellucid (no small feat given Bloch's notoriously difficult and allusive prose style), the digressions stimulating, and his main arguments convincingly prosecuted. It is to be hoped that this book will convince many readers to discover Bloch's work and not to relegate it to the dust-heap of history in the rush to embrace postmodernity orthodoxy, during an age in which 'hope' has become almost a forgotten concept.

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Encyclopedia of Aesthetics

MICHAEL KELLY, ed. in chief

New York, Oxford University Press, 1998; four volumes., 2,240 p.

This major reference work, published last August, has been in progress for well over two years. The work was initially expected to appear in two volumes, with a total length of approximately 1,800 pages, to be published by Garland Press. These expectations changed as the work progressed. Established scholars from numerous countries contributed a total of some six hundred articles written just for this work. Each article was refereed by members of the editorial board, which consists of forty-one members and reads like a Who's Who of contemporary aesthetics and literary theory, including, for example, Pierre Bourdieu, Stanley Cavell, Arthur C. Danto,

George Dickie, Paul Guyer, Joseph Margolis, Mary Mothersill, Alexander Nehamas, Anita Silvers, Albrecht Wellmer, and Richard Wollheim. The list of contributors is no less impressive, and the quality of the individual articles is consistently high. (Three current members of the CSH contributed articles: Bruce Baugh, "Rock Music," Jean Grondin, "Gadamer and the Truth of Art," and Jeff Mitscherling, "Ingarden.") Each article is generally two to three thousand words in length, accompanied by a bibliography of primary and secondary sources in currently available editions.

As described in Oxford University Press' promotional pamphlet:

This encyclopedia meets two research needs. It provides in-depth historical coverage of significant ideas, concepts, theories, and figures in the field. At the same time, it offers a guide to the arts in human life — art as a product of culture, a source of meaning, an instrument of ideology, a record of popular expression, and an aspect of human experience that touches all corners of society.... It surveys centuries of philosophical questions about art — from multi-article entries on Aristotle, Plato, Hegel, Nietzsche, and other important figures to concise, clearly written introductions to such essential concepts as Truth, Value, and Beauty. It also explores every major school of critical thought about art. For example: four articles from different perspectives examine how Feminism has transformed the way art is understood and judged. Six articles comprise the entry on Politics — examining the historic tension between artistic creation and political engagement or the impact of such crises as AIDS on the making of art. Other articles illuminate the different meanings and uses of such key terms as Narrative, Representation, and Nature.

A brief list of contributors and titles for some of the above categories will give some indication of the thoroughness and generally high quality of the work as a whole. Contributions for Plato include Christopher Janaway's "Survey of [Plato's] Thought," Paul Woodruff's "Plato on Mimesis" and "Plato's Use of Poetry," and Julius Moravcsik's "Plato on the Effects of Art" and "Plato and Modern Aesthetics." Entries for Nietzsche include Bernd Magnus' "Survey of [Nietzsche's] Thought," Julian Young's "Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Disinterestedness," Kathleen Higgins' "Nietzsche's Literary Style," Gary Shapiro's "Nietzsche and Visuality," and Keith Ansell-Pearson's "Nietzsche on Art and Politics." Contributing entries on Feminism are Anita Silvers, "An Overview," Peggy Zeglin Brand, "Feminism and Tradition," Rita Felski, "Critique of Feminist Aesthetics," and Joyce Brodsky,

"Feminist Art History." Other articles that might especially interest CSH members include Galen Johnson's entry on "Maurice Merleau-Ponty," Daniel Herwitz's "Historical and Conceptual Overview" of postmodernism, Sally Banes' "Postmodern Dance," Charles Altieri's "Postmodern American Poetry," Mary Wiseman's "Poststructuralism," David Z. Salz's entry on "Theater," Robert L. Martin's "Ontology of Music," and Julie Van Camp's "Ontology of Dance."

To quote again from the promotional pamphlet:

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In short, this work most definitely has something for everyone who is in any way interested in or affiliated with the arts. It will almost certainly remain the standard reference work in aesthetics for many years to come. The price of the four-volume set — \$495.00 — may render it beyond the financial reach of most individuals, but this outstanding reference work should most certainly stand at the top of the acquisitions list for every university library.

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After Modernity

JAMES RICHARD MENSCH

New York, State University of New York Press, 1996, 309 p.

Modern philosophy has long been under attack and, with it, the role of the self has also fallen under scrutiny. While Modern philosophers treat the self as a ground for knowledge, Postmodern philosophers see it as "dependent on its circumstances" (1). The ground for knowledge has shifted away from the self to history and moved towards the contingent structures of language.

But is this the best that we can do? James Mensch's book, *After Modernity*, suggests that we can do better than lament the loss of a ground for the knowledge of being. He claims that in attempting to overcome Modernity, many Postmoderns reiterate a priority given to time over being that is

characteristic of Modernity. In order to leave Modernity behind, we must rid ourselves of the claim that time grounds being: "Rather than making being depend on time, we have to make time depend on being" (153). By shifting the emphasis from time to being, Mensch proposes an alternative to Postmodernity.

Mensch traces the problem of a time-based philosophy through the works of numerous philosophers as diverse as Aristotle, Avicenna, Descartes and Sartre. He shows that Plato's emphasis on constancy as a criterion for Being does not show the relation of a thing's essence (which is constant) to its existence (or the origin of appearances) (12-15, 24). Augustine's answer to Plato is that time is the ground for Being. Time cannot be understood as a being, since it is always passing from the nonbeing of the past and to the nonbeing of the future. But our experience of being occurs in time, and must be based on time. Also, the dual nature of time, as a sequence of moments and as an overall presence to being, corresponds with the dual nature of being as existence and essence. The existence of a thing is determined by the sequence of its appearances, while the essence of a thing is revealed as a presence that persists throughout the sequence of its appearances. Being, as existence and essence, is correlated on the basis of time as sequence and presence (Chapter 2).

According to Mensch, Modernity blossoms in the work of Husserl. The concept of time was treated narrowly by many philosophers in the eighteenth century (where time was viewed only in terms of a sequence of causally related appearances). The essence of a thing, then, remained beyond our experience; it was knowable only through representations of a thing in the mind (39). Husserl restored the knowledge of essences by treating time in the same way that Augustine did. A general presence is intended by each moment in a temporal sequence because each moment is dependent on the others. As moments pass from the future and to the past, they gain their meaning as a temporal moment in relation to other moments. This means that at each moment, all of the other moments, future and past, are made present as a sense of depth. Each moment intends the other to be in a certain relation to other moments, just as our past determines the present to follow it and to be followed by the future. By virtue of this "diagonal intentionality" (44-47), no moment is seen as simply caused by prior moments, but as effecting a whole and single presence to reality. The whole presence, in turn, allows us to experience a whole object within the sequence of its appearances. By treating time as presence in addition to time as a sequence of events, Husserl is able to use time to unite the appearance of things and their essences once again and to restore time as the ground for being.

There are two major improvements that Husserl makes to the thesis that time grounds being. One is that time is not taken for granted but grounded in a timeless consciousness that precedes the temporality of the subject. In

Chapter 4, Mensch expands the idea of a timeless consciousness to claim that we already have a sense of the Other before either time or subjectivity is established. The ground for being, then, is time only in so far as time is grounded in transcendental consciousness, freeing the ground for being from the contingency of the empirical self. The other improvement is that we are able to see the essential structures of things themselves without regard for any particular appearance, by considering the formal structure of the contents of the appearances. There is a set of possible content that we share with others, an "alphabet of experiences" (80) that we appeal to in understanding the essence of what we experience. We are led not only to a timeless consciousness at the root of our experience of being, but to a structure of essences that we read like an alphabet. The ground for being, then, is a timeless opening to the essences that being presents to us.

The improvements to the thesis that time grounds being provide an ambiguous position for philosophy: from one side, being is grounded in temporal consciousness, and from another side, consciousness is timeless and an opening to being. Mensch's suggestion is that we must confront this "janus head" (191) of a timely and timeless ground for being by discarding the thesis that time grounds being and by "crossing the line" (202) from time to being. He appeals to Aristotle's conception of time as relative to changes in the appearances of substances in nature. Rather than making time primary, Mensch claims that time is the result of the actualization of substances according to their essences. The essence of an acorn is its function as a growing tree, and temporality is the effect of change as that function is fulfilled. Our experience of the tree is the function of the tree's development, so that it is an effect of the function of the tree, and not a condition for its appearance. In this way, time and consciousness are grounded in being (Chapter 11).

Mensch's solution seems to be little more than a reversal of the traditional view. His appropriation of Aristotle is very interesting, going far beyond a simple essentialism to embrace the view that being involves a complex structure of inter-related functions, out of which temporality and consciousness develop. But his renewed Aristotelian position seems to simply assume that change is prior to time, and that substances are prior to consciousness. At one point Mensch refers to 'flesh' as a reversibility between the roles of consciousness and its object, but then later dissolves the balance of the two in order to emphasize objects (as functions or essences) over consciousness (188-89). I wonder if it is not possible to overcome the problems of Modernity by treating flesh as irreducible, rather than as a janus-head to be confronted.

I would like to commend Mensch for an interesting and thought-provoking work. Rather than spelling out the consequences of the fall of Modernity, Mensch has given much thought to where we can go from here. In the

process, he provides a number of reflections on artificial intelligence, the mind-body problem, and multiple-personality-disorder, claiming that computers have intentionality and that MPD patients, in having radically severed temporal structures for their lives, literally possess different selves at the same time. Mensch also provides a refreshing interpretation of the history of philosophy, most notably in his descriptions of Husserl and Aristotle. For anyone who takes seriously the problems of Postmodernity, Mensch's book is a powerful force to be reckoned with.

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Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers, Volume 3

RICHARD RORTY

Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, viii + 355 p.

It is difficult to remain unmoved by Rorty's work, and that's surely his intention. In this third volume of his philosophical papers, the provocation continues, even though (or, perhaps, precisely because) the tone he strikes is decidedly un-apocalyptic. This latest collection contains seventeen essays, most of which have already appeared in print sometime in the last decade, and this serves to maximize our convenience even as it diminishes any sense of occasion. Although the conjunction in the title suggests a philosophically intimate connection between the themes of truth and progress, the table of contents reveals a somewhat less coherent study. The first eight papers read like responses or critical notices to the work of predominantly analytical philosophers like Davidson, Putnam, Searle, Dennett and other usual suspects on current debates about truth, relativism, and skepticism. The next four essays, which depart significantly from the epistemic concerns of Part One, fall beneath the heading of "Moral Progress: Toward More Inclusive Communities." As a group, these four papers are vintage Rorty; collectively they are the most philosophically wide-ranging and rhetorically free-wheeling of the entire book. The final five papers deal generally with the relationship between philosophy and human progress, but they, unfortunately, tend to read like beefed-up book reviews, where the books reviewed either deal with figures in the history of philosophy or are written by a 'Continental' philosopher (broadly construed).

Somewhat belatedly perhaps, Rorty does attempt to articulate the themes of truth and progress in his brief Introduction. He begins by reiterating his familiar complaint that Western philosophy's preoccupation with "the intrinsic nature of reality," along with the supposedly indispensable correspondence theory of truth, have only led to hundreds of years of tiresome

intellectual debate, a "pendulum swinging between dogmatism and skepticism" (4). Rorty confesses, however, that when we change our minds about what philosophy is good for and abandon this hapless search for such an 'unserviceable' goal, we leave ourselves open to the charge of relativism, and this charge is hard to shake.

But Rorty insists that he is no relativist. He argues persuasively that because 'truth' is an absolute notion, it does not make sense to adopt the relativist's vocabulary of 'true for me but not for you' or 'true today but not tomorrow'. These, Rorty states, are "weird, pointless locutions" (2). But talk of justification is possible since justification is always relative to the particular beliefs, values or aims of an audience. Hence we should only use 'true' when we mean 'justified' and rest content with our inability to "hypostatize ... 'true' into 'Truth'" (4). The problem with resting content in this way, however, is that we must give up any claims to scientific progress if by this we mean getting closer and closer to reality in our scientific language. We are certainly better at making predictions than, say, the Greeks, and we have managed to solve old problems and invent newer, more interesting ones for ourselves, but Rorty insists that the undeniable successes of science should not be invoked to authorize truth-claims about the way reality is in itself. This position has important consequences, not the least of which involves the very way in which philosophy is 'practiced' in today's academy. Indeed, once we abandon any ontological priority to the world described by the natural scientist, we can similarly reject the epistemic stature of the scientist within our culture. Philosophers, as a result, should abandon the "bad idea" (8) of aping the scientists in their quest for legitimacy, for the rigor they seek is illusory and comes at the expense of their philosophical imaginations. This criticism is not new; Heidegger and others arrived at the same conclusion decades ago, but Rorty gets there from his own novel, and certainly un-Heideggerian, premises.

Similarly, in the case of moral progress, Rorty is very clear that the moral values of our human rights culture, prevalent in today's secure, wealthy, North Atlantic democracies, should not be regulated or justified by appeals to certain 'facts' about human beings, such as our rationality, dignity or freedom. What Rorty disavows, then, is the possibility of checking our treatment of other people with intuitions about some ahistorical moral 'nature' of human beings, whatever this may be. This does not mean that we should stop *treating* people as ends in themselves, but it does entail that we abandon our attempts to ground such treatment in dubious ontological claims about human rights. As Rorty states in "Human Rights, Rationality and Sentimentality," he is simply not interested in, as a pragmatist, the differences between the moral realist and the moral antirealist, for this meta-ethical squabbling will never help us with the immediate, practical questions of solving particular moral disputes. In another essay, "The End of Leninism,"

Rorty is almost wistful about the dissolution of the old “global leftist strategy,” under which “local hopes” were previously subsumed, and explains that such a void is now filled by the contemporary academic left’s preoccupation with “‘transgressive’ and ‘subversive’ cultural studies” which upset students’ parents instead of upsetting unjust institutions (238). It seems that on a practical level the left’s retreat has gone too far. But despite these present consequences, we are still better off in a world purged of metaphysical specters. To sum up: how we act ought not to be justified by transcendental arguments, but rather in light of our own contingent aims, interests, and purposes: in other words, ethnocentrically.

For those not sufficiently tweaked by Rorty’s glib avoidance of the philosophical difficulties that have troubled moral philosophers for centuries, his further claim in the human rights essay — that those “moral philosophers who hope to cleanse the world of prejudice and superstition” resemble Serbians “acting in the interests of true humanity by purifying the world of pseudo-humanity” (168) — will probably induce apoplexy in Kantian and Platonic camps. Now, there is a potentially interesting claim here, one that resonates with themes Derrida has articulated over the years, but as in many other instances, Rorty’s textual strategy (as I will call it) is to incite his critics by punctuating his articles with flippantly delivered overstatements. On the surface, his goal is to outrage, but Rorty’s textual strategy should always be understood against the background of his desire to continue and expand the conversation of philosophy. This means, I believe, that sometimes he intentionally subordinates his manners and perhaps, at times, even his intellectual honesty to the more circuitous goal of provoking responses to his work from across the philosophical spectrum. Like Nietzsche, it seems Rorty sets interpretive traps for his critics, who, scandalized by a surface rhetoric, often overlook the deeper arguments he is formulating in their dismissive responses. Rorty is then in a position (and we see this in his article, “Charles Taylor on Truth”) to respond, often with tremendous force and precision, to his opponent’s view.

In more conventional moments, Rorty is quite content to stake out his philosophical positions by invoking his now familiar lists of proper names of those with whom he either agrees or disagrees. In the first section of *Truth and Progress*, Davidson emerges as Rorty’s closest ally. In the final section, Rorty confesses that he thinks of “Jacques Derrida as the most intriguing and ingenious of contemporary philosophers, and of Jürgen Habermas as the most socially useful — the one who does the most for social democratic politics” (307). Although this high praise for Habermas is largely unsupported in the following essay (which contests his reading of Derrida), Rorty does manage to uniquely position himself outside the usual alliances that deconstruction provokes. Both camps read Derrida as a ‘public’ philosopher, one who is making claims about the nature of language that have implications for the

practice of politics, but Rorty rejects this view, arguing instead that Derrida is a ‘private’ philosopher, an ironist whose “creation of new discourses can enlarge the realm of possibility” (310). So Rorty ends up defending Derrida *qua private ironist* against both his boosters and knockers, but goes on to lament in the next essay (a review of Bennington’s/Derrida’s *Jacques Derrida*) that the book he is looking for — *Derrida for Davidsonians* — remains to be written. Rorty clearly admires Derrida (but not his wooden, servile imitators), yet remains baffled by the sorts of grand philosophical claims his boosters make on his behalf. For example, Rorty writes:

I do not know how to use the notion of ‘quasi-transcendentality,’ except as a name for the advantage that Bennington claims for Derrida over all the other philosophers whom I have just listed. But I am not clear what that advantage is supposed to be, or that it exists (337).

Given the frequent inability of Derrida’s rhetorical under-laborers to write clear, understandable prose, I do sympathize with Rorty here; however, I think his eagerness to assign Derrida’s work to a neutralized, private sphere is too quick and unjustified.¹ Although the public/private split may well have its political advantages, Rorty himself should perhaps be suspicious of his own apparent absolutization and enforcement of that division in his attempts to confine complex philosophical discourses to the rival camps of publicly useful and publicly useless theory.

In such a diverse group of essays, there is much that cannot be summarized or discussed. If a new trajectory in Rorty’s intellectual biography can be discerned here, I would venture to say it is his growing stature as a wide-ranging, philosophically astute, cultural commentator and his diminishing stature as a philosopher with something new to contribute to cutting-edge debates in contemporary Anglo-American epistemology, metaphysics, and philosophy of mind. I am convinced, however, that Rorty will remain a bold and original voice, someone from whom even his intellectual foes can learn. And given his prolific output, surely the maddening seductions of his next volume will not be far behind.

Notes

- 1 I have complained elsewhere of Rorty’s hasty characterization of Hegel as an old-style metaphysician. Of course, by my own account, if Rorty’s reductive comments about Hegel served the end of provoking my response, then his textual strategy was successful. See “Absolute

Knowing and Liberal Irony: Hegel, Rorty and the Criterion of Progress," forthcoming in *International Studies in Philosophy*, Spring 1999.

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The Gift of Touch: Embodying the Good

STEPHEN DAVID ROSS

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What is the significance of touch for a contemporary thought of materiality and alterity? Is it possible to rethink touch in ethical terms, linking it with the notions of expression, exposure, sacrifice, general economy, and *poiēsis*? In *The Gift of Touch: Embodying the Good*, Stephen David Ross raises these and other provocative questions in a remarkable re-reading of the Western philosophical tradition in which he attempts to understand touch in terms of the Platonic Good beyond Being (*epekeina tes ousias*). This book is the third and most recent in a series of books by Ross on 'the gift' and 'giving'—a concept, or perhaps better, a *logic* borrowed from various anthropological (Mauss), literary (Bataille, Cixous), and philosophical (Heidegger, Lévinas, and especially Derrida) sources. Ross' first two books in the series (*The Gift of Beauty* and *The Gift of Truth*) deployed this logic of the gift in order to explore the relation of beauty and truth to ethics and the Good. Similarly in *The Gift of Touch*, traditional ontological concepts and entities such as materiality, flesh, touch, and bodies are re-read in an ethical register in an effort to couple touch and bodies with what Ross calls an 'ethic of inclusion' (I'll return to this ethic in more detail below).

Ross' general strategy in this book is a dazzling and impressive one: he offers informed, critical readings of nearly *all* the relevant texts on touch and bodies in the history of western philosophy and contemporary poststructuralism. Ross' readings range across authors as diverse as Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and Spinoza to Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Deleuze and Guatarri, Lévinas, Irigaray, Elizabeth Grosz, and Judith Butler. In this review I concentrate on what I take to be the most important chapters for gaining a general understanding of his project, viz., those on Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Lévinas, Grosz, and Butler.

Plato is often read as the thinker of dualism par excellence, the prime philosophical representative of those who argue for the priority and primordially of the soul over the body. Plato, it would seem, is the philosopher most removed from the body and touch, the philosopher who knows nothing of flesh or materiality. Often Plato's *Phaedo*—where Socrates, facing death, insists on the importance of the soul and the

insignificance of the body in the afterlife—is cited as evidence of this general trend in Platonic thought. In a surprising and nuanced reading of Plato in the first two chapters of his book, Ross turns this classical reading of *Phaedo* on its head, or more precisely, places it firmly on its feet. Ross begins by citing, and reminding us of the fact that early on in *Phaedo*, Socrates "lowered his feet to the ground, and sat like this for the rest of the discussion" (*Phaedo*, 61cd). Beginning from this point of contact and touch, Ross does not deny the anti-body thrust of Plato's work, but reveals instead a more complicated picture of Plato's thought of materiality.

Here, under Ross' pen, Plato is transformed from a superficial critic of materiality into a profound thinker of finitude and mortality, one who challenges us to think of Socrates' death both as a disaster and a call of the Good. Ross carefully negotiates the complex tensions in Plato's writings between knowledge and the unknowable, life and death, suggesting that Plato's understanding of Socrates' death oscillates between a general and restricted economy (terms borrowed from Bataille). In this wavering between two economies, Plato's dialogue gives us to think Socrates' death as a disaster and loss which no mourning can ever recover or heal—and, at the same time, Socrates' finitude is thought in terms of general economy, as an opening to alterity and abundance through materiality and touch. The point for Ross is not to argue for the preponderance of a general over a restricted economy in Plato, but to insist upon this double register in Plato's text and to show how this other, general economy has been overlooked by most readers. The critical task for a thinking of materiality after Plato is not to decide on one of these two economies—choice makes little sense here, especially in terms of general economy—but to work through the overlapping of these two economies in his texts, as well as the difference between them.

Aristotle is often lumped in with Plato as another critic of the body, locating the essence of the human in *logos*, distinguishing man from animals and the rest of the physical world. The famous opening line of the *Metaphysics*, that "All men desire by nature to know (980a)," is taken to be the quintessential gesture of Aristotelian epistemology and ontology. Aristotle is also the foremost thinker of kinds and place, of location and space. As Ross argues, the Aristotelian desire to know that motivates his entire philosophical approach fixes bodies in place, readying them for a touch that desires to *know* alterity. In a Lévinasian vein, Ross suggests that we understand desire and touch as being beyond mastery, as a response to the call of the Good that exceeds knowledge in all directions, beyond the ability of consciousness to know bodies, what they can do, and what their proper place and kind are. For Ross, the critical question for any reading of Aristotle on materiality, touch, and bodies is: what if bodies in their alterity escape the bounds of knowledge, of restricted economy, and *technē*? What if bodies, rather than having a fixed place, belong to an abundance that knows nothing

of kinds and hierarchy? Despite his reliance on a metaphysics of knowledge, *logos*, and *techne*, on Ross' reading, Aristotle is not wholly unaware of abundance and *poiésis* in nature beyond knowledge. Thus, it is necessary to recognize two competing senses of *phusis* in Aristotle, one linked to restricted economy, the other to general economy. Also, Ross suggests (following a thread of thought that is more his own than Aristotelian) that we understand Aristotle's characterization of the good as "for the sake of which" (*Metaphysics*, 982ab) not in terms of *telos* or end, but as the good of nature in abundance. This rethinking of the good and *phusis* in Aristotle leads to an engaging re-reading by Ross of the matter/form binary in terms of restricted and general economy.

Of all the classical philosophical thinkers he reads in this book, Ross is perhaps closest to Spinoza. It is Spinoza who knows better than any other traditional philosopher that we know little of what bodies can do. Spinoza tells us that "no one has yet determined what the Body can do ... that the Body itself ... can do many things which its Mind wonders at" (Spinoza, cited by Ross, 89), a passage with which Ross begins his book and echoes many times throughout the pages that follow. In a quasi-Deleuzian reading of Spinoza that runs counter to traditional Spinoza scholarship, Ross singles out Spinoza as perhaps the first thinker in European thought to understand the body and touch as an opening onto nature's abundance in expression and exposure. Ross achieves this through a fascinating reading of the theme of *mimesis* (representation) as it relates to mind and body in the *Ethics*. But Ross' proximity to Spinoza's thought of abundance — a thought that leads Ross toward an ethic of inclusion, and Spinoza, in certain texts, to an ethic of limits based on a restricted economy of kinds — places him in contradistinction to some of Spinoza's more chauvinist remarks on the non-place of women in ethics and the place of animals in human economy. Critical of this latter tendency in Spinoza, Ross urges us to *think from* Spinoza's conception of nature as abundance, to understand nature's infinity in terms of general economy, resisting exclusion and hierarchy. He will continue to pursue this thought throughout the rest of the book as he turns his attention to contemporary poststructuralist writings on bodies and touch.

It would be impossible to understand the impetus behind Ross' re-reading of classical philosophical texts in the first part of the book without knowing something of the context out of which it is written. One could broadly and reductively refer to this context as 'postmodernist,' 'poststructuralist,' 'Continental,' or 'post-phenomenological'. If anything ties together these varied and highly differentiated trends within modern thought, it could indeed be an increased attention to and a complication of the themes of materiality, bodies, and touch and their relation to subjectivity. Some of the important background thinkers and movements necessary for understanding what is going on in Ross' text include: Heidegger's transformation of Husserlian

phenomenology into a phenomenology of being-in-the-world, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's work on the body that developed out of Heidegger's early writings, Lévinas' writings on the role of embodiment in the ethical, French feminist writings on bodies and the maternal, Foucault's genealogical investigations into how power is inscribed on the body, as well as recent poststructuralist feminist appropriations of Foucault and Nietzsche. It is with an understanding of this context that one can gain a better sense of what is at stake in Ross' deconstructive intervention into the history of Western philosophy, and why he is *obligated* by these thoughts of difference to repeatedly return to traditional philosophers in his books on the gift.

None of this should be taken to suggest that Ross is simply an uncritical follower of poststructuralism, repeating lessons he has learned from Foucault, Derrida, Lévinas or others. Ross does indeed borrow heavily from these thinkers, but his use of their work *also and always* takes the form of a responsible reading, sifting through the multiple inheritances that these thinker's texts leave to us. For example, in his chapters on the two best recognized theorists of the body, Merleau-Ponty and Foucault, Ross is not content to simply accept their refreshingly positive analyses of the body. Merleau-Ponty's work on the body, which is motivated largely by ontological and epistemological concerns, is critically interrogated by Ross as to its inability to ask the question of the body's relation to alterity and the Good beyond knowledge. Similarly, Foucault's analysis of disciplinary mechanisms and their effects on the body are pushed to their limits by Ross when he raises questions about bodies for which Foucault has little interest, viz., women's and animals' bodies (Ross returns to women's bodies in more detail in a later and important chapter on Irigaray).

Perhaps the most interesting part of the book is Ross' chapter on Lévinas. Any reader who is familiar with Lévinas' writings is bound to notice that on many points, Ross' concerns throughout the book are indistinguishable from basic Lévinasian themes. What is at stake in Ross' project thus becomes all the more apparent where he departs from him. This departure from Lévinas, it seems to me, stems from three distinct limits in Lévinas' *oeuvre*: 1) the question of sexuality in alterity, 2) the privilege of the human over animals and nature, and 3) the inability on Lévinas' part to think touch and love in conjunction with the ethical. Ross' concerns with the first two limits are engaged in more depth in the chapters on Irigaray, Grosz, and Butler; the third limit is the central focus of the Lévinas chapter. In the latter chapter, Ross finds himself largely in agreement with Lévinas' analyses of expression and exposure, but starkly at odds with Lévinas' understanding of touch. For Lévinas, touch is closely linked with, or inevitably leads to, totality and mastery. In place of an ethics of touch, Lévinas gives us an ethics of the face, a face that comes to one as master from a certain height. Ross questions Lévinas' reliance on an ethics of the face as well as his understanding of

touch as sedentary, wondering why Lévinas either cannot or does not understand that touch wanders and circulates in exposure. This limit in Lévinas' work stems perhaps from his somewhat sharp distinction between totality and infinity. Ross reads this distinction in a more contaminated way, insisting that totality and infinity are inextricably intertwined through touch in a manner that Lévinas does not pursue. This distance from Lévinas does not, however, prevent Ross from circling back and invoking Lévinas' conceptions of responsibility, infinity, and incarnation for the purposes of developing an embodied ethic of inclusion. More than any other figure (with the possible exception of Irigaray), Lévinas presents for Ross the possibility of thinking embodiment in its ethical specificity against more neutral accounts of exposure and alterity such as one finds in, for example, the motif of singularity in the texts of Deleuze and Guattari or Jean-Luc Nancy.

The final four substantive chapters (the very last chapter is a summary and conclusion of the book as a whole) of Ross' book take up poststructuralist feminist and ecofeminist concerns with the politics and ethics of bodies and touch. In Chapters 12 and 13, he offers a reading of Elizabeth Grosz' important work *Volatile Bodies*, before turning to an analysis of Judith Butler's influential *Bodies That Matter* in Chapter 14, and Carol Adams', Susan Griffin's, and Donna Haraway's various versions of ecofeminism in Chapter 15. At stake in Ross' reading of Grosz is an insistence on the importance of rethinking not only subjectivity in terms of corporeality (Grosz's task), but an expanded understanding of subjectivity-as-corporeality in relation to exposure and the good everywhere, not only in human bodies but in natural and animal bodies as well. Similarly in his chapter on Butler, whose work represents perhaps the most sophisticated feminist writing on materiality today, Ross questions the implicit humanism in Butler's work on materiality. Where Butler discusses the abjection of certain *human* bodies (the bodies of those who do not matter, those who have been denied full subjectivity and are able gain access to subjectivity only by acceding to the demands of the Symbolic), Ross wants to re-mark not only the abjection of those bodies, but other bodies as well. And this is a project that derives from Butler's own work, read in a certain (I would suggest 'responsible') way. For instance, becoming a 'subject' in Butler's terms means not only renouncing a certain conception of embodiment, but consists also in creating and denying a constitutive outside that eventually returns to disrupt that pretension to unity in subjectivity. This outside is constituted by abjected others of all sorts — women, children, men and women of color, lesbians, animals, nature, the non-living, etc. Butler contents herself with tracing the exclusion of various *human*, especially women and lesbian, others, but seems unwilling to make the ecofeminist gesture of considering the exclusion of women alongside the exclusion of animals and the rest of nature.

Hence the importance of ecofeminist discourse for Ross' ethic of inclusion. Ross employs ecofeminist writings from Carol Adams, Donna Haraway, and Susan Griffin to think exclusions in their historical interconnectedness, their multiplicity and specificity — women and animals, women and nature, white women and men of color, women of color and lesbians, and many, many others. If we are to work toward an ethic of *inclusion*, an ethic that, as Ross understands it, strives as much as possible to avoid exclusion based on kinds, then each one of these exclusions needs to be traced both in its specificity and its interconnectedness with other exclusions — a massive, indeed infinite, task. This infinite project to which we have been promised has its (non)origin in the good, in the call of and toward justice — and, for Ross' purposes in this book, most importantly — in touch and embodiment, in one's being-exposed through touch to all other embodied beings.

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