Book reviews / Comptes rendus

Heidegger, Authenticity, and Modernity
Heidegger, Coping, and Cognitive Science (Essays in Honor of Hubert Dreyfus, Volume I, Volume 2)
MARK A. WRATHALL and JEFF MALPAS, editors

These two volumes comprise a rich collection of essays honoring Hubert Dreyfus's contributions towards bringing a significant part of Continental philosophy to the attention of the Anglo-American tradition. Having Heidegger's philosophy as their central concern, these studies are the expression of "thoughtful dialogues between thinkers," following the rigors and standards according to which the German philosopher himself conceived the possibility of authentic "renewal" in the field of philosophy. The authors of the published essays, mostly Dreyfus's own students and friends, are presently engaged in diverse debates over the central concepts in Heidegger's philosophy. The critical positions that they take towards Dreyfus's own understanding of the German philosopher are themselves evidence of the influential role played by the latter, and generally speaking, for the inestimable value of a true philosophical dialogue between thinkers. Arising from the concern, on the one hand, to treat a classical philosophical text with respect for what is explicitly stated in it and, on the other hand, to show concrete ways in which its explicit claims can be integrated in understanding contemporary problems, the essays, as well as Dreyfus's responses to them (published in the final sections of each volume), cover a broad scene of notions and themes.

While the first volume discusses some basic Heideggerian concepts, the second volume focuses on central ideas developed in Dreyfus's own writings on intentionality and artificial intelligence. Since the editors also provide each volume with an introduction wherein the papers are summarized, I will restrict my remarks to the papers that I find most significant.

The studies gathered in the first volume fall under three main headings: 1) Philosophy and Authenticity, 2) Modernity, Self, and World, and 3) Heideggerian Encounters. Taylor Carman, Randall Havas, John Haugeland, and Charles Guignon, the authors of the first section's essays, concern themselves with Heidegger's concept of authenticity. The positions they take are both explanatory and critical in relation to Dreyfus's interpretations. In his reading of Heidegger, Dreyfus is finally committed to the dilemma of rendering inauthenticity as either inescapable or incomprehensible. Taylor Carman's explanation of the relation between Dasein's ontic, existential inauthenticity and its fundamental, ontologico-existential falling decisively contributes to an understanding of the phenomenon that would avoid this difficulty. Havas brings to a closer examination the relationship between Dasein's intelligibility and community, arguing, against
Dreyfus, for the constitutive role (in contrast to a merely derivative position) that intelligibility has for the human world of encountering relations. Emphasizing the essential unity among the existential structures of Heidegger’s Dasein, John Haugeland’s essay attacks the central thesis of Dreyfus’s interpretation of Being and Time, namely the belief that the first part of the book (respectively the ontological structures elaborated in the first part of it) could be understood apart and independently from (the existential structures analyzed in) the second one. Charles Guignon approaches the problem of authenticity from quite a different perspective. His study aims at providing an exposition of Heidegger’s view, as developed in his major writings between 1919—1935, on the essential conditions of the possibility of authenticity as a basic characteristic of a genuine philosophical approach in general.

The second section of this volume gathers several essays aimed at answering the ontological question from the standpoint of the present “post-subjective” age. The realities of the technological era—the reduction of the world to a uniform system of transformable, consumable resources—determine, in Heidegger’s view, especially as stated in his later writings, a certain transformation of the understanding of Being. Michael Zimmerman’s essay analyzes Dreyfus’s attempt to show that Heidegger’s understanding leaves a place for a concrete, constructive account of Dasein’s possibility of taking advantage of the opportunities afforded by our present time; a possibility which neither entails a loss of one’s authentic and disclosive self nor reduces this self to some sort of “flexible raw material.” Through an analysis of the complex relationships between our de-centered postmodern selves, modern technology and authenticity, this essay presents the outcome of technological development as being a real opportunity for the construction and preservation of authentic selfhood. It is important to read Zimmerman’s essay in relation to Jeff Malpas’s analysis of Heidegger’s understanding of the meaning of technological en-framing associated with a corresponding ontologically threatening transformation of the spatiality of Dasein. Malpas’s argument convincingly shows that the mode of disclosedness, in which both thing and world are revealed, is possible only in relation to the involved being-in-the-world that is dwelling (227). The basic strategy involved in providing such an argument is that of pursuing Heidegger’s analysis of the concept of spatiality undertaken in Being and Time. Far from crediting any future possibility of an authentic self, Malpas believes in the possibility of recovering a proper space for human dwelling, in the face of technological en-framing, as one that has to be worked out in relation to (or, better, starting from the very opportunities provided by) technology itself. Two of the other essays included in this section mainly use Heidegger as a pretext for discussing Kierkegaard’s concept of “leveling” (Alastair Hannay) and, respectively, Nietzsche’s notion of the “magisterial truth” (Béatrice Han). Intended to be a thorough analysis of Heidegger’s meaning of dwelling, and an explanation of the present homelessness (alienation) of human beings as a

radical failure to dwell, Julian Young’s essay argues that Heidegger’s different accounts of the phenomenon of dwelling explain the profound change that separates “late” from “early” Heidegger. For Young, the different ways of Heidegger’s conceiving the ontological phenomenon of Dasein’s dwelling are basically the different modes of his approach to the nothing—as “absurd” emptiness or absolute nothing opposed to “real plenitude of what has been transcended” or relative nothing. According to Young, “It is a mark of the profound changes that occurred in Heidegger’s thought between 1927 and 1951 that dwelling, the feature universally, ontologically, absent from human existence in 1927 has become by the later date, definitive of the human ‘essence’ ” (190); “the transformation of early into late Heidegger is the transformation of the human being from one who is, in essence, homeless into one who, in essence, dwells.” (193) The essay has at least the merit of providing an interesting explanation of the way in which the fourfold structure of being-in-the-world (“on the earth,” “under the sky,” “among mortals,” “before the divinities” discussed as such in Heidegger’s later writings) maps onto the threefold structure of temporality or care as presented in Being and Time.

The essays of the final section of the book bring Heidegger into dialogue with philosophers like Dewey, Husserl, Searle, and Davidson, in an attempt to articulate a proper understanding of certain basic moments of convergence and of irreducible difference between these approaches. William Blattner’s strong arguments aim at criticizing Richard Rorty’s and Mark Okrent’s reading of Heidegger’s ontological project undertaken in Being and Time as a pragmatist account of truth. The more general intention of the paper aims at discrediting any possible attempt to assimilate Heidegger’s doctrine of the de-intellectualization of understanding to the standard pragmatist view as developed by Dewey. Dagfinn Follesdall’s paper challenges Dreyfus’s understanding of Heidegger’s relation to Husserl. The study mainly focuses on the issue of coping which, Follesdall argues, is not as Dreyfus suggests, a radical, original Heideggerian concept, but rather one by means of which Heidegger continues Husserl’s own suggestions. What Follesdall actually criticizes in Dreyfus’s reading is his taking Husserl to be “more Cartesian” than he really was, understanding Heidegger’s explicit attacks on Descartes as implicitly discrediting Husserl’s own views. The implicit methodological suggestion that this essay promotes is that of the real need to return to Husserl’s own writings before uncritically adopting the picture of Husserl “surreptitiously” (257) created by Heidegger. The last two essays of this volume focus on the issue of intentionality as elaborated by Heidegger in comparison to Searle’s (David Cerbone’s paper) and Davidson’s (Mark Okrent’s article) positions.

Most of the papers published in the second volume, Heidegger, Coping, and Cognitive Science, deal with issues that grow directly out of Dreyfus’s own work, having as their central aim to make explicit or to criticize some of his central
views. The Dreyfus that the essays in this volume present us with is not only or not merely the excellent commentator of Heidegger’s thought, but also the original phenomenologist concerned with a hermeneutic of the concrete realities encountered in our present world.

The studies grouped in the first section of the second volume are mainly concerned with Dreyfus’s understanding of the phenomena of coping and intentionality, and they focus on the relationship between background, pre-reflective, pre-theoretical practices or capacities and their explicit articulations in various mental, intentional contents. Two of them are, I think, most relevant for this study. Engaged in the attempt to reject some central objections brought about by Dreyfus’s reading of his work, John Searle’s article is also a significant study of the main characteristics that demarcate in general a logical analytic from a phenomenological approach to intentionality. Insisting upon the thesis that every skillful coping must succeed or fail, having therefore certain “conditions of satisfaction,” (73) shows that, contrary to Dreyfus’s belief, skillful coping must itself be conceived as a kind of intentionality. For Searle, performing an analysis of the logical structure of intentionality starting from facts known in the actual sciences ultimately means investigating the neuro-biological basis of the capacities enabling our common practices. From the position thus taken, he criticizes Heidegger’s and Husserl’s phenomenological projects as still embedded in the epistemological foundationalist tradition aiming at elucidating the conditions of the possibility of knowledge (intelligibility) or certainty. Facing such a serious objection, Mark Wrathall’s paper provides an interpretation of the phenomenon of Dasein’s transcendence to explain the possibility of any actual skillful coping. Through the clear analysis here undertaken, Mark Wrathall’s study explains the root of the real differences that separate Searle’s from Dreyfus’s account. The explanation given lies in an adequate understanding of the different meanings that the two ascribe to the concept of “background.” Showing basically that, for Searle, the background is a “neuronal structure able to produce intentional states,” (93) while for Dreyfus it consists in a certain “set of practices, skills and activities.” (93) Mark Wrathall’s elucidation becomes a relevant test of the validity of Dreyfus’s critique of Searle’s approach.

The papers gathered in the second section of the book, “Computers and Cognitive Science,” attempt to understand fundamental phenomenological notions and themes in the “new” language of cognitive science. Sean Kelley’s article addresses the problem of explaining skillful bodily actions in a comparative approach, one that would bring into dialogue a phenomenological model with the theoretical explanatory model provided by cognitive science. The author attempts to offer a new neural network model of interpreting the basic features of motor, intentional behaviors (limb movement, the act of grasping) which, unlike the standard models provided by traditional brain science, would not conflict with but rather confirm a phenomenological description (Merleau-Ponty’s) of this kind of actions (166). The ultimate significance of his study lies in its confirming Dreyfus’s central thesis that the conclusions of phenomenology represent an important and informative resource for those attempting to develop scientific explanations of human phenomena. Oriented mainly by Dreyfus’s inquiries into the limits inherent to neural networks in comparison to the abilities of human brains, Harry Collins’s paper intends to analyze these limits in respect to the possibility of socialization. His arguments, analyzing the possible achievements that a computer can have in respect to the four different kinds of knowledge discussed (symbol-type, embrained, embodied, enculturated) rest on the premise of a theory of human action in society. The essay complements Dreyfus’s critique of artificial intelligence with a strongly argued account of what computers can do in terms of their useful interactions with human intelligence.

The articles in the final part of the book, gathered under the heading “Applied Heidegger,” are intended to be concrete exemplifications of the sort of work that Dreyfus’s “applied philosophy” inspired (3). The constant danger that threatens such attempts is that of losing the rigor of a technical, philosophical discourse and becoming a merely descriptive, trivialized interpretation of technical, philosophical concepts. In this sense, Charles Spinoza’s attempt to make explicit Heidegger’s account of the divine in the light of our contemporary experience, becomes a trivial account of how cultural figures (e.g., The Beatles) embody a form of spirituality which, once transmitted, transforms a whole generation and is a concrete way in which the gods announce their presence in our disenchanted world. In a similar attempt, Fernando Flores’s paper invites us to consider the profound changes that a Heideggerian approach would bring about in concrete situations occurring in the practice of business. The thesis of this paper is that the reinterpretation of business management in the light of Dreyfus’s interpretation of Heidegger leads to a re-evaluation resulting in a high increase in competitiveness in at least five areas of this practice: understanding the customer, designing business process, finance, implementing of strategic change, and entrepreneurship. Apart from the significant good, concrete, productive outcomes that the new approach has probably led to, Flore’s paper is ultimately subject to the inadequacy of being a reductive reading of Heidegger, in which the ontological categories of concern and care are interpreted in the ontic terms of need, mutual beneficial exchange and reciprocal advantage, while existential “disclosing” becomes the mere concept designating “the highest ethical good.” (291) Finally, Patricia Banner’s paper transposes Heidegger’s ontology into the concrete practice of nursing. The “derivative,” merely ontic interpretations presently given to the ontological concepts of “care,” “solicitude,” “finitude,” “world,” and “thrownness” elaborated in Being and Time, while perhaps suggesting Heidegger’s importance for the new approach of actual clinical practice, clearly miss, if not completely distort, Heidegger’s own meaning.
Overall, the collection of essays published in these two volumes, intending to broaden the area of discussions occasioned by Heidegger’s philosophy, marks an important moment in the field of contemporary theoretical concerns. Opening up new areas of interest, placing Heidegger’s own basic concepts into new contexts of interpretation, or simply revealing his supposed contribution to the peculiar modes of disclosing today’s world, the articles published in the present Festschrift will surely find a diverse readership both among dedicated professional philosophers and a broad range of non-philosophers.

Notes


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The Portable Kristeva
KELLY OLIVER, ed.

Julia Kristeva is surely one of the major figures in today’s European intellectual life. Her influential studies on language, sexuality, and dynamic therapy have encountered an enormous appreciation in fields such as linguistics, philosophy, sociology, cultural criticism, political science, psychoanalysis, psychiatry, feminist studies, and literary criticism. Quite remarkably, in addition to her theoretical writings, she also has been working as a psychoanalyst for more than twenty years and, more recently, she has begun a career as a novelist. Undoubtedly, Kristeva is a noteworthy figure in the postmodern pantheon. However, with respect to the Anglo-American world, her fame is not comparable to the one achieved in the European scene. It seems that within the Anglo-American world, her influence, unfortunately, remains limited to the departments of French and English literature, rather than reaching out to the departments of linguistics, psychology, and philosophy.

It is Oliver’s intention to find a remedy to the parochialism of Anglo-American academia, helping Kristeva’s name reach out of the circumscribed area of literary studies. Her Portable Kristeva, published in the series “European Perspectives,” aims at showing the mature, innovative, wide-ranged contribution that this Bulgarian-French author can offer to her colleagues in linguistics, psychology, and, especially, philosophy. It must be highlighted, in fact, that it is not just the continental philosopher who would be interested in her work, but also the philosopher of language working inside the analytical tradition (since Kristeva’s studies offer interesting interpretations of the notions of intentionality, subjectivity, sense-perception, and the mind-body problem).

Oliver selects passages from several works by Kristeva, and organizes them topically. The first section, namely a translation of her “Mémoires,” deals with Kristeva’s biography and her understanding of her own intellectual life. Revisiting thirty-five years of intense activity, she situates her work in relation to existential philosophy, to which she was exposed during her studies at the Sorbonne in the 1960s, as well as to structuralism and deconstruction, as the two main theoretical sources for her research in linguistics and philosophy. Furthermore, she sketches her experience as a participant in the Tel Quel group (later renamed as Infini), her disillusion as a member of the French Communist Party (particularly after visiting China in the 1970s), and her views on European and American feminism.

The second section deals with Kristeva’s work on language, meaning, and sensation. Oliver collects a group of texts written between 1974 and 1994 (Revolution in Poetic Language, Desire in Language, Time and Sense), in which Kristeva defines the categories of “symbolic,” “semiotic,” “subjectivity,” and “sensation.” The notions of “symbolic” and “semiotic” are perhaps two of Kristeva’s best-known contributions to the human sciences. She describes the “symbolic” as the structures of significance determined by the differential relations that Saussure, Derrida, Wittgenstein, and Quine have all analogously conceptualized. The “semiotic,” instead, is individuated as the structure of significance determined by the subject, either individual or collective, that causes him/her/they to make use of the “symbolic.” In this way, Kristeva connects the meaning of words with a meaning for life; namely, the use of linguistic categories and practices as instruments to express feelings, desires, aspirations, projects, etc. “Subjectivity” is outlined, in fact, as the complex, fluid, ongoing articulation of dialectical interactions between these two structures of significance. She provides evidence from her psychoanalytical experiences (slips, autism, stuttering, jokes, etc.) in an effort to solidify the fundamental intersection between words and life. Moreover, she defines neuroses as forms of dialectical impasse between these two structures; namely, between the subject’s desire, or bodily drives, and the holistic, codified conglomerate of linguistic meanings. “Sensation” is also understood within the same framework. According to Kristeva, perceptual experience, in its very initial stages, is already informed by linguistic elements, in so far as it constitutes a reading of signs, a recognition of significant determinations.
The third section of this book gathers a group of texts dealing with Kristeva’s works on love. Her Tales of Love, Black Sun, and New Maladies of the Soul, written between 1983 and 1993, criticize the grim Freudian portrayal of child development, with special regard to the development of linguistic skills. Love becomes the central issue in understanding how a child achieves its self-expression through the codified structures of the “symbolic,” instead of hiding itself in obstinate autism because of its fear of the castrating father. Psychological and several psychiatric disorders are then explained as the absence of a satisfactory connection between inner drives and a linguistic frame of expression.

The fourth group of texts deals with Kristeva’s works on individual and collective identity. Abridged translations of her writings of the 1980s provide the reader with a generous harvest of notions on the process of “abjection.” This process is shown to characterize the infant’s development of a self-image and, at the same time, the realization of the mother as an object. “Horror” and “fascination” are the emotional counterparts of this process. These concepts are then applied to the adult’s relationship between the conscious and the unconscious, and this echoes the same dialectic between “horror” and “fascination.” Kristeva maintains that psychoanalysis furnishes an interesting example of how a subject, in order to develop into a fully mature individual, must eventually embrace and accept its own “otherness” and, therefore, how cosmopolitanism represents the ultimate goal for contemporary Western societies because it is officially based on the recognition and promotion of the individual’s human rights to integrity, self-expression, and flourishing. In other words, if we want a society of fully developed individuals, we must accept as much diversity among us as possible, and, as a consequence, we must reject nationalistic isolationism or xenophobia as a threat to such a development.

The fifth group of texts deals with Kristeva’s works on maternity and feminism. With regard to the former issue, Kristeva is committed to a demasculinization of psychoanalysis’ conceptual framework. The first step is the recognition of maternity as a feminine event, rather than (solely) as a scientific or religious case, in which the mother is generally absent, being reduced to a functional subject of the process of generation. The second step is the understanding of maternity as an unconscious act of love between the present mother and her own mother, as distinguished from Freud’s idea of maternity as a response to the woman’s unconscious envy of the penis. More broadly, female sexuality is reinterpreted in female child—mother terms (as parallel and separate from Freud’s universal male child—mother model). In light of this reinterpretation, Kristeva analyzes the history of feminism as a tripartite process. First there is a mainly political feminism directed at the attainment of an equality of rights. Second, there is a mainly artistic feminism of autonomous femininity, which tries to create peculiarly female, non-phallic forms of narrative. Third, there is a mainly philosophical feminism, which rejects any notion of determined identity, considering all categories of understanding, “man” and “woman” included, as contingent, social-historical constructions. Kristeva sides with this third group and solicits her female colleagues towards a post-feminist future.

While we might normally consider such a “portable philosopher” book as a commercial operation having little scholarly expertise behind it, this is not the case with Oliver’s edition. Her selection of texts is careful, honest, and wide-ranging. Her organization of Kristeva’s representative works shows a deep understanding of the author’s originality, background, interests, and goals. Furthermore, Oliver’s comments, which are not limited to the long preface and introduction at the beginning of the book, but which also open each of the five sections outlined above, are insightful and helpful to connect Kristeva’s works with the many thinkers and fields to whom she is indebted. The consequence, however, is that this “portable” edition is not at all very “portable.” In other words, Oliver’s exposition is so rich and detailed that it makes the book sound more like a critical study of Kristeva’s thought than like an introductory, essential companion for the occasional reader who is curious to get to know one of the most prominent intellectual figures on the contemporary European scene. In other words, this critical remark is not meant to be an admonition against the professional zeal displayed by Oliver. On the contrary, we should applaud her highly academic book, despite the fact that Oliver’s potential readers will be narrowed considerably.

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Being and God in Aristotle and Heidegger: The Role of Method in Thinking the Infinite
CATRIONA HANLEY

With Being and God in Aristotle and Heidegger, Catriona Hanley offers an excellent example of scholarly literature and provides a competent, scrupulous comparative study of Aristotle and Martin Heidegger. Admiringly, Hanley avoids any preposterous conflation of their philosophies, as her two detailed, separate sections on the two thinkers exemplify. The first part, which mainly orbits around Aristotle’s Metaphysics, and the second part, which limits its scope to the early Heidegger (i.e. till the mid 1930s), are intended to furnish all the relevant information needed to target five major problems: (1) What Heidegger took from Aristotle; (2) How Heidegger transformed Aristotle; (3) How Heidegger should be read now that his debt to Aristotle is widely recognized and richly documented; (4) How the relationship between being and God figures in their philosophies; (5) What the role of methodology is in determining this relationship.
Hanley focuses her attention on (4) and (5). (1)—(3) are expected to become clear through the analysis of this conclusive pair of more specific issues. In addition, she admits that an extensive, explicit study of (1)—(3)) would commit her to an overly demanding task. As a consequence, she determines her position on (1)—(3) indirectly, working inside the academic tradition of scholars such as Volpi and Van Buren, whose contributions she takes as generally familiar to the reader. Naturally, the audience to whom her book is directed is a selected elite of historians of philosophy in the Ancient and Continental areas.

The pivotal element in Hanley’s treatment of (4) and (5) is placed on the explanation of the a-theistic shift of Heidegger’s ontology. Whereas Aristotle develops an onto-theology, i.e. a science of being grounded in the notion of a temporally infinite God, Heidegger, at least till the mid 1930s, formulates a mere ontology, i.e. a science of being qua being devoid of any reference to the divine. Hanley is convinced that Heidegger’s exclusion of God from the picture is a logical consequence of his methodological approach, which she reads as capable of dealing only with the realm of the finite. Heidegger proceeds via phenomenology, tackling the problem of being from the point of view of the temporal, contingent, in possibilitatibus vivente Dasein, thus from the start leaving no room for the infinite. Aristotle’s philosophy, on the other hand, allows for the infinite, as well as the divine, since it includes a way to attain knowledge of absolute, eternal, universal principles: theoretical understanding. More precisely, Hanley outlines Aristotle’s notion of episteme—which she translates as “science”—as the “search for universal grounds of phenomena peculiar to a particular subject genus.” (1) Ontology, as the episteme of being qua being, is therefore the search for being’s universal grounds. Significantly, at least according to Hanley’s reading of his Posterior Analytics and Physics, Aristotle’s entire scientific enterprise is, at its core, etiological: namely his investigation aims at determining the primal source of movement, the ultimate ground of all passages from potentiality into actuality. Such a source, or ground, is described as necessary, fully actual, eternal, non-kinetic and immaterial, and it constitutes that which our “rational psyche” (26) detects as required to make sense of all forms of movement conceivable and cognizable in the universe. Starting from empirical observations, in fact, human knowledge moves from such particulars to higher and higher degrees of abstraction, determining the “essence or species form” of larger and larger categories of cases, which are “expressed as a universal in the definition.” Eventually, by employing “identification and noetic intuition of universal principles,” (1) we can achieve the understanding of the primary source of movement, the essential root of all forms of being. Knowledge itself, as a form of passage from potentiality into actuality, calls for an ultimate aitia (“universal ground”) of movement, which, in the Metaphysics, finds a name: God. This is how God enters the equation: it represents the primal mover, the fundamental aitia of “the physical cosmos.” (2)

Heidegger, on the other hand, condemns Aristotle’s approach as oblivious to the distinction between the ontic and the ontological. Just as all his predecessors have done—so Heidegger modestly claims—Aristotle too subsumes all beings under unifying logical categories of understanding, “freezing” the fluid, all-interdependent reality within the cold pigeonholes of conceptual distinctions. Doing so, Aristotle is betraying such beings’ unique individuality, and he is neglecting the fact that our faculty of understanding is itself as kinetic, as contingent, as non-actual, as the sensible cases from which it takes the moves. Aristotle is said to have failed to grasp the “radical” being of the existing world in which Dasein dwells, thus denying its ontological evidence, rejecting its all-encompassing embrace and, instead, reifying it as an ontic, theoretical object. In order to avoid this kind of self-deception, Heidegger takes a phenomenological stance, which he sees as the only alternative to the millenary metaphysical tradition that Aristotle exemplifies. In phenomenology, in fact, no detached “rational psyche” abstracting an object’s essential features is given. The very starting point is a subject-object relationship, informed by the human practical concerns and linguistic structures of signification, which delimits the “possible horizon” (102) of our experience and, a fortiori, of our knowledge. Henceforth, Hanley can list a series of sharp oppositions between Aristotle’s and Heidegger’s approaches. Whereas Aristotle stresses the ethical imperative derived by the knowledge of the fixed form of rationality proper to human nature, Heidegger stresses the nihilistic tragedy connected with the implausibility of such an absolute knowledge. Whereas Aristotle stresses the theoretical, universal, and eternal character of the noetic intuitions on which science is based, Heidegger emphasizes the practical, idiosyncratic, social and historical malleability of structures of signification. Aristotle stresses actuality, while Heidegger stresses potentiality; we are nothing, according to Heidegger, but a finite set of possibilities, an on-going cluster of drives, for we are limited by temporality, ignorance, and mortality.

Thus, Hanley concludes, Heidegger’s methodological position cannot but close off theology from the scene; there is no place for eternal, pure actuality but, rather, there remains only possibilities and potentialities. Quite dramatically, God has been “bracketed” out at the beginning of the phenomenological inquiry, and now it cannot be reintroduced, since its alleged features do not pertain to the realm of entities that phenomenology can legitimately ascertain.

However, Hanley wonders, is this an irrecoverable case? Shall we conclude that a phenomenological stance strictly implies “God’s death?” Hanley does not think so. At the end of her study, in a rather summary way, Hanley sketches a possible alternative to Heidegger’s nihilistic verdict. In the first place, she argues that Heidegger’s method excludes the possibility of talking about the infinite and God, but not the possibility of their actual existence. In the second place, she affirms that Heidegger’s phenomenology of the finite might even admit an experience of the infinite (and of God) as “the non-finite Other.” (198) In other
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Gilles Deleuze. Une Vie Philosophique.
ÉRIC ALLIEZ, ed.

With the exception of four contributions, this collection of thirty-three essays represents the intellectual labour of those who participated in the June 1996 conference, Recherches Internationales Gilles Deleuze, in Brazil. The editor, Éric Alliez, an attentive reader of Deleuze and an accomplished philosopher in his own right, has collected in this volume a set of first-rate essays which succeed in offering the reader a useful chart for the navigation of often turbulent waters. The collection presupposes a certain familiarity with the texts of Deleuze and Guattari; but, given some familiarity, the essays fully compensate for the effort of going through more than five hundred pages of challenging writing. The anthology is divided into four parts: Philosophical Variations, with René Schérer, Arnaud Villani, Luiz Orlandi, José Gil, Peter Pål Pelbart, Jean-Clet Martin, Jean-Luc Nancy, François Wahl and Giorgio Agamben—all seasoned readers of Deleuze—discusses the ontology of the singular, the logic of sense and the distinct temporalities of events and states of affairs; History and the Becoming of Philosophy, with Deborah Danowski, Gérard Lebrun, Scarlett Marton, Éric Alliez, David Lapoujade, Véronique Borgen, Bento Prado Jr., and Isabelle Stengers, insightfully discusses the encounters between Deleuze and Hume, Nietzsche, Maimon, Bergson, William James, Sartre, Wittgenstein and Whitehead; Politics and Clinic, with François Zourabichvili, Michael Hardt, Fredric Jameson, Renato Janine Ribeiro, John Rajchman, Laymert Garcia dos Santos, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Suely Rolnik, Joel Birman and Eduardo A. Vidal, comments upon Deleuze's designation of our societies as societies of control and canvasses political and artistic movements for new lines of resistance and flight; finally, Aesthetic Varieties, with Pascale Crion, Jacques Rancière, Raymond Bellour, Haroldo de Campos, André Parente and Julio Bressane revisits Deleuze's preference for the "hystericized" over the organicist art work, and makes it clear that this preference does not commit Deleuze to the usual aesthetics of the sublime; it rather turns his attention to emerging intensive forces and affects, capable of inflecting both power and servitude.

What this anthology does best is distinguish Deleuze's thought from earlier and contemporary ways of thinking. According to John Rajchman ("Y-a-t-il une intelligence du virtuel?"), for example, behaviourism was the type of philosophy best suited to productivist societies endowed with a taylorist discipline, while today's cognitivism best suits the tastes of a technicist society. Deleuze, by contrast, juxtaposes to the brain-computer of our cognitive neurosciences a vitalist and "pragmatist" brain—reminiscent in many respects of W James and Whitehead—a brain which is able to interact with a pluralist and unpredictable world. Instead of being a centre mastering the world, this brain stands for the power of the virtual to make connections. The result of this new way of thinking is a veritable anomaly, attempting to build metaphysics upon multiplicities and singularities, instead of essences and universals (A. Villani, "Deleuze et l'anomalie métaphysique"). According to Jean-Luc Nancy ("Plis deleuzienne de la pensee"), the result is also a virtual philosophy, which actualizes the philosophical real—a philosophy of nomination (it names what it actualizes), rather than a philosophy of
discourse and communication. This philosophy, according to Villani, presents us with a metaphysical idealism of the singular, which replaces the Platonic auto kath’ auto (it itself) with the heteron kath’ heteron (the different itself). In the centre of Deleuze’s thought, difference is no longer a relation but rather a thing in itself—no longer the “different than” but “difference in itself.” The fact is that this substitution would not have worked without Deleuze’s distinction between the virtual and the possible—and Rajchman’s essay discusses this distinction very effectively: the virtual unlike the possible is real and actualizable—the way the langue of the structuralist is virtual and real, although actualizable only in speech and writing. It is only at the level of the internally differentiated virtual—which is further differentiated throughout its actualizations—that the different in itself (the real target of the philosophies of difference) can be discussed with precision. Only at this level, singularities, events and haecceities (the real elements of the transcendental field) assemble themselves in series and resonate with one another as they form planes of consistence.

A metaphysical anomaly of this magnitude requires a motive for being appropriated, a new image of thought, as well as a rigorous theory for the production/productivity of sense. Sense, for Deleuze, is neither designation nor manifestation nor signification, but rather something akin to Husserl’s noematic nucleus with antecedents and connections as far back as the complex: significabile of Gregory of Rimini, expressed through infinitives and accompanied by question marks. Two strong essays address the issue of sense. José Gil’s “Un tournant dans la pensee de Deleuze,” discusses Deleuze’s The Logic of Sense (the companion volume of Difference and Repetition) as the response to a quest for a new way through events and series—of thinking the production of sense (or rather of infra-sense) which can best be witnessed in the experience of madness. (This essay is also a superb discussion of the evolution of Deleuze’s notion of the “body without organs” from The Logic of Sense—where it does not yet reach its real potential—to Anti-Oedipus). In the sequence, a masterful yet difficult essay by Jean Wahl, “Le Cornet du Sens,” further investigates the genesis of sense, making it clear that sense, for Deleuze, must be produced, not discovered. As he develops his argument, Wahl shows that Deleuze’s is a philosophy with no room for a nostalgia of Being. Rather, it is a philosophy that understands spacing as distribution—neither as explosion nor as fragmentation—a philosophy of speed and traversing, rather than of territoriality and sedentarism.

Now, a philosophy of difference which seeks the different in itself runs the risk of becoming incoherent unless it successfully addresses the question of the co-ordination of the disparates it encounters. Deleuze calls the successful co-ordination of disparates the “plane of immanence”; and Bento Prado’s essay, “Sur le ‘plan d’ immanence’,” sheds light on it through an appeal to Wittgenstein’s Weltbild. A Weltbild is the amalgam of pseudo-propositions crystallised at the base of a language-game. Coming as it does before the alternative true/false, it functions nevertheless as the condition of both. Concepts presuppose it, and philosophy misrepresents it each time it understands itself as a theory of representation; for, in this case, it interprets the plane of immanence as a set of propositions which refer to empirical or transcendental objects. It is Giorgio Agamben’s excellent essay (“L’Immanence absolue”) which further elucidates the plane of immanence, reading it as the field where concepts are produced, circulate and collide. In a sensitive discussion of Deleuze’s last published work before his death, “Immanence: A Life,” Agamben claims that the ultimate gesture of philosophy is to think of immanence as a life. A life is a figure of absolute immanence because it cannot be attributed to a subject—it is an infinite de-subjectivation. The question, of course, can still be raised as to whether de-subjectified life is ultimately able to escape reterritorialization. Indeed, Laymert Garcia dos Santos’ essay, “Code primitif/code gênétique,” raises few sceptical questions about this issue. The genetic code, he argues, having been decoded, becomes the object of an enormous axiomatization, the aim of which is the forced reterritorialization of the code and its insertion in the circuits of private property. Later on, in his effort to answer those who charge that Deleuze’s conceptual constructivism may result in a debilitating form of relativism, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro in “Les Pronoms cosmologiques et le perspectivisme amérindien,” argues that Deleuze subscribes to a non-relativist perspectivism: all beings see (represent) the world in the same way; what changes, though, is the world they see. But a perspective should not be confused with a representation, because the latter is a property of the mind, whereas the former is a point of view of the body. Furthermore, Prado, in the same essay, points out that the plane of immanence, which is Deleuze’s absolute horizon independent of all observers, renders virtual events and concepts independent of all actual states of affairs.

Eight essays make up the section on Deleuze’s encounters with the history of philosophy (those “unnatural nuptials,” which, as Deleuze used to say, were the results of his encounters with the thought of others). These encounters, as Luiz Orlandi in “Lignes d’action de la différence” argues, cannot be spread over a space which would in turn, testify, to philosophemes being attacked and defended; they rather represent lines of flight which permit difference to modulate its many powers. A few of the essays in this section stand out as they address, in a novel way, issues emerging from Deleuze’s thought in its dialogue with other philosophers: the essay of Gerard Lebrun, “Le transcendental et son image,” for its rehabilitation of Maimon’s critique of Kant, and the impact of this rehabilitation on Deleuze’s own writings; David Lapoujade’s “Du champ transcendantale au nomadisme ouvrier,” for its interesting rapprochement of W. James’s pure experience and Deleuze’s immanence; and Isabelle Stengers’ “Entre Deleuze et Whitehead,” for its judicious discussion of both, and its preference for the latter.

The problematization of psychoanalysis by Deleuze and Guattari also finds space in Alliez’s collection. At issue here is Deleuze’s theory of productive
desire which knows neither law nor lack, and which cannot exist except as in assemblages—the kind of desire which is turned against Hegel, Freud, and Lacan. In this section, Eduardo Vidal (“Hétérogénéité-Deleuze-Lacan”) attempts a reading of Deleuze and Guattari’s unconscious, which is populated with drives and intensities against Lacan’s unconscious, which is characterized by lack. Furthermore, Joel Birman (“Les Signes et leurs excès: la clinique chez Deleuze”) welcomes the Deleuzo-Guattarian body without organs, which occupies the space between desire and Oedipus; from this site, it dislodges Oedipus from his position of control in the formation of the subject and its accounts, albeit in a non-Freudian way, for the possibility of primary repression. This section also includes essays on Deleuze’s notion of the subject. The subject is not given; it has to be produced in a way that exceeds the individual—this is the argument of Suely Rolnik in “Schizoanalyse et anthropophagie,” where Brazil, schizoanalysis, the principle of anthropophaghy (swallowing the other so that his particles and my particles mingle together) and fluid subjectivities are brought together in an intriguing way. The subject has to be produced on the basis of the impersonal and pre-individual singularities, which populate the virtual field. (J. Birman, “Les Signes et leurs excès”). Finally, Peter Pál Pelbart (“Le Temps non-réconcilié”) complains that as long as temporality and historicity are thought to be identical, the multitude of temporal figures populating psychotic experiences is lost; the distinction between Deleuze and Guattari’s becoming and history provides an invaluable tool for re-evaluating the temporal heterogeneity of psychoses.

The book includes a strong section on Deleuze’s minor languages and literatures and on his nomad arts. Nomad arts mobilize material and force, rather than matter and form, as they endeavour to place variables in a state of constant variation. As for Deleuze’s selection of minor speech and writing for the sake of la prise de la parole—that is, for the sake of those who do not yet have a language—it underlies his impatience with the timidity of linguistic, grammatical and literary theoretical models, which rest satisfied with the mere reproduction of discourse. Jacques Rancière (“Existe-t-il une esthétique deleuzienne?”) underscores Deleuze’s attempt to historicize the work of art in opposition to the organicism of the Aristotelian poetics and to all notions of molar autonomy. Pascale Crivion (“A propos d’un cours du 20 Mars 1984. La ritournelle et le gallop”) suggests that Deleuze’s writings on music do not propose a new discourse on music or a new model for its interpretation; they rather determine new angles of encountering concerns and ideas originating in other fields of experience and research, or of assembling potentialities and musical ideas which bond with other kinds of work. The way in which it articulates expression and content, music, according to Deleuze, highlights the “non-sonorous” forces of cosmos, earth and time. Witness, for example, the role of the gallop and the ritornello in musical compositions, which mark the continued passings of presents and the preservations of pasts. In a similar spirit, Raymond Bellour (“Michaux, Deleuze”) remarks that Deleuze’s references to literature are not designed—as in the case of Heidegger—in order to evoke Being, but rather to experiment with better responses to the univocality of Being. André Parente, in “Le cinéma de la pensée ou le virtuel en tant que jamais vu,” revisits Deleuze’s three stages in the history of cinema, and, with them in mind, he makes the point that, after abandoning the notion of the cinema as a door behind which there is something to be seen, and also the notion of the cinema as a framed plane within which something is to be seen, Deleuze invites us to think about the current stage of the cinema as an information table upon which images circulate in an undifferentiated way. The problem then is how to be among images, given the fact that the background itself is another image.

The second section on politics is developed around the schizophrenia-inducing double bind of capitalism (its propensity to steadfastly liberate flows of desire, while continuously preventing new flows from escaping), the capturing pincers of the state-form, and the rhizomatic lines of flight that stake out a political project for the becoming-revolutionary and nomadic, rather than sedentary and fascinant. Fredric Jameson (“Les dualismes aujourd’hui”) chooses a more accommodating view towards Deleuze than the one that we would have expected from him a few years ago. He continues to lament the poverty of economic analyses during the 1960s and what he takes to be the unilateral emphasis on power and domination of that time. But he credits the authors of Anti-Oedipus with the search for criteria for the distinction between right and left—although he still expresses his concerns regarding the new ideologies to which this search may succumb. His essay ends by praising Deleuze and Guattari for having correctly foreseen the third stage of capitalism—globalization and cybernetics. By contrast, Michael Hardt (“La société mondiale de contrôle”), claims that in our societies of control, the dialectics of the inside and the outside no longer find application. So-called public spaces become more and more privatized. What was, only yesterday, operating through exclusion (for example, the exclusion of the other in racist ideologies) is today a strategy of differential inclusion. René Schérer (“Homo tantum. L’Impersonnel: une politique”) underlines approvingly the political decisions which account for the displacement of the subject: beyond the personalist frame of the polis, displacement allows for an appeal to the “ethnie,” that is, to those without country, without abode and without citizenship. Renato Janine Ribeiro (“Les intellectuels et le pouvoir revisited”) returns to the 1972 exchange between Foucault and Deleuze on the political responsibilities of intellectuals. François Zourabichvili in an important essay (“Deleuze et le possible [de l’involontarisme en politique]”) highlights the Bergsonian inspiration of Deleuze’s politics. He argues that the exhaustion of the possible does not climax at the triumph of the actual; it is rather the clarion call for the creation of the new. The possible is always conceived on the basis of what is actual; it is only the virtual/real that ushers in the new. Therefore, the exhaustion of the possibilities of the traditional left, far from sedimenting the programs of the
right, foreshadows the suffusion of the political unconscious with new intensive forces.

In conclusion, Gilles Deleuze. Une vie philosophique exhibits all the strengths and the occasional weaknesses of a collection of essays, authored by different people, but put together by someone who is an expert in the field. On the one hand, Eric Alliez has spared no effort to make the reader forget that these are the proceedings of a huge conference: essays have been carefully selected and arranged, with an eye to the outcome, continuity and saturation—as much as possible—of the entire field of issues and concerns that we can trace back to Deleuze’s writings. A plurality of viewpoints, a variety of reading strategies, and a multitude of voices by believers and unbelievers alike have been made to begin to resonate in common. The payoff is a volume that is informative and thorough in its reach. On the other hand, if one wants to look for weaknesses, one would find the inevitable repetition that characterizes anthologies, along with some unevenness in the ambitions of the contributors, and the inability of a collective work of this nature to sustain any argument for as long as it is necessary to achieve final clarity. This said, the reading of this book is a “must” for those who want to have a better understanding of the French philosophies of difference that dominated the intellectual landscape from the 1960s to the early 1990s. Deleuze’s particular version of the philosophy of difference was, until his suicide in 1995, rather intimidating for North American readers. His death prompted a dramatic rise in curiosity and an explosion of writings—not all of which measure up to the complexity and richness of thought that they confront. Alliez’s volume is one of the significant exceptions to this state of affairs.

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How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics

N. KATHERINE HAYLES


It is said of the present, amongst other things, that it has abandoned any firm distinction between artifice and nature, abandoned it even to the point where the body—that most distinct of natural accomplishments—is itself threatened by technological obsolescence. Katherine Hayles’ How We Became Posthuman is about how this present ever came about, how we brought the body to a point of almost total disappearance and how we might get it back. It is a story of our increased abstraction, and one that rests, she argues, on the scientific tendency towards the “privileging of informational pattern over material instantiation,” (2) a move that has, throughout the twentieth century, made embodiment more like an accident of history than a necessity.

For Hayles, this account of the body’s erasure is largely paralleled to the history of cybernetics, and much of her book does an able job tracing the three conceptual advances in cybernetics that have supposedly brought this posthuman state about. The initial theory of cybernetics was that machines could come to possess the same processes that allow a living organism to achieve internal stability in a fluctuating environment; this is the homeostatic phase, based on adjusting feedback loops between the operator and its context. The second, “reflexive” phase, drawn mainly from the work of Maturana and Varela, encloses the environment within the living system: the external world exists only as it is determined by the internal organization of the organisms in it. Thus, living systems are not constructed externally, but are autopoietic, or self-making. The third phase, according to Hayles, defines life in terms of autopoietic systems, whether natural or artificial, but places additional emphasis on the computer modeling of emergent behaviour within the living entity itself. As a process evolving in computer technology, the “logical form” of the life system becomes, in theory, separable from its material instantiation. Computational life is life. This, in turn, changes how we see ourselves. The human becomes posthuman when the natural body is supplanted by technological dynamics; when the abstract processes at work on the computer screen are less an extension of ourselves, and more the very reproduction of the living processes by which we are generated.

That, at least, is the trajectory Hayles adheres to. However, she makes her case rather selectively. She notes only in passing that artificial life also applies itself to the “wetware” creation of truly biological systems; or to the “hardware” creation of “robots and other embodied life-forms.” (225) These are, contrary to her thesis, remarkably contemporary fields in which “disembodiment” is definitely not the desired outcome. But, more importantly, disembodiment may not even be the desired outcome of computer-generated life either. Because even the computer system is essentially a material apparatus, the life it yields might not be disembodied so much as re-embodied technologically. The reader is left wondering whether computer-generated life is without a body, or merely possessive of a vastly rudimentary body interacting with an equally rudimentary computer environment. Have we lost the body or a type of body? Is a body what takes place in natural limits, or does nature itself provide the means to transcend these boundaries? Hayles’s thesis is, in part, that human beings can never escape embodiment, but the reader rarely feels that contemporary technology is meant to be such an escape, or that embodiment as such is as threatened as she claims.

Her case might be helped by attending much more to conceptual arguments, which are remarkably few and far between in the book, and much less to narrating the work of others. The book is, if anything, researched to the point of fault: a barrage of information and digressions thereupon clutter what ought to be
Self-knowledge and the Self

DAVID A. JOPLING


Should Oedipus have heeded the imperative writ large above the Delphic temple gates—“Know thyself!”—by engaging in critical self-inquiry? Would a tenacious drive towards self-evaluation have enabled Oedipus to avoid his tragic destiny? In David Jopling’s book, *Self-knowledge and the Self*, the focus of the inquiry is on answering questions of this sort, questions concerning the nature and limits of self-knowledge and their implications for moral agency. While Jopling uses dramatic and literary works (including Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex*) to illustrate key philosophical points, his aim goes far beyond clarifying the themes of drama and literature. The author summarises the book’s project in the following way: “The goal of this work is to examine some of the epistemological, phenomenological, and moral dimensions of self-knowledge.”

In pursuing this goal, Jopling highlights three theories of philosophical psychology, each explaining why an individual agent would reflectively ask (or fail to ask) and felicitously answer (or fail to answer) the questions “Who am I?” and “How should I be?” According to the author, these theories partake in one or more of three broad traditions in Western philosophy, each positing a different conception of what constitutes self-knowledge, as follows: (1) an attainable virtue; (2) an elusive goal; and (3) a process of self-criticism. Subsumed within the first tradition is Stuart Hampshire’s philosophy of “stepping back,” or gaining a more objective vantage from which to evaluate the self; as a result, the individual achieves a humanly good end in life: namely, self-improvement. Partaking in the second and third traditions, Jean Paul Sartre’s theory postulates a perpetually uncertain and incomplete project of existing as the basis for the individual’s pursuit of self-knowledge; that is, a project that involves self-deception, self-critique and overcoming conventional modes of self-understanding in order to approximate, though never fully attain, an authentic self. The third theory, held by Richard Rorty, emphasises the contingent and contextually sensitive quality of the self, which must be read and interpreted imaginatively, and sometimes ironically, to suit the relevant discourse. Acquiring self-knowledge, and thereby rendering a new self-interpretation, disappoints the goal of reaching a definitive and improved understanding of the self (in agreement with Jopling’s second tradition) since no interpretation in any discourse is complete or privileged (pro the hermeneutic circle and contra Hampshire’s view). Yet, despite their differing loyalties, Jopling asserts that all three theories make the shared claim that “acquisition of self-knowledge is to a significant extent an action of the self, for the self, and by the self.”

The three theories of philosophical psychology—represented by the thought of Hampshire, Sartre and Rorty—serve as foils for the fourth, and Jopling’s favourite, theory: the theory of dialogic self-knowing. In the second chapter, Jopling dons his gloves and work boots, so-to-speak, to do, what he calls, “largely ground-clearing work”: the task of distinguishing alternative approaches to understanding the self—such as inquiries about ideally objective selves, psychological profiles, self-concepts, personal narratives and subjectively felt selves—from self-knowledge proper. He then devotes separate chapters to presenting the tenets of the three foil theories—chapter 3 (Hampshire), chapter 4 (Sartre) and chapter 5 (Rorty). The author’s central concern, though, is to refute the claim shared by the three philosophical psychologies, i.e., that the locus for gaining self-knowledge should be situated solely with the individual. Jopling summarises his main objection to this claim in the following manner: “The individualism that informs these three philosophical psychologies is problematic because it is purchased at the cost of an implausible account of the social and interpersonal dimension of self-knowledge.” A better account, Jopling argues, would put an end to such overweening individualism by introducing the possibility of acquiring self-knowledge through interaction between the self and others. Therefore, the success of the book’s project depends on the success of the argument in favour of the theory of dialogic self-knowing.

Jopling devotes the last chapter (chapter 6) to arguing for the thesis that the theory of dialogic self-knowing provides the missing link towards a more robust account of self-inquiry. The author considers three versions of the thesis in favour of self-knowledge acquired through the relation between the self and others, each involving a distinct translation of this relation, as follows: (1) involvement in communities with like-minded persons, (2) truth-preserving intersubjective agreement and consensus, and (3) dialogic encounters with interlocutors. In response to the first translation, in which self-knowledge demands agreement with fellow like-minded community members, Jopling objects that the requirement of like-mindedness perpetuates group delusions, and therefore undermines the possibility of veridical insights into the self. In addressing the second translation, the author rejects elements of both Charles Taylor’s and Ernst Tugendhat’s formulations; the former on the ground that the drive to radically re-evaluate the self with reference to others’s standards fails to guarantee the accuracy of those
standards; the latter because it inadequately specifies what constitutes consensus and expert knowledge in the concept of “answering to someone else.” Jopling characterizes the third translation in a more favourable light: “If the acquisition of self-knowledge is part of a dialogical project, then to be self-knowledgeable is to be an interlocutively and interpersonally responsive agent.”

In Jopling’s assessment of these three versions of his thesis, he prizes one feature above all: that they explain the self’s ability to learn about itself by recognizing the sui generis qualities of the other person as distinct from itself. While the presence of this feature is weakest in the first translation, it is, by comparison, only slightly stronger in the second and strongest in the third. Here, the author draws heavily on the concepts of Otherness and dialogue in the writings of Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas. Dialogue resembles a vague, spontaneous and mutually engaging exchange, an exchange that distinguishes the self from the other person as Other—or as a distinct being qua human (not simply another self). For Jopling, a theory that explains how self-knowledge is acquired through dialogue is superior to a theory that does not. Why? Because it accounts for an alternative source of self-knowledge: insight gained by the self, not only in communion with itself, but also in dialogue that reveals the differences between the self and the other person as Other. Hence, Jopling establishes his criterion of success: that a theory of self-inquiry accounts for the competency of the self to engage in reflective dialogue. Since the third translation does indeed pinpoint dialogue as crucial to self-inquiry, the theory of dialogic self-knowing, the author argues, prevails over its competitors.

At any rate, some doubts still arise as to the cogency of Jopling’s argument in favour of the theory of dialogic self-knowing. In the book’s finale, the author employs another literary work—The Stone Angel by Margaret Lawrence—to illustrate how interaction between a self-inquirer and the other person as Other can yield critical insight into the moral character of the self. Although a hated air surrounds the meeting between the protagonist, Hagar Shipley, and the stranger in Lawrence’s novel, such an encounter in ordinary life seems far too happenstance to ground the individual’s need for consistent and reliable self-development. While Jopling’s project accomplishes the goal it sets out to—viz., to “examine some of the epistemological, phenomenological, and moral dimensions of self-knowledge”—the reader is left with a nagging suspicion that the success of his argument in favour of the theory of dialogic self-knowing was staged. The author’s favourite theory is almost too perfectly tailored to the criterion of success: that it captures the competency of the self to engage in dialogue with the other person as Other. Nevertheless, Jopling’s project is a worthy one, and his argument—though not decisively successful—marks a significant contribution towards resolving the problem of self-knowledge.

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More Radical Hermeneutics. On Not Knowing Who We Are

JOHN D. CAPUTO


John D. Caputo follows up his previous, successful, and controversial Radical Hermeneutics. It is his conviction that we need More Radical Hermeneutics. Caputo’s message has not changed. He is back as a defender of post-modern anti-essentialism, which he characterizes as a serene, joyful memento mori of all the philosophical and theological schools that still believe in the possibility of overcoming the intrinsic contingency of human intellectual constructions. Caputo describes himself as the advocatus diabioli, for he reminds the reader about the fact that human beings are dramatically and irrecoverably limited. Human physical and intellectual resources are no meta-empirical, meta-historical gift; they are no extraordinary key to unlock the eternal laws of the universe; they are no revelation of “the Secret.” (1) Human physical and intellectual resources are contingent, perspective-dependant, and survival-oriented tools given differently to each singular, unique, socio-historically located individual, which represents the exclusive ontological datum that we can ascertain. On this basis, radical hermeneutics becomes the only consistent philosophical attitude that Caputo can offer, namely a constructive disposition in favour of non-dogmatic interpretation, novelty, and diversity.

Caputo’s style has not changed. He still displays a vast erudition combined with a sagacious, brilliant writing, in which wit, insight, and irony conjoin with one another to create an intriguing and persuasive pattern of reflection. English and French literature, biblical studies, psychoanalysis, and medieval philosophy are equally valid sources of illumination. Critical studies, Christian hermeneutics, talking cure, history of philosophy are all activities that can be ascribed legitimately to Caputo. In truth, no specific disciplinary boundary is set, even if the backbone of Caputo’s forma mentis is unequivocally a philosophical one.

Caputo’s references have not changed. Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Martin Heidegger are still his philosophical heroes,” namely authors who are not afraid of facing the radical contingency of the human condition. Other voices join theirs, though, to ensure that the panorama of postmodernism is adequately represented: Maurice Blanchot, Druclila Cornell, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jean-Francois Lyotard are all granted a place of honour in Caputo’s volume. Only one pezzo da novanta is missing: Gilles Deleuzes—and Caputo gives no reason for this exclusion.

The book is organized in three sections. The first one is devoted to a full-fledged exploration of his anti-essentialism, with particular attention to its main inspirers. The second one deals with three specific contexts to which his anti-essentialism can be applied, namely gender, natural science, and ethics. The third one tackles the issue of an anti-essentialist approach to religion, regarded as an
More accurately, the first section opens with a chapter on Foucault's "hermeneutica negativa." (17) i.e. a radical scepticism with regard to all forms of narrative claiming to have discovered "the Secret" of human nature. Madness, sexual deviance, and criminal behaviours are the fields that Foucault investigates to show the fictitious character of such narratives, which actually rest upon linguistic, social, and political constrictions of the existing diversity into forced identities. This dialectic between constrained identity and proliferating diversity is discussed further in the following three chapters on Gadamer, Derrida, and Rorty. Caputo praises these authors because of their brave admission of the constitutive contingency of human descriptions of reality. Although they recognize, or even share, the passion for knowledge that has inspired metaphysicians and theologians in the past, they are not driven away by it. They exemplify a wise, moderate, "felicitous nominalism" (30) which abstains from absolute claims of any sort, and which welcomes novelty as the positive face of human ignorance. Not knowing is not a fatal flaw, in fact, but rather it is the necessary condition for the flourishing of interpretative possibilities, explanatory attempts, revolutionary discoveries, idiosyncratic expressions of one's self. Concluding, Caputo defines friendship, tolerance, and multiculturalism as the interpersonal, social, and political embodiments of the positive attitude of the authors listed above, their "felicitous nominalism."

The second section begins with a chapter on anti-essentialism and gender. Following Drucilla Cornell's studies on this issue, Caputo individuates in definitions, metaphors, and roles concerning gender a set of exemplary cases of forced identity that should be discharged in favour of a non-dogmatic attitude, which would be far more respectful of individual peculiarities, creative innovations, and changes in the forms of human interrelation "(sexuality without number" 149). The second chapter applies analogous considerations to the field of natural science, which Caputo interprets as an emblematic instance of hermeneutic procedures. Defending Thomas Kuhn from Weinberg's attacks, Caputo reinforces the idea that natural science is organized as a socio-historical paradigm of explanation, which is bound to collapse whenever inexplicable phenomena, new methods, or new inventions come along. The section ends with a chapter on ethics as a philosophical praxis requiring a ruthless anti-essentialist reformulation. According to Caputo, too many contemporary ethical studies are aimed at creating uniformity of behaviour, prescribing the appropriate code of conduct, and proscribing any alternative. In this manner, he argues, plurality and novelty cannot arise or, if they do, they are likely to do so in dramatic ways. Caputo condemns, in particular, the notion of duty as overly limiting and paradoxically selfish: gratuitous giving and infinite responsibility are detected as the right, anti-essentialist antidote. They, and not duty, reflect the fundamental openness to diversity, to the unknown, to the future, which Caputo defines as the general attitude of the committed anti-

essentielist.

The third section deals with the issue of religion. In the first two chapters Caputo gives an interesting interpretation of the Christian faith as a form of radical hermeneutics. First, in fact, faith is based on the notion of not knowing "the Secret," but believing in it nevertheless. Quoting Kierkegaard and Eckhart, Caputo praises uncertainty and ignorance as constitutive traits of the religious experience. Second, the exegesis of the Bible and, more strikingly, the mystery of Jesus’s Resurrection are read as interpretative exercises par excellence. The understanding of the Word is based, in fact, on provisional readings of signs, tentative interpretations of traces, inconclusive hypotheses on the significance of the spoken and the unspoken: "Undecidability is the condition, the quasi-transcendental condition, of faith, the thing that makes faith (im)possible, the impossible." (220—1)

In conclusion, Caputo provides his readers with an insightful, valuable study of several aspects of contemporary postmodemism, both of deconstructionist and hermeneutic origin. His remarks on Derrida and, especially, Richard Rorty are extremely incisive and illuminating. However, his work suffers from a limitation typical of much postmodemism: optimism. Caputo, as before him Derrida, Habermas, and Rorty, assumes that diversity, pluralism, and democracy are going to promote human flourishing by their own virtue. Caputo describes even Foucault himself as a confident defender of these values, despite the fact that the French thinker is often seen as a desperate prophet of the tragic nature of human relations. Such a recurring stress on the intrinsic goodness of diversity, pluralism, and democracy represents the postmodern equivalent of an act of faith. It is not clear, in fact, why diversity, pluralism, and democracy should necessarily grant human flourishing, instead of destruction and life-reduction. As Caputo enjoys highlighting, we do not know what the future is going to disclose: maybe a better life, as he hopes, or maybe an endless nightmare, as most of past and present history seems to suggest.

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Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity / Martin Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe 63
JOHN VAN BUREN, trans.

Heidegger has said that the seminar notes Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity (based on the summer seminar he gave in 1923 at Freiburg), constituted the first notes for Being and Time. One cannot consequently overestimate their significance
for understanding his later work and his subsequent philosophical path. Given that Heidegger’s work is not a system, the comprehension of its unity requires knowledge of its genesis. Ever since the German publication of *Ontology* in 1988, English readers have impatiently awaited its translation. John van Buren, author of *The Young Heidegger: Rumor of the Hidden King* (Indiana University Press, 1994), accepted this hermeneutical challenge and has succeeded with aplomb. We will begin by briefly highlighting the contents of the work and then proceed to comment on the translation and editing work of van Buren. The difficulty of the translator’s task will be appreciated once the content of this seminar is considered.

The title generally serves as an indication of a book’s contents. At first sight, *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity* seems obscure by the combination of terms it presents. What relationship does Heidegger intend between “ontology,” “hermeneutics,” and “facticity?” In the first part of the work, Heidegger states that the task of hermeneutics is to elucidate facticity, the be-ing of the ineluctably self-interpreting (hermeneutical) nature of Dasein. “Facticity” most essentially characterizes Dasein in its be-ing character, in other words as being there in each case for a while, at a particular time, present in the world about which it is preoccupied or concerned. The task of hermeneutics is to hold Dasein wakeful to itself. Heidegger calls this eminent possibility of Dasein “existence.” The wakefulness of Dasein for itself, its not running away from itself, indicates that it is always on the path toward itself, toward encountering itself, in anticipation and questionableness (interpretation gone wrong). This fundamental dynamic of Dasein shapes its specific temporal horizon, revealed by care, disquietude and anxiety. Consistent with the phenomenon of care, Heidegger interprets “of” in the expression “hermeneutics of facticity” not as an objective genitive, but as a possessive one that stresses the self-interpreting nature of facticity (Dasein) itself. Later in the seminar, Heidegger interprets “facticity” as a phenomenon that appears.

Hermeneutics becomes in this way a preliminary exercise which never stops questioning, in which, Heidegger explains, one has to stay as long as possible. The way to maintain one’s self in this questioning is to heed the foreconceptions working in the conceptuality of average everydayness. This conceptuality is conveyed by “talk,” which is motivated by “curiosity,” where Dasein is taken as a mere object of knowledge. The conceptuality of everydayness is founded in unquestioned tradition.

Looking at tradition from this hermeneutic perspective dismantles it. By applying the mirror of his now established determination of factual Dasein to the areas of history and philosophy, one can critique the conceptuality and categories of Dasein that tradition transmits and the fallenness (as opposed to wakefulness) that it perpetuates. This is why in the second part of the seminar, Heidegger tries to explain average everydayness through an analysis of contemporary historical consciousness and today’s philosophy. Whether it tries to elaborate the morphology of culture, define the totality of being according to an absolute temporal norm, or construct a system, all these efforts impose an interpretation of Dasein as being lulled by the certainty and security of objectivity. Heidegger thereby determines today’s history and philosophy to be “talk” based on “curiosity”: “a being-nowhere found in the ‘must see everything,’” (43) the public-ness of life as such.

In the last part of the seminar Heidegger explains that curiosity can be dominant because Dasein is initially being in a world, encountering and sojourning at home in it, in other words being concerned about one’s environing world, aware that the world is here for one insofar as one cares about it. Through encountering the world, Dasein derives its significance and founds the possibility of hermeneutics as such. The world has sense only if Dasein opens it by means of caring for a specific situation of its everydayness, and not by theoretical grasping. But since care is oriented towards the world in everyday concern, its actualization and temporalisation correspond to “fallenness” where Dasein conceals itself in curiosity, public-ness and habits. Dasein thus hides from its own care; the distress that genuinely moved Dasein toward self-encounter also dissolves.

We will now comment on the work of the translator. Not only is van Buren’s expertise in the early Heidegger recognized, this edition merits reinforcing this strong reputation. There are useful and relevant additions to the German edition: all Latin and Greek quotations are referenced in the English translation; van Buren adds references to the English translations of the German works cited in Heidegger’s notes; and there is extensive helpful philosophical commentary on the subject matter.

The German edition contains a detailed Table of Contents (which constitutes a summary) as well as an Editor’s Epilogue by Käte Bröcker-Oltmann. Van Buren adds his own Epilogue, copious endnotes and a German-English, English-German glossary. In the translator’s “Epilogue” and the endnotes van Buren meticulously justifies his translation decisions from both linguistic and philosophic perspectives. In addition, he elaborates the principles that guided his work by setting out the Heideggerian understanding of translation. Translation is inevitably interpretation, the transformation of a thought. But transformation here is not pejorative since it brings new insight to the subject matter and illuminates new connections. Moreover, a translator as interpreter must be aware of his linguistic and historical situation, while retaining respect for the language, conceptuality and subject matter of the original text. Since van Buren sees translation as hermeneutics and is aware of his own forehaving, his approach concurs with Heidegger’s, producing a sensitive and eminently thoughtful rendition of this enigmatic text.

The minor qualms that follow do not mitigate our unqualified approval of this excellent edition. On a first reading, the length of the endnotes almost causes one to lose the narrative thread of the main text. These notes are all very helpful and justified, and although it is impossible to separate completely the linguistic
from the philosophic, a possible alternative would be to restrict the endnotes to linguistic remarks and place the more philosophical comments in the Epilogue. The reader could then choose whether or not to refer to the highly specialized linguistic explanations. Another point is that a few translations seem too detailed, for example, “auf” (with respect to, on the basis of; and with view to...), “Woraufhin” (the with-respect-to-which and on-the-basis-of-which), “aus” (wherefrom, out-of-which, and on-the-basis-of-which) and “Einsatz” (initial engagement and bringing into play). An endnote explanation may have been sufficient to suggest the different meanings the reader should have in mind when he reads the word, allowing the translator to choose an expression more in tune with the sobriety of the German term. Finally, van Buren speaks of looking for a balance “between the poetic dimension of Heidegger’s text and its factual earthiness.” (99) While we agree with his view that the seminar anticipates later texts generally regarded as poetic, he has perhaps over-emphasized the poetic dimension of this text. (91, 92, 97, 107, 108, 111) His main examples of poetic language are the words “Aufenthalt,” sojourn, and “Verweilen,” whiling. An explanation of what van Buren means by “poetic” would have been useful.

Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity is a highly enigmatic work due to the nature of its subject matter and its form as lecture notes. Although it stands on its own and can be read without reference to Heidegger’s later work, this text challenges the alleged lack of an ethical perspective in Being and Time. Van Buren rouses the reader’s interest in this subject with a simple question: “Was the course ‘Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity’ the original form of Heidegger’s ‘original ethics’? Heidegger would have responded in the affirmative, prompting the reader to ask: Is it then meaningful to ground ethics in ontology and to found ontology on existence? To ask this question is to encounter Heidegger’s thought and to be moved by the hermeneutical impulse toward self-interpretation. Perhaps that was precisely what Heidegger ultimately wanted to accomplish.

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Die Resokratisierung Platons, Die Platonische Hermeneutik Hans-Georg
Gadammers
FRANÇOIS RENAUD

When I retired from my teaching position at Heidelberg towards the end of the sixties, I originally had planned to develop all of the already submitted, and also all of the commenced studies on Greek philosophy into one larger book on Plato. I never got to
do so. Other tasks always interfered (...).

So writes Gadamer, who celebrated his 100th birthday in February of 2000, in the preface to the seventh volume of his collected works, published just nine years ago. Now François Renaud has undertaken the arduous task of synthesizing Gadamer’s thought on Plato to present it in one book. Whether Gadamer will regard this as his work having been done for him, is a question he alone can answer. We shall have more to say about this later.

There is no doubt, however, that many Plato scholars and those curious about, or already interested in, Gadamer’s work will find Die Resokratisierung Platons an invaluable source, both for insights into Gadamer’s thought and as a rich source of references. A further attraction: it is beautifully written, impeccably researched, and well documented. What is more, the contextualisation, the careful and sensitive exposition of Gadamer’s thought, and the measured and considered critical comments show interpretive practice at its best. The only thing that many English-speaking scholars will wish for is that Renaud may publish an English version soon.

“The goal of this book is to critically examine the Plato interpretation of H-G. Gadamer,” says FR in the first line of his introduction. (1) The route he chooses has three distinct stages: the first (chapters I and II) locates Gadamer’s Plato studies within the larger context of the German philosophical tradition and classical philology. (5) He traces in broader strokes Gadamer’s interpretive practice and hermeneutical theory from its roots in tradition to its offshoots in scholarly reception. Chapter I brings to the forefront the tension between practice and theory in Gadamer’s work. As FR states, this tension informs the critical thesis of his book:

The distinguishability in principle of understanding and application, interpretation and critique, sense and meaning, that Gadamer’s hermeneutical theory ultimately is not willing to recognize, which his hermeneutical practice, however, quietly presupposes, constitutes the critical foundational thesis of the present (i.e. FR’s) study. (15)

Chapter II revolves around Anamnesis (recollection) as participation (Teilhabe). The Anamnesis teaching as the central motif of Platonomism underlies the task of destruction (Destruktion) aimed at breaking up the sedimentation that covers up the conceptual (begriffliche) roots of tradition. Pivotal for Gadamer’s thought is the model character (das Vorbildhaftes) of the classical (des Klassischen) that he defends against classicism and historicism.

The second stage (Chapters III—VI) might be termed the expository stage. Here FR collects Gadamer’s dispersed Platonic studies and unites them under four
main themes: Socratic dialogue (III), ideas (IV), dialectic (V), and ethos (VI). The figure of Socrates and the Socratic dialogue explored in chapter III are central to Gadamer's project of the "re-socratization of Plato" (hence the title of FR's book). Here the role of logos—its limits, its harmony with ergos (deed), and as question—gains prominence. This leads into the notion of eidos (idea) discussed in Chapter IV with particular focus on "taking flight into logoi" (die Flucht in die Logoi), the hypothesis of eidos, and the demand for justification (Rechenschaft). The discussion of Platonic ideas carries over into Chapter V, where the crucial theme of "the one and the many" is elucidated. Chapter VI focuses on ethos as practical philosophy in the sense of phronesis and of dialectic as practical knowledge from an Aristotelian and a Platonic perspective. Contrary to the tradition that sees Plato as a dogmatic two-world proponent and idealist, while emphasizing Aristotle's realism, Gadamer aims to minimize the opposition between those two philosophers by denying the dogmatism and the two-world view, and instead stressing the immanence of ideas.

The third stage (Chapter VII, and the conclusion) consists of critical comments derived from other scholarly approaches to Plato, and critiques of Gadamer's approach to hermeneutics and to Plato interpretation. Although the specified goal of the book is a critical examination, readers expecting an in-depth critique of Gadamer's Plato interpretation might feel disappointed. As the German heading of Chapter VII (Kritische Anmerkungen) suggests, and as indicated also by the subheadings, this part of the book offers critical comments on all the main themes the earlier chapters explicate. The lack of in-depth critique, however, does not necessarily detract from the value of the book. On the contrary, this survey of some of the contentious aspects in Gadamer's work is immensely helpful for scholars seeking to orient themselves in the debate. It might have been interesting, though, to see a concluding chapter bringing out more clearly FR's own view on Gadamer's practice and theory. But here as throughout the book FR practices admirably Gadamer's demand for Zurückhaltung (restraint).

In addition, the book contains an appendix critically discussing Leo Strauss's Platonic hermeneutics (152—9). Invaluable bibliographical material includes, apart from an extensive general bibliography, a chronological list of Gadamer's Plato studies (150—1) and a separate list of Gadamer's works (160—2). The book lacks a subject index, although a name index is included.

If we were to take up a Gadamerian perspective, what could we say about FR's synthesizing efforts as a hermeneutical endeavour? Consider some of Gadamer's hermeneutical tenets: A hermeneutical rule is that one must understand the whole through the particular (aus dem Einzelnen) and the particular through the whole, hence, the hermeneutical circle (GW I, 270ff, 296ff). Understanding a text means understanding the question to which the text is the answer (GW I, 368ff, 375), and this presupposes recovering the Fragehorizont (horizon of questioning), which is achieved by the fusion of the horizons (Horizontverschmelzung) of the past and of the present (GW I, 311f, 380). Socratic dialectic is paradigmatic for hermeneutics (GW I, 368ff, V, 38ff). Schriftlichkeit (being in writing) is hermeneutically enabling (GW I, 393 ff), rather than impeding as Plato thought (Phdr. 274c ff). Moreover, although Gadamer acknowledges the role of mens auctoris in "living conversation" (lebendiges Gespräch), the author's intent is problematic and of diminished interest when it comes to written text (GW II, 19). Nevertheless, Gadamer states:

When we attempt to understand a text, we do not try to transfer (versetzen) ourselves into the psychological state of the author. Rather, if one wants to speak of self-transference (Sichversetzen), we put (versetzen) ourselves into the perspective under which the other has gained his opinion (GW I, 297).

Understanding is always already interpretation (GW II, 19). And most importantly understanding, and thus, interpreting, is to understand each other "in" the subject matter (sich in der Sache verstehen) (GW I, 29ff).

Let us turn to FR's book. Its structure follows the principle of, first, giving an overview of the whole by assembling the particular key points of Gadamer's hermeneutical practice and theory. FR does so by fusing the horizon of past scholarship from which Gadamer's thought arose with that of present scholarship (i.e. the reception of Gadamer's thought). Interestingly, Gadamer himself stands in both horizons, so to speak. In the second stage FR collects the particular tenets of Gadamer's Plato interpretation and unifies them under key concepts. In the third stage Gadamer's interpretation of these Platonic concepts is critically examined.

But let us dwell for a moment on what such collection of thought from a variety of texts written over the span of about sixty years implies. First, it raises the question whether one can take an author's thought as homogenous enough to yield a coherent interpretive picture over time. This, of course, is one of Gadamer's own assumptions in his Plato interpretation. As FR points out, Gadamer aims for a unitary depiction of Platonic thought, pivoting around the figure of Socrates (121ff). In other words, he does not subscribe to the tradition that sees a clear development in Plato's thought from the early, over the middle, to the late dialogues. By contrast, FR sees such an "undeniable development" in Gadamer's own thought from the early to the later Plato studies, a development that FR takes into account in his explication (16—18). Moreover, consider the fact that Gadamer himself collected texts spanning nearly eight decades and published a selection of them in ten volumes. For the most part the included texts remain unrevised with some comments added in brackets. But FR draws not only on the Collected Works but also on other texts, not only on Gadamerian but also on texts by other authors who have either influenced Gadamer or reacted to what he has said (mostly in his
What made Gadamer include or leave out these texts and not others when compiling his GW? In the case of major texts—say Truth and Method, or Plato’s Dialectical Ethics—the answer seems obvious. These texts are landmarks of Gadamer’s work. But for a variety of shorter texts this is not necessarily so. Hence, one may ask whether Gadamer’s decision against inclusion is any indication of his attitude towards them. In short, could one read it as a rejection? My own feeling is that there are no sufficient grounds for such a reading. Does that mean that one can safely assume that Gadamer stands behind everything he has ever written (barring what he explicitly amends in his annotations)? It seems to me that this would go too far in the opposite direction. One obvious criterion for assuming that an author continues to hold certain beliefs or tenets he or she has expressed earlier in life is their coherence with what is said later. But can we infer from that that anything that does not cohere should be discarded as no longer the author’s considered opinion? In addition, would that entitle us to speak of a development in the author’s thought? Gadamer would seem to answer both questions in the negative. “Not only sometimes, but always, does the sense (der Sinn) of a text surpass its author.” (GW I 301) Once written, a text becomes part of tradition, and so, takes on a life of its own. The original author (ursprüngliche Autor) does not have privileged access to its thought in the sense that he or she knows best how to interpret it and can serve as the standard for its “correct” interpretation.

This seems at the same time both counter-intuitive and strangely plausible. On the one hand, we take it for granted that an author can explain best what she means in her text. After all, conference discussions of an author’s paper, for instance, are based on this assumption. Few people would tell an author that she might not know what she means but that they do. They might very well point out a discrepancy between what she believes her written words convey and what the hearer or reader may in fact take them to mean. But would anyone at this point say: “you cannot change your text; what you said there will be considered as your opinion for all times?” We take it for granted that an author might discover in discussion that what her text conveys to others is not in fact what she intended to convey. We also allow for the possibility that dialogue about the text may lead the author to change her opinion, say, if flaws in the argumentation are pointed out to her (or if further research yields different conclusions, etc.).

The problems arise when the text has become part of the public domain—that is, if a written text is published. There is no chance of “recalling” a written text as a dealer might recall a faulty car model. Of course, one can try to retract in subsequent publications, but there is no guarantee that readers will read both. What is more, the author may remain unaware that readers understand the text differently than the author intends it to be understood. And if the author is no longer living, access to her original intent or intended meaning is denied. To some degree this is the tension between the original meaning (ursprüngliche Bedeutung) of a text and the significance of the meaning for us (Bedeutsamkeit für uns) that FR points to in Gadamer’s theory and practice (42). This is a multilevel question, because we may draw a further distinction between the author’s original intended meaning and the meaning the text had for its original audience. Moreover, it is misleading to speak of the latter as though there were any clear-cut interpretive consensus views. There are interpretive traditions, but as in written history, what is transmitted are often the views of the victorious. This also holds for tradition itself. The meaning for “us” depends on who “we” are at any given point in the tradition. The “we” may simply refer to the view of mainstream scholarly tradition, or depending on the perspective from which it is spoken, it can represent dissenting interpretive views. Gadamer’s own wish to rehabilitate Socratic Platonism serves as an example of the latter. 7

Tension arises from any claim that an interpretation is a rendition of the original author’s intended meaning. Claims about the author abound, for instance, in Gadamer’s Plato studies. That is, every time he speaks of “Plato’s philosophy,” Gadamer is already going beyond the texts because Plato, as is well known, is conspicuously absent from all but two dialogues. 8 So clearly Gadamer’s dialogue is not only with the text(s) but with the author. In particular in the case of dramatic writings, like Plato’s, going outside of an individual, self-contained text, in an effort to collect thoughts and ideas emerging from a number of texts by the same author, and to synthesize them into a unitary outlook, presupposes making some strong claims about the author’s intention. After all, the author himself gives no evidence of any intention to openly flag his own views. It is arbitrary to decide which of the characters is intended to voice the author’s views. Any interpretation that takes Socrates as the mouthpiece of Plato’s opinion, for example, goes well beyond the evidence of the text. And, as far as we know, Plato made no effort to collect the thoughts and tenets dispersed in his work into unified ideas (called Platonic doctrines) to represent a unitary whole (called Platonism). Whether he intended his readers to do so, we do not know. His Phaedrus points out the dangers involved once a written text enters the public domain. The text needs its parent-author to come to its aid, because it is unable to protect and to defend itself. 9

But what if the author is no longer there to come to the aid of the text? In the case of transmitted texts, whose authors are just names of the past known to us through texts, it is the sensitive interpreter who will try to come to its aid. He or she cannot be a surrogate parent, so to speak, but an understanding friend of the text—not of the parent-author. If we become friends through conversation, and if interpretation means having a conversation or dialogue with the text, then friendship plays an important role in “good” interpretation. 10 That Gadamer feels a deep friendship for Plato’s dialogues becomes evident when reading his Plato studies. Similarly FR’s sensitive interpretation of Gadamer’s Plato studies evinces an attitude of friendship towards Gadamerian texts (and Platonic texts too, for that matter). In the former instance, the friendship for the texts is conflated with the
friendship for the text's parent, so to speak. Getting to know the text is taken to be synonymous with getting to know its author. This seems legitimate in the case of a text where the parent-author explicitly speaks in his own voice, as is true of Gadamer's own writings, for instance. In that case the text becomes an extension of the author's oral communications. To stay with Plato's metaphor, the offspring (text) is directed to express the views of the parent (author). If the offspring muddles the communication, or is misunderstood for other reasons, the parent can step in, if so inclined, and clear up the misunderstanding. Conversely, when dealing with writings that do not purport to state the author's view, one should be careful not to conflate the opinions expressed by the text with those of the author. When making new friends, we do not usually suspect their parents' opinions behind their views (unless, of course, our new friends are young children). And unless our new friends tell us about their home life and parents, our assumptions about the latter are conjecture. Even if we know the opinions of all the siblings, this does not necessarily mean that we know those of the parents. Similarly, even if we know all the opinions expressed in a multiplicity of texts by the same author, this does not mean that we have come to know the author's own opinions. That is to say, not unless the author explicitly writes in his or her own voice, or has disclosed that a particular character is intended as a mouthpiece, are we entitled to establish a direct link between the views expressed in the text and those held by the author. And so, while it is perfectly legitimate to collect the thought of the latter kind of author from a variety of texts into a unity of ideas that represent a coherent whole, it is not legitimate to do so in the case of authors who chose a dramatic style that hides its author's voice. FR's Gadamer interpretation is of the former kind. Gadamer's Plato interpretation is of the latter. Whether FR has understood Gadamer as he intended to be understood, is for Gadamer alone to say. But, then again, Gadamer's own view on mens auctoris and the independence of the text may prevent him from doing so.

Notes


2. Renaud (later FR) referring to Gadamer's earlier intention, explicitly states that, among other things, his book is an attempt to provide the comprehensive presentation (Gesamtdarstellung) of the Gadamerian Plato interpretation that has been missing until now (5).

3. See also Chapter I on this.