

Heidegger from Metaphysics to Thought, by Dominique Janicaud and Jean-Francois Mattéi. Translated by Michael Gendre. Albany: N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1995. 236pp + xxxiv.

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Heidegger's attempt to overcome metaphysics has created as much confusion as it has inspired the development of deconstructionist strategies in the second half of the 20th century. By interweaving five elegantly crafted essays, Dominique Janicaud and Jean-Francois Mattéi trace the subtlest shifts within language by which Heidegger "steps back" from the sedimentations of conventional metaphysical usage and retrieves the most perennial of all issues, the question of being. Rather than renouncing the project of fundamental ontology due to its various aporias, the authors elicit new channels of discovery within Heidegger's writings so as to mark other paths to the matter of thought. In a self-styled duet, they amplify the tension between Heidegger's approach to language and that of metaphysics. These divergences, which become most explicit in the "Letter on Humanism" (1947), harbor more radical forms of articulation which enable us to think what remains unthought throughout Western philosophy.

The emphasis on a "duet" proves especially telling. For to appreciate the work as a whole we must be able to distinguish the contribution of each author. Indeed, the book cannot be quoted piecemeal; for in forging a unique path, the authors implement a key motif of Heidegger's pot-metaphysical thought, namely, that thinking is a solitary journey which each individual undertakes in his/her ownmost way. In the first two chapters, Dominique Janicaud illustrates how the overcoming of metaphysics involves recalling its limits, that is, appropriating the possibilities which have been incubated within the tradition from the beginning. "Thus, metaphysics is less overcome than assigned to limits, it is less set aside than reminisced about in its truth" (p. 7). By addressing Heidegger's essay "Overcoming Metaphysics" (1954), Janicaud shows how thinking is a worldly enterprise which endures the tension between the dominance of technological rationality and the humility of dwelling in harmony with the poetic intimations of language (p. 39).

In the third and longest chapter, Jean-Francois Mattéi takes a bold step to consider the unique configuration between thought and language—the development of nuance and differentiation—which evokes new depths of meaning otherwise hidden in the most familiar ontological concepts. He thereby counters the popular tendency to label the later Heidegger as a mystic who abandons his earlier effort to elicit a matrix of articulation to express the most obscure facets of being. Mattéi describes this opening forth of a space of articulation as a "setting apart" or "chiasmus." He has in view transposing familiar connotations assigned to concepts, or relocating

the boundaries of speech so as to cultivate new combinations of meaning. "I shall call 'chiasmus' the figure of the reversal of a proposition whose members are contained within both the initial proposition whose members are contained within both the initial proposition and the inverted one and produce a distinctive pattern of crossed overlapping" (p. 41). In a provocative and graphic manner, Mattéi indicates why ontological language becomes so much an issue of *style* for Heidegger, and how thought exacts a greater measure of rigor by incorporating the limits which are implied by its relation to poetry.

Mattéi's appeal to "crossed articulations" cuts to the quick of Heidegger's controversial attempt to write the word "being" with the letter "X" across it as exemplified in *The Question of Being* [1957] (p. 41). Rather than entailing a deconstructionist obsfuscation of writing under erasure, this practice of "crossing out" unlocks the meanings already harbored in the niches of language, and restores to words an elasticity of setting apart and gathering together diverse connotations. For example, in *What is a Thing?*, Heidegger transposes the significance of Kant's highest principle of synthetic judgments to outline the intermediary zone of the "between" (*Zwischen*) where the cognitive relation as a whole unfolds. ". . . the conclusion on the Kantian doctrine in *What is a Thing?*, (1935-36) allows one to detect the openness of another dimension, between things and humans, 'which reaches out beyond things and back behind human beings'" (p. 64).

Through his concise discussion of chiasmus, Mattéi reinterprets the turn (*Kehre*) as a curvature and transformation at the heart of thinking rather than as a linear shift from the early to the latter Heidegger.

For the turn *to be* truly a turn that maintains its grip, it must cause the thing it moves to turn and spin so as to transform its uniform rectilinear movement into circular motion. It needs to amount to a *circuit*. The turn, is, after all, *turning* motion. We must perhaps think of the turn as the principle of the cycles regulating the universe (pp. 76-77).

Mattéi suggests that the torsion created by the turn allocates the space for the interaction between world and thing, thereby inaugurating a historical-cosmic event which Heidegger describes as the play of the "fourfold" (*Geviert*)—earth, sky, mortals and gods. The playful configuration of the fourfold reveals the intersecting axes of thought and language. "By thus following the crossed intertwining of the four we have gradually entered the round of the *Geviert*, where again we encounter the ring . . . that endlessly comes back upon itself, yet never closes and is freed in its coiling motion" (p. 109). In this chiasmatic turning, the conventional coordinates of up and down, of transcendent and immanent, are interchanged. Thus, the

luminosity of the divine realm, or the stars sparkles against the backdrop of our earth-boundedness, the darkness of the night (pp. 149-159).

In Chapter Four, Janicaud addresses the enigma posed by the historical epochs of being, that is, its character as destiny on the one hand and the human contribution of decision on the other. With great subtlety he marks the interface between the transmission of ontological history and the crisis of technology. "Now, the knot of the topic of 'decision' has precisely *already been cut* by Heidegger in a sense that gives rise to a difficulty, for it presupposes that one can be on both sides of the 'decision' at the same time" (p. 161). In Chapter Five, Janicaud initiates a dialogue between diverse participants in order to nurture the asymmetries of Heidegger's thought which permit its recoil within the wider expanse of openness rather than seeking its closure as a monolithic system. The Epilogue offers a brief dialogue between authors which marks both the divergence and intersection of their distinct pathways of thought (p. 226).

Any attempt to accentuate the character of thought remains abstract, however, without also considering the dispositional ingredient which orients all ontological inquiry. Whether we consider the circuit of disclosedness which springs from hermeneutics, or thought's response to the issuance of being's truth (*Ereignis*), a preliminary attunement (*Stimmung*) must still intervene in order to restore a sense of originality to the philosophical endeavor. Indeed, the preliminary claim of *finitude* re-emerges to anticipate the further of thought to its mode of attunement marks the *experiential* condition by which anyone aspiring *to be* a philosopher can begin from the *concrete* stance of his/her thrownness into language. If there is a point on which both Janicaud and Mattéi concur, it is on the need for thought to experience its primeval rootedness in a way otherwise lacking in Hegel's speculative philosophy of the Absolute.

Professors Janicaud and Mattéi provide a bold entree into the labyrinth of Heidegger's later philosophy with a tenacity seldom witnessed in contemporary scholarship. Though limited in its scope, their work is as rewarding in its bursts of insights as it is challenging in the patience required to read it. Indeed, the authors leave the reader desiring more, and while this may be a shortcoming when viewed from one perspective, it is a virtue when seen from another.