

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*, edited by Nicholas Jolley. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Reviewed by Marc Bobro, University of Washington.

Nicholas Jolley's *The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz* will prove to be a valuable compendium for the student of Leibniz who wishes to refresh her recollection of central themes in Leibniz or to acquaint herself with new developments in Leibniz scholarship. On the whole, the essays contained within are clearly written and they cover a wide range of topics. There are, however, notable oversights. For example, there is no mention of Leibniz's theory of personal identity nor is there much helpful discussion of his related doctrine of immortality. Of course, any single volume about Leibniz will fail to be comprehensive; Leibniz was surely a philosopher with far-reaching interests. And, the topics discussed in this volume do merit close attention: substance; knowledge; logic; truth; freedom; language; physics; existence of God; perfection; and, ethics.

The volume contains several essays that serve to uncover the intellectual debts owed by Leibniz to other thinkers and traditions and that describe the development of Leibniz's own philosophy. The collection begins, for example, with a concise but informative biographical essay by Roger Ariew. Not all of the information Ariew presents is directly relevant to Leibniz's philosophy. For example, Ariew recounts Leibniz's observations regarding a talking dog he once encountered. But not only are such personal details of Leibniz's life difficult to find in an English language text, many students of Leibniz are interested in comparing his words with his actions, so to speak.

In the collection's final essay, Catherine Wilson reveals the reception of Leibniz's works in the eighteenth century. Wilson draws the intriguing distinction between the exoteric (published, public, and popular) and esoteric (unpublished, private, and unpopular) philosophies of Leibniz, thus pointing to a controversy, which still lingers, over whether Leibniz was disingenuous in certain writings, especially the *Theodicy*. Can such a distinction be sustained? Wilson's discussion of this question is fascinating.

The contribution by Stuart Brown places Leibniz's writings in the context of his contemporaries—among them, Spinoza, Newton, and Locke. But I must disagree with one aspect of Brown's characterization of Leibniz's relationship with Locke. Brown writes: "Although his *New Essays* are the

most detailed commentary Leibniz wrote on any philosophical work, he was not influenced by Locke in any way" (57). To my mind, this is false; or, at the very least, highly controversial. Consider Leibniz's theory of personal identity as articulated in the *New Essays* and contrast it with his earlier discussions of personal identity in the *Discourse on Metaphysics* and the correspondence with Arnauld. There is no plausible reading according to which Leibniz did not concede certain important points to Locke. For example, Margaret Wilson, in a seminal paper, has argued that Leibniz adopted something like Locke's sameness of consciousness criterion of personal identity in the *New Essays*.<sup>1</sup> For Leibniz wrote: "Even if God were to change the real identity in some extraordinary manner, the personal identity would remain, provided the man preserved the appearances of identity."<sup>2</sup> This expresses the claim, which is clearly at odds with Leibniz's views in the *Discourse* and the Arnauld correspondence, that an individual might possess the same self-consciousness and continue as one and the same person but cease to be the same substance.

The majority of papers in this collection venture beyond a mere rehearsal of standard interpretations and criticisms, to new and sometimes controversial positions. This makes the collection useful not only for beginners but for advanced students as well. Consider Cristia Mercer's and Robert Sleigh Jr.'s exceptional essay on Leibniz's early metaphysical views. Mercer and Sleigh argue that Leibniz's later and undoubtedly more famous writings owe much to his earlier views. This is by no means commonly accepted. Many scholars tend to speak of the "mature" philosophy of Leibniz in isolation from his early philosophy, fixing their attention on the *Discourse* (1686) onward. Mercer's and Sleigh's arguments are clear and persuasive, thus shifting the perspective on Leibniz's collective writings.

Continuing where Mercer and Sleigh leave off, Donald Rutherford discusses Leibniz's mature metaphysics, pointing out its distinctive features and certain notorious problems of interpretation. For example, Leibniz insisted that each mind exists as permanently united with its own organic body. Rutherford notes the Jesuit Tournemaine's well-known objection that Leibniz's preferred explanation of this union in terms of the famous doctrine

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Wilson, "Leibniz: Self-Consciousness and Immortality in the Paris Notes and After," in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 58 (1976), pp. 335-352. Unfortunately, this important and influential article is not listed in the bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> *Hew Essays on Human Understanding*, translated by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett, (New York: Cambridge, 1981), p. 237.

of the pre-established harmony is not adequate. But did Leibniz ultimately agree with Tournemaine? The answer to this question is difficult to determine. On at least one occasion, Leibniz renounced the explanation in terms of the pre-established harmony, agreeing with Tournemaine that some additional metaphysical union is required. Moreover, Leibniz propounded the extraordinary doctrine of the *vinculum substantiale*, or substantial bond, to another Jesuit, Des Bosses, in his continual efforts to explain the union of mind and body. But in a letter to the natural philosopher and physician de Volder, during relatively the same period, Leibniz claimed that to suppose a genuine metaphysical union between mind and body is to engage in pure speculation; no reason can be given for it. Rutherford thinks that Leibniz's reply to Tournemaine was disingenuous (156) and his discussion with Des Bosses regarding the *vinculum* "an academic exercise" (162), concerned to "blunt the full force of his philosophy for the sake of his Jesuit critics" (157). Rutherford refers to a passage which he thinks Leibniz all but admitted this to Des Bosses.

I fear that the things I have written you at different times on the subject do not sufficiently agree among themselves, since I have certainly treated this argument concerning the raising of phenomena to reality or composite substances only on the occasion of your letters.<sup>3</sup>

But I understand this passage quite differently. To my mind, it should be read as follows: "You, Des Bosses, have raised a problem I have not previously considered in any depth. You have made me reconsider certain important aspects of my metaphysics. I have been forced, if you will, to detail my theory in greater complexity than I had anticipated and thus have possibly uncovered further problems." Whether or not Rutherford is right about what is meant by the above passage, he is surely correct that it is hard to reconcile Leibniz's talk of the *vinculum* with his apparent rejection of composite substance.

Robert McRae's essay on Leibniz's theory of knowledge is short and to the point. It includes a very nice discussion of the principle of sufficient reason, focusing on the different senses of the term 'sufficient reason' for

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<sup>3</sup> Letter to Bartholomaeus Des Bosses (30 June 1715) in *Die Philosophischen Schriften von G. W. Leibniz*, edited by C. I. Gerhardt (Berlin, 1875-1890. Reprint. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1965), vol. ii, p. 499.

Leibniz. Unfortunately, McRae's essay is also short on references. For example, he points out correctly that for Leibniz God cannot complete an infinite analysis, and thus cannot *prove* contingent truths. He then notes, again correctly, that God can nevertheless *know* contingent truths, if only by "an infallible vision" (194). But McRae provides no textual evidence for these important and surprising claims.

G.H.R. Parkinson's chapter is a flawless example of an essay which not only captures the essential features of Leibniz's theory of truth and his view of freedom, but also finds the main problems with those features and offers possible solutions, all in a most clear and structured way. Moreover, Parkinson successfully exploits the views of venerable contemporary thinkers in his explication of Leibniz's theories of truth and freedom. For example, in his discussion of Leibniz on possible worlds, he includes David Lewis' recent work. On the idea of trans-world identity—certainly a vexing problem for Leibniz scholars—he appeals to Saul Kripke. And, on Leibniz's defense of freedom of the will, Parkinson addresses Stuart Hampshire's forceful criticism. I strongly recommend that all beginning students of Leibniz read this paper.

Next we find two other excellent chapters: Rutherford on language in Leibniz and Daniel Garber on the relationship between Leibniz's metaphysical and physical views. Like Parkinson, Rutherford points out an anticipation in philosophy of language by Leibniz. Rutherford, however, goes beyond Parkinson in tracing the history of Leibniz scholarship on this topic. Garber offers by far the lengthiest essay in this volume. It includes clear discussions of causality, especially Leibniz's unsympathetic reaction to Occasionalism (the view that God is the only genuine cause of activity in the world), and the laws of motion. My suspicion that the controversy between Leibniz and the Occasionalists ultimately revolved around the more worthy conception of God is confirmed by Garber's insightful study.

Blumenfeld contributes two welcome additions to Leibniz scholarship: the first on Leibniz's arguments for the existence of God and the second on Leibniz's view that this is the best of all possible worlds. Notwithstanding the failure to mention some of Leibniz's more intriguing, though perhaps less convincing, arguments for the existence of God (such as the argument from pre-established harmony), Blumenfeld does an admirable job in formalizing the different versions of Leibniz's ontological and cosmological arguments. In the second essay, Blumenfeld tackles with gusto Nicholas Rescher's influential interpretation that the best possible world embodies

the ideal “trade-off” of variety and simplicity, the two criteria of perfection for Leibniz. Blumenfeld argues persuasively that the trade-off view is mistaken; in fact, Leibniz thinks that the best possible world—the actual one—not only contains the most variety but is governed by the simplest laws. Blumenfeld provides a great service in explaining quite clearly just what this variety consists in and what is meant by *simplest laws*.

Of all the topics addressed in this volume, the moral philosophy of Leibniz is perhaps the least well-known. Gregory Brown’s essay offers a valuable summary of Leibniz’s motivations and views on this issue. Brown argues that Leibniz attempted to reconcile the positions of Grotius and Hobbes, that is, to accommodate the feasibility of altruism within a psychological egoistic account of morality, while grounding one’s obligations neither on the threat of punishment nor on the command of a superior (411). In an anticipation of Bishop Butler, Brown claims, Leibniz grounded this reconciliation in the idea of “disinterested love.” Whether or not Leibniz succeeded in this reconciliation is not something Brown attempts to answer.

Among the many virtues of this volume, perhaps the greatest lies in its consistent portrayal of Leibniz as a philosopher who was respectful and mindful of past ideas, rather than as a radical, latching onto ideas only for their novelty. For although openly critical of many of his predecessors and contemporaries, Leibniz often paid his philosophical debts explicitly. Further, Leibniz tried to discover mutually shared views in all philosophical systems, on the assumption that shared views are somehow closer to the truth.

*The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, David Fate Norton (ed.). Cambridge University Press, 1993. Reviewed by Martin G. Leever, Loyola University of Chicago.

*The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, edited by David Fate Norton, is a superb anthology consisting of ten essays by some of the most notable Hume scholars writing today. This anthology will prove to be a valuable resource for both Hume scholars and students alike.

Norton contributes a general introduction to Hume's thought as well as an essay on "Hume, human nature, and the foundations of morality." The other contributors are: John Biro on "Hume's new science of the mind," Alexander Rosenberg on "Hume and the philosophy of science," Robert Fogelin on "Hume's skepticism," Terence Penelhum on "Hume's moral psychology," Knud Haakonssen on "The structure of Hume's political theory," Andrew Skinner on Hume's "Principles of political economy," Peter Jones on "Hume's literary and aesthetic theory," David Wooton on "David Hume, 'the historian'," and J.C.A. Gaskin on "Hume on religion."

In addition to these fine essays, the anthology also includes two autobiographies ("A Kind of History of My Life" [1734] and "My Own Life" [1776]) which shed light on how Hume himself understood his work. Norton has also included an extensive bibliography containing a comprehensive list of Hume's own works, a list of responses and correspondences by Hume's own contemporaries as well as a lengthy list of books and articles on Hume.

Most philosophers and students of philosophy have a tendency to reduce Hume to a handful of passages from Bk. I of *A Treatise of Human Nature* and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Such a narrow conception of Hume leaves one with the impression that Hume was a radical skeptic whose primary agenda was to debunk the metaphysical and epistemological claims of continental rationalism. *The Cambridge Companion to Hume* goes along way in broadening this typically myopic portrayal of Hume. This collection of essays paints a portrait of a complex and multi-faceted philosopher deeply entrenched in a particular historical context and in dialogue with not only other major philosophers, such as Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley and Adam Smith, but also with such minor figures as Wolloston, Kames, Hutcheson, and Shaftesbury. In constructing this holistic view of Hume, editor David Fate Norton brings together essays concerning not only the standard metaphysical and epistemological issues for which Hume is well-known, but also essays which

present Hume's views on morality, economics, history, art, and religion. One of the benefits of those essays which explore these lesser-known concerns of Hume is that they introduce the reader to a great number of Hume's works which get very little attention. For example, the essays by Haakonssen, Skinner, Jones, and Wooton expose the reader to Hume's *History of England* as well as to the many essays which make up Hume's *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*. Aside from a few of these essays, such as "Of Suicide," which are somewhat well-known, most of the essays, such as "Of Money," "Of the Origin of Government," and "Of the Standard of Taste," have remained in relative obscurity. Nevertheless, it is by drawing upon such lesser-known writings that this anthology is able to present a richly detailed and holistic portrait of Hume.

One major theme which unifies the various essays in this anthology is the depiction of Hume as "a scientist of human nature," committed to the view that disciplines such as philosophy, economics, history, etc. are fundamentally grounded in the laws and propensities of human nature. This message comes across strongly not only in the essays dealing with Hume's treatment of metaphysics, epistemology, and morality, but also in those concerning Hume's views on politics, economics, art, and religion. For example, in his essay on Hume's political theory, Haakonssen highlights Hume's belief that society and politics must be grounded in human nature and not in "enthusiasm" or "superstition." Likewise, Skinner's essay on Hume's economic thought emphasizes the foundational role of human nature in Hume's views on economics. To this end, Skinner discusses the role of self-interest in Hume's economic thought.

One particularly interesting point about Hume's theory of human nature reappears a number of times throughout the anthology. In his famous account of how one comes to have an idea of "necessary connection," Hume argued that one experiences an impression of expectation which arises after repeatedly experiencing certain events in the same sequence. Norton proposes that Hume accounts for moral obligation and moral disapproval in the same way (p. 170). Certain sentiments and behaviors typically follow sequences which give rise to an impression of expectation. This impression, in turn, gives rise to the ideas of moral obligation (as well as disapproval). In a similar vein, Haakonssen argues that Hume's analysis of a government's right to power utilizes a mechanism similar to that responsible for the ideas of "necessary connection" and "moral obligation" (p. 202).

Norton's introduction serves as a fine overview of Hume's thought. In this introduction, Norton characterizes Hume not as a skeptic, but rather as a "post-skeptic" whose primary aim was to construct a science of human nature. Norton's naturalistic reading of Hume is supported by other contributors, such as Biro and Rosenberg. However, in a later essay, Robert Fogelin emphasizes the sense in which Hume must be understood as a skeptic. Hume scholars have for a long time been debating whether Hume should be best read as a skeptic or a naturalist. One strength of this anthology is that the reader gains insight into the senses in which Hume may have been both a skeptic and a naturalist.

In the first essay, "Hume's new science of the mind," John Biro discusses Hume's goal to build a science of human nature and his conviction that all other sciences must ultimately be grounded in this science. As mentioned above, Biro, like Norton, de-emphasizes Hume's skepticism and emphasizes his constructive efforts. According to Biro, Hume was not primarily concerned with skepticism, but is rather concerned with doing something more akin to what we now call "cognitive science" (p. 36). Indeed, Biro credits Hume for having anticipated a number of principles and tendencies which have come to light in contemporary cognitive science. For example, Hume noticed that we tend to inductively overgeneralize in many areas of our experience. Biro suggests that this is close to what has been discovered in recent studies of cognitive processes such as language learning (p. 46).

By explaining Hume as a scientist of sorts, as "an anatomist of the mind" (p. 39), Biro is able to dispense with the common opinion that Hume's conception of the mind is that of a mere passive receptacle for sense impression. On the contrary, Biro points out that Hume saw the human mind as actively governed by a variety of principles and propensities (p. 40-41).

Alexander Rosenberg provides the second essay, "Hume and the philosophy of science". Rosenberg examines a variety of issues in Hume's philosophy which relate to the philosophy of science, such as causation, induction, explanation, and mathematics. Rosenberg points out that in claiming that ideas refer to impressions, Hume had put forth a theory of *empirical meaning* (p. 66). Hence impressions and ideas are not simply *causally* related, but *semantically* related as well. This theory of meaning served as the main vehicle by which Hume investigated traditional philosophical ideas. The meaning of any idea, whether it be of "substance," or "self," is investigated by asking to what impressions it refers. Also, like Biro, Rosenberg



portrays Hume as an anticipator of sorts, seeing in Hume an anticipation of twentieth century "hypothetico-deductivism" (p. 80).

Hume's interest in conducting a science of human nature highlights his constructive task as a philosopher and is responsible for many of the "naturalistic" interpretations of Hume. Fogelin, however, persuasively argues that Hume must still be understood as a skeptic in many ways and to overlook this is to miss Hume's importance as a philosopher. Fogelin first examines Hume's skepticism as it arises in his treatment of induction, and then later examines Hume's skepticism both regarding reason as well the senses. According to Fogelin, Hume employed two skeptical strategies, one "argumentative" and the other "genetic" (p. 93). The "argumentative" strategy consisted in arguments "intended to show that a given belief is not capable of rational justification," whereas the "genetic" strategy consisted in tracing a given idea back to the impression(s) from which it arose (p. 93). The latter strategy was skeptical in that it provided a rather unexpected causal explanation for ideas (e.g., personal identity) which may have been thought to have originated differently.

In his essay on "Hume's Moral Psychology," Terence Penelhum discusses Hume's theory of passions and their relation to human behavior. In doing so, Penelhum brings to light some important connections between Bks. II and III of Hume's *Treatise*. Penelhum lays out the different classifications of Hume's passions (e.g., direct and indirect) as well as giving considerable attention to Hume's argument regarding the influencing motives of the will and the activity of "calm passions" (pp. 126-129).

Penelhum also offers an instructional account of Hume's views on freedom. He clearly explains Hume's distinction between a "liberty of spontaneity" and a "liberty of indifference" as well as his reasons for rejecting the latter. Finally, Penelhum goes on to discuss Hume's treatment of obligation and virtue as well as the role which the self plays in Hume's moral philosophy.

Though all of the contributors to this anthology do an admirable job of placing Hume in his philosophical and historical context, Norton goes farthest in presenting the rich context in which Hume wrote. In his essay on Hume and the foundations of morality, Norton unfolds Hume's moral philosophy by first providing a philosophical background of issues and figures. Framed in this way, Norton is able to portray Hume as a thinker in dialogue with predecessors (e.g., Grotius, Pufendorf, Hobbes, Mandeville, Shaftesbury, etc.) and contemporaries (e.g., Hutcheson and Wollaston). As

mentioned earlier, Norton gives special attention to Hume's conviction that morality is grounded in human nature. Indeed, it is because of the consistent nature of humanity that we can, according to Hume, identify real differences between virtue and vice. Finally, Norton also gives some attention to the apparent differences between Hume's moral philosophy as it is put forth in the *Treatise* and that which we find in the second *Enquiry*.

Knud Haakonssen's essay on "Hume's political theory" continues the warranted emphasis that Hume sought to ground the moral sciences in human nature. Haakonssen presents Hume's political philosophy underscoring Hume's attack on the early modern conception of society and politics as grounded either in "enthusiasm" or "superstition." Haakonssen depicts Hume as a man concerned about the politics of his time, leery of the threat of "factionalism." Hence, according to Haakonssen, Hume stressed the importance of unity in society and saw the "religions" of "enthusiasm" and "superstition" as a threat to such unity. In addition to these concerns, Haakonssen also leads the reader through Hume's views on the nature and origin of the idea of justice, the basis for authority, and the role of rights in society.

In his essay on "Hume's principle's of political economy," Andrew Skinner draws heavily from many of the essays from Hume's *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* as well as his *History of England*. Skinner lays out the background from which Hume's economic views emerged and continues the anthology's emphasis on the foundational role of human nature. Hence, human propensities such as self-interest are at the foundation of commerce and trade. Also, like several of the other contributors, Skinner sees Hume as an anticipator, foreseeing the theory that "humanity has passed, by stages, from hunting and gathering to the commercial society of eighteenth-century Europe" (p. 232). Perhaps one of the most important points which Skinner brings to light was that of Hume's method of investigation. Hume employed a "historical" method when investigating economic issues. That is, Hume believed that the most fruitful way to learn about issues such as taxation or foreign trade was to observe history and not simply concern oneself with static principles (p. 229).

In writing his essay on "Hume's literary and aesthetic theory," Peter Jones was able to pull together bits and pieces from Hume's *Treatise* as well as from essays, such as "Of the Standard of Taste," in order to construct an essay on Hume's aesthetics. After briefly presenting some background on literary criticism, Jones directs our attention to a number of state-

ments in the *Treatise* which deal with the idea of beauty. Here he points out that Hume tended to account for judgments of beauty in terms of utility, sympathy, and at times, comparison (p. 261). After treating some of these remarks from the *Treatise*, Jones goes on to discuss Hume's essay "Of the Standard of Taste" and some issues of literary criticism.

Drawing primarily from Hume's *The History of England*, David Wooton adds an essay entitled "David Hume: 'the historian'." Wooton discusses Hume's method as a historian, namely being that of a spectator who presents a coherent narrative, rather than as a participant in history enumerating a set of facts (p. 385). Wooton remarks that this shift in style was partially responsible for widening the audience to include women.

Aside from noting Hume's style of writing about history, Wooton also discusses a number of issues about which Hume was concerned, such as the relationship between Parliament and the Crown as well as the strengths and weaknesses of both Tory and Whig political agendas.

The last essay of the anthology, "Hume on Religion," is contributed by J.C.A. Gaskin. Gaskin argues that Hume's thoroughgoing skepticism with regard to religion and religious belief is unrivaled in the history of philosophy. Gaskin begins his essay by introducing the reader to some of the unfamiliar terminology used by Hume and about Hume, such as "natural" religion (as opposed to "revealed" religion), "theism," and "fideism."

Though Gaskin admits that the all of Hume's works entail an implicit criticism of religion, he focusses most of his attention on Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, the *Natural History of Religion*, as well as a few sections from the first *Enquiry* and the *Essays*. Although Hume's criticisms of religion seem somewhat "piecemeal," Gaskin argues that Hume followed "a comprehensive critical strategy" (p. 313). He treats most of the major issues in Hume's philosophy of religion, such as his critique of design arguments, miracles, morality, and natural belief as well as giving some attention as to how one might categorize Hume's views on religion. As with all other attempts to classify Hume's positions, Gaskin admits that Hume's doctrines elude any straightforward categorization, such as "atheism," or "fideism."

The anthology goes beyond mere exegesis of Hume's views and engages in a fair amount of criticism. For example, Rosenberg criticizes Hume's view that space and time are not infinitely divisible. According to Rosenberg, Hume's empirical theory of meaning should lead Hume to conclude that claims about the indivisibility of space and time are *unintelli-*

*gible*, not, as Hume believed, false. Rosenberg locates the source of Hume's confusion in the "misunderstandings of limits and the possibility of infinite series summing to finite magnitudes" (p. 83).

Another point of criticism can be found in Fogelin's essay. Fogelin criticizes Hume's famous distinction between "relations of ideas" and "matters of fact" as "incoherently drawn" (p. 96). Since Hume made such wide use of this distinction, this problem could potentially infect a large portion of his philosophy.

Still another point of criticism, one suggested by Penelhum, concerns Hume's views regarding freedom. In rejecting a "liberty of indifference" in favor of a "liberty of spontaneity," Hume makes it difficult to understand how he can retain any normative force behind his concept of "virtue" (p. 144). Penelhum also makes the common criticism that since Hume treated the idea of the self so skeptically in Bk. I of the *Treatise*, his use of the self in his moral philosophy was illegitimate (p. 140).

To the scholar, *The Cambridge Companion to Hume* has already become an important contribution to Hume scholarship. For the student of philosophy, this anthology is an indispensable guide through the complex and profound philosophy of David Hume and it is sure to become a standard reference work in Hume's thought.

Daniel Atherm, *Scientific Nihilism*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994. Reviewed by B. William Owen, San Diego State University.

In his *The Logic of Modern Physics* P. W. Bridgman praises the recent "change of attitude toward what may be called the interpretative aspect of physics" (vii). Ernest Nagel, in sympathy with Bridgman, argues in *The Structure of Science* that "the distinctive aim of the scientific enterprise is to provide systematic and responsibly supported explanations" understood as "answers to the question 'Why?'" (15). Following in the same line of thinking Daniel Atherm advocates a return to classical "natural philosophy" understood as the project of giving "*narrative causal explanations* of the facts as they are revealed by observation and experimentation" (4). All three are opposed to the view that science in general, and physics in particular, consists just of descriptions of phenomena stated in the language of mathematics. On this view explanation is either irrelevant, or consists just in our ability to make consistently accurate predictions. Atherm thinks this is insufficient and "that a missing dimension of narrative physical explanation in the domain of physics is worth pursuing and can be successful" (5).

*Scientific Nihilism* consists of two parts, each divided into five chapters. Part One is a critical discussion of the sources and arguments for "scientific nihilism," Atherm's term for the widespread view that causal explanation in physics is either unattainable, or unnecessary. Part Two takes up the positive task of supplying a causal narrative explanation of some aspects of quantum mechanics and relativity. We find here the expected discussion of scientists and philosophers such as Bohr, Einstein, Heisenberg, Kuhn, Cartwright and Hacking. The chief ideas for his positive view however are drawn from the middle and later work of Alfred North Whitehead. We find also references to Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Nietzsche, names not often associated with philosophical discussion of particle physics.

Atherm begins with a historical recounting of what science was like before the current trend of acausalism. Gassendi and Newton, for example, gave causal explanations, despite the latter's famous "*hypotheses non fingo*." Among more recent physicists, Maxwell was "unequivocally causalist" as evidenced by his "pains to uphold Newton as a natural philosopher concerned with physical explanation" (29). What then brought about the change to acausalism?

There are three principle reasons for the current acausalism, the first two scientific and the third philosophical: first, the repudiation of the ether theory; second, the collapse of mechanistic models of light; third, the unchallenged assumption that causality is necessarily a motion of matter. On the scientific side, the theories of relativity and quantum mechanics, developed in response to the experimental findings of Michelson and Morley, among others, helped bring about the collapse of causalist physics. On the philosophical front, the verificationism of the logical positivists located causal explanations in the realm of metaphysics. Here they could be safely ignored since metaphysical statements lack sufficient meaning on a verificationist criteria to be scientifically testable.

Some acausalists, however, dispute the view that all explanation has been abandoned. Rather, they argue that we have only now become aware of its true nature. On this view explanation consists, not of a causal narrative, but rather of "the citing of a law or laws specific to the circumstances of the thing to be explained," (68). This is the well-known "covering law" model of Hempel and Oppenheim, according to which explanations are strictly deduced from an adequate description of the event to be explained serving as one premise, together with a universal law as the other premise. Athearn's basic complaint with the covering law model is that the descriptions it provides can "only amount to a conditional proposition describing an observed regularity, *and not to an explanation*" (79). That some fact is established does not constitute an explanation of why that particular fact obtains instead of some other.

The way to retrieve causalist explanation is to rebut the Humean view that causality must be a mechanical motion of matter. Specifically, the Humean view claims that a necessary connection must obtain between cause and effect. Moritz Schlick's "Causality in Everyday Life and in Recent Science" serves as the main exposition of the view to which Athearn objects.

On Athearn's view, "a cause neither necessitates an effect nor is a necessary condition for it in any philosophically compelling sense" (116). He suggests instead a "productionistic" account of causality that aims to avoid the mechanistic and necessitarian assumptions of Humean accounts. On the productionist view it is possible "that a certain causal process might in principle have one of its usual effects *not happen*, and still be the same particular process, the same otherwise causally efficacious actual occurrence, that it normally is" (114).

Athearn thus appears to be aligned with Realist philosophers of science who reject Humean skepticism about causality. Many realists are, however, only partially aligned with Athearn's project, for they are in fact acausalists in hiding. Athearn considers, in some detail, the realist views of Nancy Cartwright, Rom Harré and Wesley Salmon. The chief problem for Cartwright and Harre is their adherence to a notion of causality which limits real events to those that are either directly observable, or whose direct effects are observable. Consequently, neither considers the possibility of non-mechanistic causal realism.

Wesley Salmon goes a bit farther in Athearn's direction with his preference for David Bohm's "hidden variables" view. But in the end, Salmon's probabilistic account of causality does not go far enough. One problem with the view is that different senses of 'probability' are ignored in the attempt to apply the account to both deterministic as well as indeterministic physical processes. Such confusion hinders causal realism rather than helps it.

What causal realism needs is an ontology adequate to the experimental results of current physics. The key to that ontology is a non-mechanistic, productionist account of causality according to which "one might speak of events (by way of physical explanation) which are distinct in character from local motions undergone by matter" (192). This is the task of Part Two.

Many of the problems of current physics stem from questions about the nature of light. Accordingly, Athearn offers a theory of radiation making use of a productionist account of causality working in tandem with an event ontology. This provides a narrative causal explanation of many of the currently problematic areas of physics. What is needed in order to explain the problems surrounding theories of light is an "ether of events" (201). The idea here is that of a field of "premechanistic" events that is always ongoing and independent of what we observe. This ongoing event-field generates, in some non-mechanical causal manner, the subatomic events that comprise atoms. Athearn calls this "prelocal causality" (225).

Since the productionist account relies essentially on a concept of process, which implies some notion of time, the event ether itself produces both time and space. But the ether of events itself "is not a transition that *takes time*, but is so to speak a suspended structure at once and at one with itself, while at the same it is essentially 'passage', in some sense *processive*" (247). This should not be understood as implying that time originates at

some point in the ongoing process of events. Rather, the idea is that "time in its primary physical meaning is none other than a primordial structured transition such that along with the emergence of space there comes about an organization of perspectival totalities into one or more 'family' groupings" (249).

Athearn's theory of causality supplies the relation between the event-ether and space-time, sometimes called "production" or "genesis." His chief inspiration for this view comes from some remarks of Wittgenstein on the relations between thought and action. The idea is that we can conceive of the apparent order in our thoughts and actions "as *emerging*. . .so that some stages antecedent to the order that emerges are, *with respect to this order, chaotic, 'quite amorphous'*" (287). Athearn suggests that from this we can account for the indeterminism of subatomic particles. Causality is thus not a one-to-one relation between determinate objects and events. What we observe as the determinate features of the world have no causal connection of this type to anything prior. Rather, there is "a determinate order, a system of definite occurrences, emerging from an antecedent system or order of a *different kind*" (288). This seems to be a version of emergentism, although not one merely of biological organisms as some evolutionary theorists have conceived, or even of certain properties, e.g., color, hardness, consciousness. Rather, the world of observation itself is, at the fundamental level of matter, an emergent from something "prior," namely, the ether of events.

This theory of causality, together with the ether theory is then applied to problems of motion and reference arising from relativity theory. Athearn's suggestion is to conceive of actual events as occurring in multiple "time-systems." Taken together, these systems form a structure of spatial systems. The differentiation of these various time-systems, rather than the system itself, is the frame of reference for any instance of accelerated motion. That is, accelerated motion just is differentiation of time-systems. Uniform motion, on the other hand, is confined to "localized spaces" which are undifferentiated in the relevant manner.

On this Whiteheadian view, there are multiple time, as well as space-systems. Motion relative to some object, such as the sun, is relative to systems other than those we inhabit. The reason the velocity of light is thus invariant is that it is antecedent to the formation of particular space and time systems; it is "an independent mode of extension" (352). Its particular kind of extension "defines planes of simultaneity" (352). Even though light travels through space, "the events of propagation would not identify a



particular linear temporal series in simultaneously extended space, hence would not discriminate the time-system of any particular body of reference" (352).

The non-mechanistic account of causality plays a key role in both parts of this book. Athearn's emergentist account is inspired by some comments of Wittgenstein in his *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*. Since Athearn's stated aim is to avoid materialist and mechanical notions of causality, emergentism would *seem* to be just the ticket, although, as I will show, it raises more problems than it solves.

Athearn's view of emergentism can be summarized as the combination of three claims:

- 1) Complexity Condition: Emergent objects are produced by some prior set of conditions that has reached a "certain level of detail" (288).
- 2) Non-correlate Condition: Emergent objects do not have "one-to-one correlates" in antecedent conditions (288).
- 3) Differentiating Condition: Emergent systems are "*of a different kind*" than the antecedent conditions they emerge from (288).

The Complexity Condition claims that emergent objects arise from some system only when that system reaches a sufficient level of complexity. So, for example, the wetness of water arises when a sufficiently complex level of molecular organization is reached. The problem with this Complexity Condition is that the notion of a level of detail is arbitrary. A clock mechanism may, for example, become sufficiently complex so as to produce the emergent behavior of slowing down under certain conditions. Such behavior could not have been predicted even with complete knowledge of the relevant mechanical forces.

But the reason for this is because we restrict the scope of knowledge to mechanical forces. The seemingly emergent behavior will be quite predictable given knowledge of the theory of heat. It is thus rather arbitrary as to when something is emergent, since nearly anything can be said to be emergent by limiting the scope of relevant knowledge. Emergent objects are, in other words, theory-relative. To use the clock example, it may in fact display no emergent properties whatsoever given a broader range of knowledge.

The Non-correlate Condition is aimed at notions of necessity in causality. The idea here is that there is no unique set of conditions which, whenever present, will always give rise to some emergent object. Athearn's alternative is that "a certain causal process might in principle have one of its usual effects *not happen*, and still be the same particular process, the same otherwise causally efficacious actual occurrence, that it normally is" (114).

But if there is no unique set of conditions that cause some object, then it is logically possible for *any* set of conditions to do so. In that case, why should we think that there is any relationship at all between the object in question and the antecedent conditions? For all we can tell the two are merely coincidental. The problems here are of an epistemic nature, having to do with our knowledge of the relevant conditions. One such problem is that of deciding when we have sufficient knowledge of the relevant antecedent conditions. Suppose we have observed on several occasions conditions X immediately preceding object O. Suppose one day we observe conditions X and O does not follow. How do we tell whether our observation was faulty, or whether we previously had insufficient knowledge of the relevant conditions? If, as Athearn suggests, there are no unique such conditions, then we will be left in the skeptical position of being unable to distinguish between these two possible and equally viable explanations.

The Differentiating Condition requires difference of kind between emergents and the conditions they emerge from. We can distinguish between two relevant notions of 'kind'. On one notion of 'kind' two objects can be of different kinds if they are described using different vocabularies. For example, baseballs and cocktail parties are different kinds in this sense. But this difference is not absolute since both can also be described using a physical vocabulary. Hence, their difference is not total, since there is at least one shared feature. This notion of kind is unobjectionable, since it does not exclude non-emergent objects. To use the clock example Jain, the slowing down of the hands due to cold temperature is a different kind of behavior than is the turning of the motor that moves the hands. Both, however, are physical, and the slowing down is not an emergent property when considered as physical.

The second sense of 'kind' is absolute; different kinds of objects have no features in common. For example, on some views, bodies and minds are different kinds in this way since they have nothing in common; at the broadest level of categorization they differ: one is physical and the other is

mental. The problem with this notion of kind is that it is hard to see how an object of one such kind can in any way cause or produce an object of a different kind. How, to use the mind-body example, can two such different kinds interact? How do brain-events cause mind-events? This same sort of problem arises for Athearn. How can an ether of events cause space and time if they are of such different kinds? Moreover, I take it that Athearn is committed to some form of physicalism, at least a minimal form according to which explanatory causal narratives employ only physical vocabulary. But physicalism will not allow for different kinds of this sort. Consequently, this difference of kind must be of the first sort in which some features are shared. But this sort of difference of kind is not a differentiating condition that is exclusive to emergentism, for non-emergent objects can be differentiated in the same way.

Clarifying his emergent view of causation would go a good way toward making this book even more useful. Traditional conceptual schemes, e.g., realism/anti-realism, causalism/acausalism, used for dealing with the problems raised by relativity theory and quantum mechanics are perhaps becoming exhausted. Athearn suggests new and interesting ways of thinking about these problems that may prove useful.

Derrida's *Gift of Death: Giving Definitions to the Gift and Giving Death*.  
Reviewed by Gabriel Rockhill.

Situated in the context of Derrida's most recent work on ethics and justice, including *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money* and *Specters of Marx*, *The Gift of Death* [*Donner la mort*] offers Derrida's most extensive investigation of religion and ethical responsibility to date. Interweaving the works of Patocka, Heidegger, Levinas, Kierkegaard and the New Testament through questions of secrecy, culpability, history, giving and death, Derrida traces through and around the secret aporetic kernels which haunt both ethics and justice. By working between oppositions and concepts, he delineates the penumbra of the unrevealable, the secret (and this is only one of them) that cannot be seen: responsibility is inhabited by a pith of irresponsibility just as the gift is plagued by its own annulment. Thus, the supposed authenticity of either responsibility or the gift hides an inner enigma: their very conditions of possibility demand the manifestation of their opposites (i.e. responsibility solicits irresponsibility just as the gift demands its own annulment). This surreptitious elucidation of the clandestine paradoxes of ethics moves within the secret paradigm of the infinite secret, one of the fathering matrices of both conceptual thought and its critique: the revolving door of thought it might be said. Thus, while sifting out certain paradoxes of conceptual thinking, Derrida simultaneously breaks the seal on a maze haunted by a certain notion of language and reason which unwinds like the secret of secrets of secrets which do not stop, the infinity of secrets — that to which one can apparently never *give death* [*donner la mort*].

An historical investigation of European responsibility through the lens of one of Jan Patocka's *Heretical Essays on the Philosophy of History* serves as the beginning of *The Gift of Death*. According to Derrida's reading of Patocka, there have been two important conversions in the historical evolution of culpability. The first of these occurred when the irresponsible and orgiastic "mystery of the sacred" was subjected to the discipline of the Platonic good and the individual soul became at once free and responsible (1 / 11).<sup>1</sup> The second transformation was a result of the Christian belief that Platonic responsibility had not completely overcome the demonic 'mys-

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<sup>1</sup>All references are given with the pages of the English translation followed by those of the original French. When it seemed pertinent, I added fragments of the original French in brackets.

tery of the sacred' and that a new culpability had to be elaborated based on the individual's relationship to the other (whose absoluteness manifested itself in God). Just as Platonism had not been able to completely overcome the orgiastic elements inherent in the mystery of the sacred, however, Derrida claims that Christianity itself has not been able to entirely erase its Platonic inheritance. In both cases, a secret remains in the palimpsests of history which could not be expunged, a nexus to the past which could not be severed. Both mutations *kept their secrets*, as if they were continuing to mourn the death of that which they had supposedly annulled, as if they were still haunted by the specters of *a past which was not passed*.<sup>2</sup> Platonism simply incorporated the mystery of the sacred and Christianity has simply repressed Platonism (see 7-9 / 16-17).

At this juncture, an important aspect of Derrida's working understanding of history exposes itself: there is a secret, an abyss that cannot be mastered, which remains in the very heart of history. With the passage of time, one secret is simply subordinated to another and thus "history never effaces what it buries; it always *keeps* within itself the *secret* [*garde . . . secret*] of whatever it encrypts, the secret of its secret" (21 / 28, my emphasis). This chasm in the core of history, this secret which is always yet to be confessed (for the secret has no end), also announces the origin of responsibility for, not unlike history itself, responsibility disrupts any attempt at thematization or subjection to knowledge and its inherent secrets render it (like the gift) illusive and aporetic (see 4-5 / 13-14). Thus, Derrida's investigation of the secrets that can never be erased from history leads to the larger question of the enigmas, the unmasterable kernels, which pervade responsibility and, more specifically, the clandestine which inhabits the gift (of death). In short, Derrida's analysis of Patocka's history of responsibility leads to the question of the historical complexity of *plus d'un secret* (no more secret / more than one secret).

This crypto-genealogy of the secrets of responsibility weaves itself together in relation to the individual's confrontation with death and, more precisely, the gift of death. According to Derrida's reading of Patocka, the

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<sup>2</sup>This economy, which preserves that which it abandons, is not unlike the circular economy of the gift which receives in return the equivalent of that which it has given. Whether it be the annulment of the gift or the impossibility of escape from the past which is not passed, the same economy appears to be in place, the same secret relationship of the eternal return of that which had supposedly been abandoned, that to which one had apparently *given death . . .* the incessant *return* of specters?

two historical conversions that we have thus far seen are linked to a transformation in cultural representations of death (see 31 / 37). On the one hand, Platonism is based on the immortal soul separating and individualizing itself through its confrontation with its own mortality:

the soul only distinguishes itself, separates itself, and assembles within itself in the experience of this *melete tou thanatou* . It is nothing other than this concern for dying [*ce souci du mourir*] as a relation to self and an assembling of self. (14 / 22)

While Christianity also maintains the importance of *ce souci du mourir*, it rejects the knowledge-based ethics of Platonism (i.e. that it is necessary to know and follow the Good according to an economics of exchange) in favor of a relationship to death as a radical alterity which demands “a goodness that is forgetful of itself” (51 / 54).<sup>3</sup> Christianity also introduces the profound alterity of an Other (God) who inhabits the most intimate kernel of our being, who sees “in secret [*dans le secret*]”, who sees inside us even when unseen by us: “God remains the witness of every secret” (112 / 104). The Christian basis for responsibility is itself founded on a movement away from the circular economy of exchange (i.e. one *good* for another *good*) towards an attempted break with economic return in the form of the sacrificial gift which is given without the least expectation of retribution or recompense. This movement towards a radical dissymmetry is based on a non-calculation which pushes one outside of the economy of give and take, a disjointure that results from one’s unique encounter with that which cannot be given or taken to or for us — death.<sup>4</sup> The sacrificial gift (if it exists), as a gulf or an abyss in the economy of exchange, is not unlike the unmasterable secrets of history; it remains outside of (and thus a secret to) the traditional economy [of giving and taking].

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<sup>3</sup>Patocka describes the coming of Christian subjectivity and the repression of Platonism through recourse to a *figure* [*figure* , also “face”], one might say, that inscribes sacrifice within the dissymmetry of looks that cannot be exchanged . . . This is the moment where the light or sun of the Good . . . goes beyond philosophy to become . . . a gaze. . . The Good becomes personal Goodness, a gaze that sees me without my seeing it” (93 / 89)

<sup>4</sup>“Everyone must assume his own death, that is to say the one thing in the world that no one else can *either give or take* : therein resides freedom and responsibility. . . Death would be this possibility of *giving and taking* [*donner-prendre* ] that actually exempts itself from the same realm of possibility that it institutes, namely, from *giving and taking* “ (44 / 48).

Let us *return* now to where it all begins, the end: death. According to Derrida's reading of both Patocka and Heidegger, an individual's irreplaceable singularity is *given* to them by their confrontation with their own death and the fact that this is precisely what no one else can ever give or take away from them (i.e. it is outside of the circle of exchange). The self, thus, discovers and elaborates its unique singularity and freedom in its relationship with death, its being-for-death. At the same time, however, the irreplaceability that is conferred or given to the individual subject by their encounter with death also functions as a call to responsibility, a demand placed on the uniqueness of the individual. That is to say, "it is only to the extent that dying — insofar as it 'is' — remains mine, that I can die for another [*l'autre*] or *give* my life to the other [*l'autre*]" (42 / 46). In other words, it is death which singularizes the subject and acts as the source of culpability. Responsibility and death are intertwined in a form of wedlock: "the sense [*le sens*] of responsibility is in all cases defined as a mode of "giving oneself death" [*se donner la mort*]" (43 / 47).<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of how pure or authentic this form of responsibility based on one's being-for-death might appear, Derrida claims once again that it harbors secrets which unHINGE it. Among other aporias, he elaborates what he refers to as "the secret of all secrets" by analyzing the following phrase: *tout autre est tout autre* (82 / 79).<sup>6</sup> Read alternately as 'every other is every other' (a simple tautology) or 'every other is entirely other' (a radical heterology), Derrida claims that this phrase holds one of the unseen secrets of responsibility — one cannot respond to the call of the other without sacrificing the call of every *other other* (who is entirely other). That is to say, the secret of responsibility (there remains, of course, more than one) is that it simultaneously demands irresponsibility due to the fact that every other is entirely other [*tout autre est tout autre*] and as soon as one responds to an other (i.e. as soon as one is respons-able), *another other* is

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<sup>5</sup>This originary role of death in the formation of subjectivity and responsibility not only conceptualizes and locates the unlocatable experience of death (which, perhaps, cannot even be located in the unlocatable) but it also echoes some of the most essential paradigms of patriarchal culture, including the assumption that death, violence and destruction remain necessary for the formation of society and ethics.

<sup>6</sup>While being one of the most important paradoxes, this is by no means the only aporia and Derrida explores concerning responsibility. For others, see his discussion of the dissymmetry between finite mortals and the good of the infinite gift (51 / 54) or his exploration of the paradoxical contradiction which arises between "responsibility in general and absolute responsibility" (61 / 62).

neglected (i.e. one is irrespons-able). One is cornered between the generality of all others and the singularity of each other. Hence, the only responsible response to others remains the non-response because the decision to reply to an other and ignore another other is never justifiable, never responsible.<sup>7</sup> This unjustifiable irresponsibility inherent in responsibility must be kept secret; one must not respond in responding, the irresponsible kernel must not be either completely revealed or annulled, it must be *kept* secret.

Pursuing this critique of 'authentic' responsibility further, Derrida *returns* to the now familiar theme that "the response and hence responsibility always risk what they cannot avoid appealing to in reply [*en retour*], namely, recompense and retribution" (96 / 91). He declares that even Christianity, which Patocka claims to be the final stage of culpability, reinscribes itself in a system of exchange in which the sacrificial gift of responsibility (in particular the gift of death) annuls itself. The finite calculations of humans are circumvented only for the implementation of the infinite calculation of God, the secret witness of every secret. Thus, an Other calculates and watches us (even when unseen by us) and we become responsible even for those things that we can hide from everyone else, we become responsible for our secrets:

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. (101 / 95)

In place of a finite economy of exchange, Derrida claims that an infinite, inescapable economy of give and take is instituted. Hence, as he attempts to show in *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, the gift (at least in this register) remains impossible. As soon as anything is thematized as a gift, there is already an expectation, however infinitesimal it might be, of a return and hence the gift is annulled: the gift in giving itself gives itself [death].

Having apparently traced the unseen secrets of Christianity, having seen in the secret, one might say, Derrida moves on to the work of Kierkegaard

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<sup>7</sup>" . . . a kind of gross spelling mistake, a lapse in the discipline and law which regulate writing and keep it seemly. . ." (Margins, 3 / 3)



and, in particular, his account of the story of Abraham and Isaac. According to Derrida's reading, Kierkegaard reveals the way in which Abraham does the impossible: he responds without responding and he gives death in a non-temporal instant in which there is no separation between his intention and his act — he gives the *gift* of death (see 59-60 / 61). Alone, responding to the call of God which beckons the singularity of his being, Abraham leaves his family in secret to take his son Isaac to the mountains of Moriah and kill him, to give him death [lui donner la mort]. He does not question the secret intent of God and when Isaac asks him what his own intent is, he responds without responding, he reveals everything but the essential (which he *keeps* secret).<sup>8</sup> Thus, at least two secrets are kept (one between God and Abraham and the other between Abraham and Isaac) and something is given without being given (Abraham's response) (see 59 / 60). At the very instant in which the intention and the act of giving coincide, when Abraham raises the knife above his head to give death [donner la mort] to his own son, the gift of death is given and God stops him. By responding (without responding) to the call of the Other which beckoned his singularity in secret, Abraham not only fulfilled the paradoxical demand to be at once responsible and irresponsible (because, among other reasons, *tout autre est tout autre*) but he also preserved the 'economic' order of ethics while breaking it.<sup>9</sup> In other words, in giving death, Abraham does the impossible: he is the most responsible and the most irresponsible, being *at once* [in the instant] a saint and a warm blooded murderer. One might even say that in responding to the call to be responsible without responding, he gives without giving: *Abraham gives the gift of death without giving the gift of death* [to Isaac]. The gift is *kept* secret and only thus can it be a gift — it is unknown, unthematized, outside the order or economic exchange, of being and time . . . like the specters, ellipses and abysses which haunt the history of responsibility, the gift (of death) is precisely when / where it *is not* . . . (perhaps)

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<sup>8</sup>"It can't be said that Abraham doesn't respond to him. He says God will provide. God will provide a lamb for the holocaust (["burnt offering"] Genesis 22: 8). Abraham thus keeps his secret at the same time as he replies to Isaac" (59 / 60).<sup>9</sup>"The absoluteness of duty, of responsibility, and of obligation certainly demands that one transgress ethical duty, although in betraying it one belongs to it and at the same time recognizes it. The contradiction and the paradox must be endured *in the instant itself*" (66 / 66).

This play of secrets is linked to a movement of critique which has not only haunted the history of philosophy but which also forms one of the most repetitious reticulums of thought. Together with the foundations which underlie and are underlain by them, these secrets function, one might say, as the playing field for the meeting, arrangement, intertwining and deconstruction of theories. Together and apart, secrets and foundations form one of the primary maneuvers of philosophic discourse and of thought in general, the beaten paths of a maze, the Ariadnean thread whose beginning is tied to its end.<sup>10</sup> Ironically, it might be said, the foundation has been put into question whereas the secret has mainly [been used to] *put into question*. In fact, as we have seen here, the secret has been put to use to trace the sutures in the foundation, it *returns* once again to its role of critique. Furthermore, this entire paradigmatic relationship between the foundation and the secret (perhaps even the figure and the ground) has yet to be *put into question*. To do so would indeed put putting into question into question, it would interrogate the play of grounds and abysses to the point of [un]veiling the secrets that make secrets possible, the inescapability of the inescapable. These strange circles of return, these ineluctables which link the end to the beginning, would themselves be queried: why have the matrices of secrets and revelations not been *put into question*? Do we *return* once again to a certain impossibility inherent in *the formation of the question*, an inescapability haunting a particular economic formulation of definitions and relationships, of secrets and grounds, of foundations . . . do we come full circle?

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<sup>10</sup>For examples of the plays of secrets and foundations see, among others, the following:  
 - Heidegger's "The Necessity for Explicitly Restating the Question of Being": "This question has today been forgotten . . ." (i.e. the foundations of our epoch have kept the question of Being secret).

- "Philosophy believed it could overcome the contradictions of the perceptual faith by suspending it in order to *disclose* the motives that support it. The operation seems to be inevitable, and absolutely legitimate too . . . Yet it *reveals* itself to be fallacious in that it transforms the perceptual faith, which is to be understood; it makes of it a belief among others, *founded* like any other on reasons — the reasons we have to *think that there is* a world. But it is clear that in the case of perception the conclusion *comes before* the reasons, which are there only to take its place or to back it up when it is shaken" (a critique of the secrets of the play of foundations and secrets in philosophy) (Merleau-Ponty, 50, my emphasis).

- ". . . man remains within a master-slave dialectic. The slave, ultimately, of a God on whom he bestows the characteristics of an absolute master. Secretly or obscurely, a slave to the power of the maternal-feminine which he diminishes or destroys" (the secrets of man's foundation haunt him) (Irigaray, 10).

This play of the clandestine and the candid, this play *between* the secret and the known, is mediated almost inevitably by a certain recollection or, more precisely, a witnessing (40). On the one hand, to exhume the hidden, one must witness its existence . . . more importantly, however, *to keep the secret secret*, one must also witness the existence of the secret, one must see it without seeing it / it must be seen without being seen. In other words, whether it is a question of *keeping* secret or revealing secrets, we are still in the register of witnessing and, to a certain extent, the field of memory. This valuation of witnessing almost inevitably tends to overshadow the importance or even the possibility of a radical forgetting without witness, a forgetting which does not know itself as such, a forgetting of forgetting. This appraisal insists on the ability to flush out, even vaguely, the surrounds of the unfindable and elucidate or trace the secret of the secret (without necessarily revealing the secret), it demands that one *speak of* without necessarily *speaking* the secret, it insists that one bear witness.<sup>11</sup> At the same time and perhaps ironically, it *bears witness to* the possibility of a forgetting [of the gift] which could, perhaps, render the gift possible in the apparent movement of Abraham outside of the economy of exchange. However, a radical forgetting of the very paradigms of secrets, gifts, returns, foundations and death as they are formulated and denoted in this discourse remains, one might say, inaccessible insofar as it can not be elucidated within the paradigms of secrets. In other words, a radical forgetting which would expunge this entire matrix of secrets, responsibility and giving remains unforeseeable and, indeed, unwitnessable. The forgetting which annuls not the gift but the paradigm of the gift is itself annulled by the paradigm of the gift. One cannot forget the secrets that inhabit it . . . there is a certain inescapability, a haunting, in a witnessing which cannot forget itself, a witnessing which one might say *tries* (and it is precisely in this trying that it cannot) to forget. This stress on witnessing forms, as will be seen, a strange tomb for thought, it *gives death* to that which might be outside of what has thus far been called or given the name of *giving* and *death*.

It is at this moment that we might begin to discuss a certain concretization of language and definitions which *give*, at least in certain contexts, terms such as the gift, responsibility, ethics, death, etc. relatively fixed locations and descriptions. That is not to say that these denotations are not

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<sup>11</sup>These themes of *speaking of* and *speaking* return in the echo of semiology.

arbitrary or changeable but simply that there is a certain seizure (active and passive), a freezing up around the joints, which surrounds particular concepts: a *rigor mortis*. For example, the term gift is generally considered to be, at least at the beginning (for this is the starting point of its impossibility, its end), something which is freely given without the least expectation of a return. It might easily be suggested that an infinity of other uses of the term 'gift' exist and that these various forms of gifts might not necessarily produce their own annulment, that it is only the *return* to a particular concept of the gift that *returns* the gift to a circular economy of eternal return. However, on a more important level, this question of seizure leads to the larger problem of language itself and to a certain understanding of the signifying process. Although highly problematized as a field of diverse and infinitely interpretable chains of signification which inevitably effect the content which one submits to it, language for Derrida is nonetheless conceived of based on a certain understanding of semiology.<sup>12</sup> One of the potential secrets, one of the possible presuppositions (if we are still to use this sort of language), inherent in his conception of the way in which language functions is that it *preserves* a reticulum which was, in fact, developed after language itself, an echo of the experience of communication. That is to say, the abstractions and metonymies which we call 'signs' and denotations remain secondary phenomena which retain the potential to hide (render secret?), gloss over, contain and categorize the torrents of language beneath them. In other *words* (for words are now beginning to change beneath us), the vibrancy of the raw flesh of language and the texture of that fabric we call communication rumbles beneath and around the discourse that tries in the least way to describe it (to speak *of* it), the umbrellas which tell us what it is that we are saying. Semiology itself, the study *of* signs, remains a rebound phenomenon which tries to depict that which, in being put into *other* words, begins to unravel and fray at the edges. That is to say, definitions act only as intermediary introductions to language, ladders which must be burned in order that the intertwinement of communication, the chaf[f]ing of sounds and sights, might begin to emerge.<sup>13</sup> It is

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<sup>12</sup>This question of language also problematizes the discussion of definitions and identities of such terms as 'Derrida' . . .

<sup>13</sup>Definitions remain abstract metalanguages which, while (perhaps) partially clarifying a word, also threaten to locate something as a word and to fix it in a location which is cut off from the sense that it develops through the friction and casting out of itself and other 'words', from the various experiences of word.

*precisely* insofar as there is *not* a *precise* definition that can be given to the word gift, there is no real sign or even word 'gift' (no economy which locates, even vaguely, gifts), that we can speak of, with, through, around and about gifts, that we can *give* words *without* a *return* to the questions of precise locations, that words can move and create the white heat of communication . . . that the return to definitions can be forgotten. Thus it might be said that to give definitions to the gift is to attempt to remove a term from its diverse settings and manifold senses, it is to try and pluck a 'word' from the foliage of communication and connotation (it is to take it away from its life, to *give it death*). In other words, and words which cannot, even though they might try, restrict other words to precise definitions (*including this one*), the gift does not have a definition nor does it any longer make sense to speak of it as a sign or, and perhaps this is the last word, as a word. The *giving* of a definition simultaneously annuls itself; *one cannot take the gift for anything*.

This fixation on definition or even the simple paradigms of any semiology tend to concretize certain concepts which then form the various poles (which might continue to move themselves) around which one moves. To begin with, certain frozen concepts haunt Derrida's discourse or, to be more precise, certain concepts which are frozen in a diverse series of manifestations and plexus of passage. Death, heterogeneity, paradox, aporia, responsibility, dissymmetry, the gift, return, giving—by moving through the vague definitions of these various moments, Derrida maintains a loose paradigm, a hazy maze, a revolution-ary economy. However diverse the definitions of these terms might remain, they still tend to form solid poles insofar as every denotation is fundamentally tied to the shaft of a particular word. Thus, a fixation on terms, a *rigor mortis*, leads to a series of semi-solid concepts which form the field of exchange. This unforgettable domain tends to articulate itself in terms of a series of oppositions whose in-betweens and aporias Derrida remains fascinated with. He moves in the corners between two oppositional poles (whether it be responsibility and irresponsibility, giving and taking, the general and the *individual...*) which dominate and prefigure his discourse. It is from these positions that he weaves through the curious paradoxes which result from such vantage points, he unveils the way in which reason based on concepts and definitions remains aporetic and paradoxical. He surreptitiously undermines a system of supposed clarity by revealing its secrets and its unseen contradictions. The traces of his own steps, however, further reiterate the sup-

posed conceptual basis of thought and the presumed necessity of poles such as definitions, secrets, foundations, words . . . His tracks lead toward and away, on a revolving path, from a certain economy of thought and ethics which, in being witnessed in their coming and going, their give and take, cannot seem to be forgotten . . . until the wind of words winding, forgetting being forgotten, questions being questioned, completely expunge his traces of traces, as if they were given / giving death.

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