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*Forms of Transcendence: Heidegger and Medieval Mystical Theology* by Sonya Sikka, SUNY Press, Albany, 1997.

Can a phenomenological description delineate aspects of religious experience accidentally—or at least without referring to religion or God? In this book, Sonya Sikka finds such an experience implicit in the descriptions of Dasein's experience of being in the work of Martin Heidegger. To test this claim, Sikka holds Heidegger's thought up against the descriptions of religious experience from four fourteenth century mystics presenting a series of comparisons involving Heidegger's thought of being and the thought of being God in St Bonaventure, Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler and Jan van Ruusbroec. In regard to Heidegger, the book suggests that however forcefully Heidegger's critique of ontotheology and traditional metaphysics may implicate rationalistic theology, central aspects of his program bear striking resemblance to medieval mystical theology.

Sikka first compares Heidegger with St. Bonaventure who, she claims, "stands squarely within the metaphysical tradition" (5) but whose thought nonetheless bears resemblance to that of Heidegger. Whereas Heidegger's critique of traditional metaphysics takes aim at thinking being in the form of functions of speculative reason, it is—more than anything else—the mystical experience grounding the expression of St. Bonaventure and the other medievals dealt with that, Sikka argues, bears resemblance to (or perhaps identity with) the experience behind Heidegger's positive descriptions (5).

This comparison marks a broad engagement with the thought of Heidegger in relation to St. Bonaventure's *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*. Sikka follows the path of Bonaventure's *Itinerary* whereby the mind ascends in three stages to God, first, through seeing the order or *ration* in things in the world, second by turning inward to see in the mind itself the image of God, then ascending further to see the deity directly as being and as the good ultimately, beyond thought, as paradox in the Incarnation of God. Early in her interpretation of Bonaventure—and seeming to anticipate points

of comparison with Heidegger's thought—Sikka points out the important involvement of a decision to come to see objects in terms of the divine *ratio*. Without overlooking the importance of such a decision, we also note preparation for seeing objects in this also includes, according to Bonaventure, beside decision “penetrating meditation, holy living, and devout prayer” (I.8) which is to say, a way of life. The engagement with Heidegger finds contrast with Bonaventure in terms of Heidegger's historically oriented revision of *ratio* or *logos*. Points of comparison include the role of decision and *admiratio* in Bonaventure to that of attunement and wonder in Heidegger. Sikka also finds that the insight of the enrootedness of thought in experience in both authors, though the fixity of the system of being in Bonaventure bears distinction from essential historicity in Heidegger. The discussion takes into account a broad range of Heidegger's work including *What is Philosophy?*, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, *What is Called Thinking*, *Basic Concepts*, *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, and *Being and Time*.

The second comparison of Heidegger with Meister Eckhart's *Quaestiones Parisienses* and his sermons yields even stronger commonalities. However, in this reviewer's mind, this comparison brings to surface the most controversial and difficult thesis of the book: the thesis that Eckhart's expressions of the ineffable God and Heidegger's expressions of ungraspable being, in a certain sense, convey the same content. Sikka measures this claim against that of John Caputo who argues for a strong analogy between the thought of being in Heidegger and the thought of the Godhead in Eckhart. The argument in *Forms* finds in these two descriptions not merely analogical sameness but a sameness of content. This claim is controversial insofar as it challenges the self-understanding Heidegger sets forth of his philosophy insofar where he explicitly denies any relation of his understanding of being to an understanding of God. Sikka cites this tension and carefully specifies that the sameness she attributes to these descriptions regards the nature of the experience described by both Heidegger and Eckhart. Whether in respect to being or to the mystical experience of God, she explains, both describe an experience that essentially decanters the subject. The question whether this aspect of the experience exhausts its meaning in the description of either writer remains open.

Nevertheless, Sikka presents a considerable challenge to the position Caputo defends regarding the relation of Heidegger to Eckhart. The discussion in this section exemplifies the book's on-going exploration, inspired by Scheler's concept of religious apprehension (8) found in *On the Eternal In Man*, of the possibility of grounding a contemporary philosophy of God on a sort of religious apprehension or experience. Throughout the book, Sikka draws out different aspects and possibilities of such an experience from all five writers.

The following comparison presents the call of conscience in both a theological and non-theological sense, found in Johannes Tauler and Heidegger respectively. Again, Sikka argues for a degree of sameness in regard to the experience involved under either interpretation of the call. This comparison examines the question of conscience in the existential analysis of *Being and Time* against the call of God the Father in the work of Tauler. Because Heidegger, by framing his description in terms of fundamental ontology postpones theological interpretation, Sikka focuses in the experiential content in the descriptions of both writers to decipher their pertinence to a perspective philosophy of God. She finds that in both Tauler and Heidegger the person is called by a hidden, inner source from what she is to what she can become. The differences are not overlooked. For Tauler, the image of God is imprinted on the human soul. This inner image conveys the voice of God the father who lures the person toward union with God. In Heidegger's fundamental ontology, which characteristically suspends theological interpretation, the source on the call of conscience, though connected to Dasein, remains indeterminate. Past these differences, Sikka argues, there is a similarity of "real content" (201) between the two accounts of conscience. Though the call can be ignored or suppressed, both writers agree that a call springs from the essence of human being. Further, although Heidegger criticizes theological interpretations of the call as pressing an ontic explanation upon an ontological phenomenon, Sikka argues Tauler evades this criticism insofar as God in calling remains, in a certain sense, hidden. Thus, she compares the hiddenness of God in Tauler to the indefiniteness of the caller in Heidegger's existential analysis (204). In this manner Sikka steers

these two apparently divergent interpretations of conscience towards each other on the level of the experience they refer to, and she further suggests that both accounts involve at root “an intrinsic relation to the infinite” (201).

The final comparison (Heidegger with Ruusbroec) expands on the theme of the mystical nature of an experience that decenters the subject. Sikka explicates Ruusbroec’s description of ecstatic union with God in the rapture of love in comparison with Heidegger’s discussion of “the turning” and the event of appropriation of being (*ereignis*). She points to similar discussions in each author of the modes of human action juxtaposed against a modeless source—though the names that allude to this source, she concedes, are pertinently distinguished as the love of God in Ruusbroec as opposed to the truth of being in Heidegger. In elaborating further the interplay of human effort and nonhuman gift in the descriptions of human experience of both writers Sikka defends a point of interpretation in regard to *Being and Time* that in that book being holds priority over Dasein and not the reverse. She finds the text ambiguous, and she supports her interpretative position by pointing to later works of Heidegger as clarifying the meaning of the earlier text.

Along the course of the comparisons and analyses readers will find discussions of Heidegger’s views on history and eschatology as well as a tempered critique of Heidegger on intersubjectivity. Further, Sikka’s discussion of the event of appropriation of being (*ereignis*) in the last section provokes for this reviewer questions about the character of being for Heidegger where the discussion exposes person-like characteristics in Heidegger’s description of being (179f., 263f.).

In light of Heidegger’s theological disclaimer (which Sikka recognizes), some may wish to critically engage Sikka’s argument for the claim that there is a sense in which Heidegger may be considered a mystical theologian (265). Regardless of the position one may take, students and scholars of the philosophy of Heidegger. Medieval philosophy and the philosophy of religion will find herein insightful analyses and challenging explorations. Though Sikka situates her work in contemporary (and Prospective) philosophy of God, these comparisons and their guiding theme of the experience

of God just as well result in a considerable contribution to contemporary philosophy of religious experience.