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Of Derrida, Heidegger, and Spirit (Book Review)

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Of Derrida, Heidegger, and Spirit, edited by David Wood; ix & 149 pp. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993, \$39.95 cloth, \$16.95 paper.

In *Of Spirit* Derrida patiently examines the twists and turns in Heidegger's dance of approach and avoidance with spirit under the sign, as he tells us, of ghost, flame, and ashes. To read Heidegger now, responsively, is to read him against his own denials and avoidances with regard to Nazism and genocide and it is also to ask what resources there are in his own thoughts and unthoughts for a more significant response than those he was able to formulate explicitly. To read Heidegger through the lenses of *Of Spirit* is to see him torn between a metaphysical conception of spirit that was rejected in *Being and Time*, but which came back to haunt him in the rectoral address and the Introduction to *Metaphysics*, and another sense of spirit that tends to disrupt the metaphysical and which is most evident in the 1953 Trakl essay.

The essays in this collection set out from a variety of directions to clarify or challenge Derrida's reading of Heidegger's unthought, and some of them extend the project by suggesting what is unthought and avoided in Derrida's own essay. Geoffrey Bennington offers an incisive statement of what Derrida is up to in *O/ Spirit*, and along with David Wood's introduction, he provides a way into the thematics of responsibility that runs through this set of essays. Wood's own piece focuses on Heidegger's rectoral address and finds it dominated by the ghost of Hegel, that is, by the ghost of Geist (the words have a common linguistic history). In a telling comparison with an almost contemporaneous essay by Theodor Adorno, Wood explores the question of what it might mean to realize or actualize philosophy and shows that Heidegger's criticism of Hegel's spirit is part and parcel of his claim that Hegel has ontologized and eternalized time, foreclosing the possibility of a genuine openness to futurity. Yet insofar as the rectoral address assigns an organizing function to spirit within the Volk and the university, there is an ominous tension between such openness and "the application of management (or military) logic to Spirit" (p. 81).

David Krell suggests that Heidegger's thoughts on the relation between humanity and animality would provide a sharper focus on the meaning of spirit in his work, and he points, in Derrida's spirit we might say, to another great avoidance in Heidegger's reading of Trakl which is to a certain extent doubled in Derrida's essay. This is the figure of the sister, whom Heidegger associates with Geist and it opens up the question of sexual difference in Trakl. Animality and sexuality are pursued more virulently by Nick Land who emphasizes the wildness of Trakl's writing in its engagement with rats, wolves, and a process of transformation (or becoming-animal). Here both Heidegger and Derrida appear as pacifying and domesticating a poetic energy that is always excessive, and finding themselves cast in the unusual position of humanists.

Will McNeill's careful essay suggests that questioning in Heidegger may already be dispersed and disrupted from the very beginning, rather than sheltered by Geist. Such a radicalization, while it may appear to be in conflict with the main claims of Derrida's text, is precisely the kind of reading that Derrida's work has enabled. Simon Critchley and John Sallis, in separate essays, point to the significance of a lengthy footnote to *Of Spirit* where Derrida responds to a comment by Françoise Dastur. While Derrida emphasized the primacy of Heidegger's questioning, Dastur directed attention to a passage in *On the Way to Language* where questioning is subordinated to listening, and so thought is a form of responding. This

suggests, as Sallis urges, that Derrida's essay could be paired by a variant or ghost that took its point of departure from the passage Dastur points out and the footnote that responds to it. Such a reading of Heidegger would find him more concerned with the issue of responsibility and responsiveness; as Critchley comments, this would be to develop the Levinasian aspect of Heidegger. Gillian Rose is the least sympathetic to such efforts at recuperating Heidegger on the issue of responsibility. Rose would resurrect something like the Hegelian conception of modernity and reason that both Heidegger and Derrida criticize. For her, Derrida is, in effect, providing an apologia for Heidegger or Nazism or both, insofar as he sees both Nazism and anti-Nazism as caught up in the same metaphysics of subjectivity. She accuses him of a "special dishonesty" and describes his work in terms of the "sublimity of originary equivocation" (p. 66). Despite this polemical tone, a careful comparison of her position and that of the more sympathetic critics would be a very fruitful point of departure for an understanding of the political tendencies of Derrida's work.

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