

Introduction

Hugh J. Silverman

Continental philosophy is in its adolescence. Its future(s) will doubtless be rich and rewarding; its past is inscribed within a variety of traditions that still remain to be reread; its present is one of many differences. This volume addresses various phases of continental philosophy — both in the context of its multiple traditions and in relation to the politics of difference that mark the understanding of its present and future(s). Divided into two parts, *Writing the Politics of Difference* focuses on the traditions of difference in continental philosophy, most notably in connection with the texts of Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, Sartre, and de Beauvoir; and it stresses the reality of differences (social, political, sexual, and philosophical) as well as the various theoretical operations that identify features of difference in contemporary continental thought.

The politics of difference is not new. And yet the term has come to operate particularly in the context of both feminism and deconstruction. Correspondingly, the profound philosophical differences that, in recent years, have marked professional debates concerning the official program of the American Philosophical Association and the effects of its representation have come under the aegis of pluralism. Furthermore, the political differences that characterize theoretical work on the nature, role, and status of democracy (in relation to totalitarianism) broaden the inquiry (especially in relation to current Eastern European realities). The critical differences that prevail in questions of interpretation relate to the understanding of how the texts of a tradition can be understood and what is to be done about the alternatives that inevitably arise both theoretically and practically. In short, how do differences operate together in a context of viable communication. This book is about these sorts of differences and the possible futures that they carry with them.

The occasion for these essays was the twenty-fifth anniversary conference of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy held at the University of Toronto in Ontario, Canada. This momentous event was also a time of thresholds. In the 1980s, the society established itself as the dominant professional framework for continental philosophy and its practice in North America. It had definitively moved beyond the narrower self-definition of a limited group concerned exclusively with transcendental and existential phenomenology. At the banquet celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary (with symposium speeches by some of its founders such as James Edie, George Schrader, David Carr, Don Ihde, and Edward Casey) the more than one hundred persons present were reminded of the early debates at Northwestern University concerning the name of the society — whether it should highlight existentialism and phenomenology, existential philosophy, or some other version of these terms. Curiously, in the first of my six years as executive director of the Society, one of the aforementioned founders recommended at an executive committee meeting that the name be changed to Society for Continental Philosophy. Although it was decided to retain the palyonym, the ensuing six years marked a profound difference in the society's self-understanding.

By the time of the anniversary conference in 1986, it was generally understood that the purpose of SPEP annual meetings was to address current issues in continental philosophy (in its broadest formulation). Sessions could be devoted not only to readings of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, Gurwitsch, and Schütz or to phenomenologies of art, society, psychology, science, and technology, but also to current debates in critical and dialectical phenomenology, semiotics and post-structuralism, hermeneutics and deconstruction, feminism and postmodernism. Common figures to be discussed, presented, and debated now included Gadamer, Ricoeur, Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard, Adorno, Habermas, Vattimo, Lefort, Kristeva, and Irigaray. Even the "figure" itself came to constitute a locus of philosophical elaboration, disagreement, and creative de- and re-construction. The frame was also opened for renewed examination and reading of Kant, Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. Furthermore, a number of important names in the North American context had already begun to emerge as foci for philosophical scrutiny. This shift in attention from a continental philosophy based solely in Europe to one highly animated on the other side of the Atlantic as well was concomitant with the introduction of SPEP conference "current research sessions" addressing recent publications by North American philosophers. In such a context, the work of Edward Casey, Alphonso Lingis, Reiner Schurmann, James Edie, John Sallis, Calvin Schrag, Bruce Wilshire, Fred Dallmayr, Charles Scott, John Caputo, William Richardson, J. N. Mohanty, Joan

Stambaugh, Joseph Kockelmans, David Michael Levin, John McCumber, and even Hugh Silverman (to name just a few) have come to be an integral part of the ongoing discourse.

In the 1980s, continental philosophy became as much a North American philosophy as an European derivative. Continental philosophy was no longer a regional, geographical name but rather a designation for an international philosophical style, a way of philosophizing that moved beyond the earlier antagonisms between phenomenology and analytic philosophy, that brought American philosophy into dialogue with and beyond its roots in pragmatism, naturalism, and process philosophy. The twenty-fifth anniversary of SPEP marked these changes in atmosphere, tenor, and assumed commitment of a revitalized society with its invigorated set of philosophical practices.

But if all of these differences are to be understood as part of the context, then one might assume that there is no basis for any disagreement? As in any group, there is never simple acceptance of the status quo nor should there be. What became a matter for debate was the degree and extent to which a particular component of the society's new set of commitments should be represented. And although the broad range of orientations could be called *continental philosophy*, any number of particular positions and even alternative philosophical views made themselves known within the context. Feminism—growing steadily into one of the dominant concerns of SPEP and particularly in connection with French Feminism—demanded and needed more space. The election of Arleen Dallery along with Charles Scott as codirectors in 1986 was symbolic of this important new thrust. Postmodernism came to be an important element in the response to traditional semiotics, phenomenology, and even post-structuralism. Dialectical phenomenology demanding a reinscription of traditional transcendental thinking fought for its identity. Deconstruction, already a major force in a literary context found its proper space in continental philosophy. And the human sciences—whose practices had come to be affected by phenomenology in particular—grew to the extent that a whole new society was created. Tensions arose as these differing orientations came to vie for a central place in the sun.

The task of those of us expected to respond to the growing needs and changing interests of the society was to provide both balance and new representation of the full range of these concerns. Where this response was adequate, the result was appreciation. Where members felt that their context was underrepresented, there was discontent. In the last half-decade or so, SPEP more than doubled in size. This increase reflects not only the growth in interest in continental philosophy but also its greater diversity. More and more, younger philosophers and fellow-travelers entered the field. No longer were all sessions plenary, and by the time of the an-

niversary conference, there were in some instances as many as five concurrent sessions. And even this was not enough . . .

This book is situated precisely at a moment of juncture — the place where the pyjamas outgrow the child — necessitating either expansion or replacement. It has been suggested that SPEP had gone into hibernation in the late 1970s. In the 1980s it came alive with so much energy and enthusiasm that an increasing number of those attending were thirty-five or younger. Correspondingly, graduate programs with a strong emphasis in continental thought at universities such as Stony Brook, Penn State, Boston College, Loyola of Chicago, Purdue, Emory, Vanderbilt, and even Northwestern again gained special prominence in the field. Although the proliferation of these programs came to meet an increasing need, they could still accept only a small number of the many qualified and aspiring applicants. SPEP became the meeting place for both younger and more established philosophers and interested scholars from a wide range of interdisciplinary interest groups. The society's annual conferences in October established themselves solidly as one of the dominant contexts for exchange, debate, and growth in continental philosophy.

In the light of this new growth and expanded program, William Eastman, director of SUNY Press, graciously agreed to celebrate the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Society with a book devoted to this one year. The essays here moulded to form an independent, coherent framework mark the traditions and politics of difference in continental philosophy. One will find alternative readings of Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, Sartre, and de Beauvoir as well as moments of difference in the context of contemporary (philosophical, sexual, and political) debate. The book concludes with some reflections on the futures of continental philosophy — through readings of Heidegger, postmodernism, and deconstruction from American, British, and Italian perspectives.

The inscription of Hegel in continental thought can be regarded as central. And yet the multitude of readings of Hegel is nothing short of dispersive. What Kierkegaard or Marx make of Hegel is very different from what Heidegger, Adorno, or Derrida find in the corpus. And these differences highlight the readings of Gary Shapiro, John McCumber, and Martin Donougho, who study carefully the subversion of Hegel's system in the philosophies of Heidegger and Adorno — two different (and in many ways) opposing German philosophies. The shift to Kierkegaard, with his own vociferous rejection of the System, nevertheless still operates within the Hegelian framework. The essays by John Michelsen, Merold Westphal, and C. Stephen Evans establish Kierkegaard's link with philosophies of acting, choice, and religion. The discussion of Sartre's ethics by Linda Bell, Thomas Anderson, Robert Stone, and Elizabeth Bowman is a natural outgrowth of the Hegelian and Kiergaardian traditions. Here,

the highlighting of posthumous material that still is not translated into English introduces new perspectives in continental philosophy's contribution to ethical theory. And further discussions by Patricia Mills, Christie McDonald, and Jo-Ann Piaridi concerning questions of identity and desire by returning to Hegel and Freud (out of Adorno and Marcuse), Proust (out of Barthes and Deleuze), and de Beauvoir (out of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty) are logical conclusions to the question of the practice of difference in the traditions of continental philosophy.

The second part of the book focuses more specifically on the writing of difference in contemporary thought. Bernhard Waldenfels, Martin Dillon, and Wayne Froman are all concerned in one form or another with the implications of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy for a theory of language and dialogue. They indicate alternative directions arising from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Waldenfels moves toward a theory of dialogue and discourse (in relation to both Gadamer and Foucault), Martin Dillon offers a controversial critique of what he calls "post-hermeneutic skepticism" and "semiological reductionism" in favor of the broader experiential account paramount in Merleau-Ponty's ontology. And by contrast Wayne Froman juxtaposes the Derridean theory of "writing" with Merleau-Ponty's interrogation of speech.

Following the discussion of language and speech is a section concerned quite directly with questions of sexual difference. Here the stress is on gender differences and the groundwork for a politics of difference. Susan Bordo in a Foucauldian vein examines "the body as a text of femininity" with its contradictory effects. Reading Irigaray, Kristeva, Felman, and Wittig, Eleanor Kuykendall asks whether women's bodies constitute or are constituted by language and explores its epistemological and ethical implications. Terry Winant shows that, in relation to gender differences, relativism about rationality need not entail epistemological relativism. She picks up on two dominant concerns of this volume by arguing for various forms of methodological and political relativism.

Claude Lefort, Dick Howard, and Claude Piché bring out aspects of a democratic theory concerned with "the *sense* of social action" and an account of "the political" as founded in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, as linked with that of Hannah Arendt, and as ultimately providing a basis for what might become a Habermasian theory of the social role of art. Out of this discussion of democracy, it follows that another politics should complete the book; namely, a philosophical politics in which the question of the future is raised: in Heideggerian (Joan Stambaugh), post-modern (Gianni Vattimo), and deconstructive (David Wood) modes.

Unlike previous books in the SPEP series, a bibliography has been included here to guide the reader and to provide a referential frame for following the itinerary though the tradition from Hegel to de Beauvoir and

into the complex of debate concerning the philosophy of language, gender politics, democratic theory, and the question of the future. Hence issues surrounding the role of philosophical systems, ethical choice, relations with others, the gendered body, language, socialization, and the status of philosophy today constitute the fabric of the present volume.

Writing the Politics of Difference was to be called "The Future of Continental Philosophy," which was the guiding theme for the anniversary conference. It would have made an excellent antecedent to the new SUNY Press Contemporary Studies in Philosophy and Literature book entitled *After the Future* and edited by Gary Shapiro (who also has an essay here). However, in the light of the contributions themselves, it seemed more appropriate to stress the writing of differences as a political practice, particularly as it has come to characterize discussions in the Society itself and in the broader context framed by its nearly thirteen hundred members. What brings together a theory of difference, feminism, the issue of democracy, and the question of the future of continental philosophy will be evident from the links that constitute this particular inscription of the politics of difference.