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Book Review



Steven DeLay, *Phenomenology in France: A Philosophical and Theological Introduction* (New York and London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 254, \$39.95, ISBN 9781138244979 (pbk).

In this introductory text, Steven DeLay provides a broad and deep analysis of the current French phenomenological tradition. Most of the book's chapters cover a distinct French phenomenologist and under a specific theme: Emmanuel Levinas, Ethics as First Philosophy; Michel Henry, the Primacy of Life; Jean-Luc Marion, the Phenomenology of Givenness; Jean-Yves Lacoste, Beyond Earth and World; Jean-Louis Chrétien, the Call and the Response; Claude Romano, Evential Hermeneutics; Emmanuel Falque, on Metamorphosis. In treating these authors and these subjects DeLay provides clear relief of the established phenomenological tradition coming from Husserl and Heidegger, thereby granting the text a remarkable unity despite covering such a wide range of distinct figures and topics. DeLay is able to clearly frame together the often-intractable development of ideas in this French phenomenological tradition, paying particular attention to the various points of contact, the divergences, the cultivation of specific intuitions, the development of particular concepts, and the emergence of new impulses. DeLay's text balances two competing aims, the first in addressing the need for more commentary on those figures "most productively interrogating" the legacy of Heidegger and Husserl, and secondly, to introduce "the texts in their own terms, and in their own styles, so that readers can enter into their own distinctive world" (p. 7); this is effectively accomplished by virtue of an elaborate and philosophically sound exegesis of the key texts and figures in tandem with a rich section of notes at the end of each chapter as well as a "sustained theological meditation" (ibid) contained in the final chapter. In total, we find a noteworthy contribution on two fronts: a compellingly clear account of intellectual history, and a unique contribution to the ongoing work of phenomenology itself.

Leveraging this formidable tradition of French phenomenological thought, DeLay's book mounts a devastating critique against "atheistic phenomenology" (p. 2) by offering a systematic and thorough account of how phenomenology is not only open to the question of God but must necessarily recognize and probe the depths of human experience where the presence of God appears to manifest as a veritable reality. Questioning and diffusing the death of God pronounced by Nietzsche, DeLay begins his book by defending the exercise of theology in philosophy by demonstrating how "the notion of negating God is hopelessly confused" (p. 3). Employing the thought of Jean-Luc Marion, DeLay shows that any such negation "hangs on a finite conceptualization of God ..." (ibid), and that in taking seriously the idea of God one must recognize that God entirely transcends the finite concept as such, therefore showing how a bit of "good theologizing" reveals that such a philosophical occlusion of God succeeds only in negating "an idol" (ibid). Engaging the thought of Jean-Louis Chrétien, Emmanuel Falque and Claude Romano, DeLay proceeds to tackle the claim that such philosophizing is merely an apologetics, and DeLay eschews any strict juxtaposition of theology and philosophy by referring to Lacoste in saying that "the measure of our phenomenological thought is not that it deserves to be called philosophy or theology, but simply the power of what it says" (p. 114), and further, he shows how such inclusion of theology into philosophy is to the credit of phenomenology as it permits a more robust treatment of "the perennial human issues of death, love, and God." (p. 4) In clarifying how the partition between theology and philosophy is largely an abstract and conceptual problem, he shows how the questions of religion, revelation, and of God are not the import of a foreign confessional witness into a methodologically pure science of phenomenology, but rather, these elements are intrinsically linked to the internal development and unfolding of phenomenology as a distinct science in itself. In this sense, DeLay provides an account of phenomenology that is not so much concerned with the theory of phenomenology or in any discussion of what it could be or even should be in some ideal and rarefied sense, but rather, the author demonstrates convincingly that it is in the very execution of phenomenology as a discrete science that the theological dimension of human life emerges in an ineluctable way. "No horizon encompasses the hand of the most High." (p. 243)

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