

***Truth and Genesis: Philosophy as Differential Ontology***

MIGUEL DE BEISTEGUI

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004; 390 pages.

Miguel de Beistegui makes a very bold move in *Truth and Genesis* to rethink philosophy in light of the ontico-ontological difference, but in a way that is augmented from its Heideggerian roots to fit into the sphere of modern science. He believes that philosophy is at a turning point and must reinvent itself. To that end, this book takes a novel and experimental approach to philosophy as the "ontology of difference," wherein metaphysics and physics, or philosophy and science, find new relation. This is a lengthy, dense, and ambitious research project that attempts to think Being anew through the thought of Martin Heidegger and Gilles Deleuze. It is, in fact, new insofar as it departs enough from Heidegger and Deleuze to say something fresh and unexpected to both philosophy and modern science. In contrast to much of the phenomenological tradition, and most of what twentieth-century ontology argues, de Beistegui proposes that science, i.e., quantum mechanics, chaos and complexity theory, non-linear dynamics, etc., provides access to Being and the ontological difference just as well as language and art. "If Being is said indeed poetically, it is also said mathematically" (16).

The book is divided into three relatively independent sections. Part One establishes the backdrop for his overall project through an examination of the basic structure of classical ontology, with particular attention given to Aristotle's metaphysics. This part also briefly covers the development of metaphysics that leads de Beistegui to what he considers to be "the last moment in the evolution of modern metaphysics" (78), where he engages Hegel. Part Two presents a surprisingly readable account of Heidegger's thought—considering the subject matter and the space allotted—with detailed attention given to his *Contributions to Philosophy*. Here, de Beistegui discusses Being as it is "for us" and difference as associated with truth. In Part Three, he presents his most interesting and original work, first by offering an all-too-brief examination of contemporary science and its connection to metaphysics, and then by interjecting Deleuze (focussing on *Difference and Repetition*) into all that precedes to this point. Here, de Beistegui discusses Being "in itself" and difference as associated with genesis. He sees the thought of Deleuze as having both extended and kept open the Heideggerian ontico-ontological difference, as well as "having provided the ontological materialism suited to our scientific modernity" (187).

To overcome philosophy's current fragmentation and increasing specialization, de Beistegui proposes that philosophy must first find a new

relation to its own metaphysical tradition in a way that overcomes the Aristotelian ontological legacy. To do this, philosophy must begin with Heidegger's differential conception of Being as the proper response and alternative to classical ontology. It must then turn toward Deleuze—parting with the phenomenological and, in particular, the Heideggerian critique of science—as an example of how to construct a metaphysics (ontology) in light of the challenges presented by science. De Beistegui argues that what has been missing is a two-sided conception of Being. There is the side of Being often identified with phenomenology (i.e., where art and language are the happening or grounding of Being) and there is Being in its mathematical-genetic side (the side de Beistegui identifies primarily with Deleuze). Philosophy, as ontology, will be by means of this two-sided conception of Being where there is “no movement, no progression from one side to the other, but a co-existence of differences” (338).

Within his new metaphysics, de Beistegui is not concerned with any sort of grounding, science of first principles, or conception of beings as onto-theology. Further, it is not enough that philosophy and science, and their new relation, be merely of an emerging philosophy *of* science, as if philosophy and science are amalgamated or conflated. Instead, philosophy and science remain entirely distinct in their mutual “un-grounding (*effondement*)” (21); neither is subservient to the other but, instead, exist as mutually supportive. Curiously, though persuasively, he argues that natural science constitutes the consummation of prior metaphysics and becomes our new metaphysics. It is “the contemporary state of our metaphysical destiny” (190). However, science is unable to think difference. Philosophy alone can do this. Science opens the way to conceiving of nature in terms of difference and event, but it cannot think its own ontology. This opening is evident in contemporary scientific advances such as those in quantum theory and thermodynamics, which have left us with a world that can no longer be considered merely objective, and “a science that is no longer its own ground” (208). Hence, “ontology can and must be as open to naturalism as to phenomenological intuition, as open to science as to art” (338).

If readers are not initially put off by the Preface (where the author describes the book as “incomplete,” “complex,” “long,” “asking for trouble,” and so forth), they will be struck by the irresistible invitation to conceive of philosophy originally, as well as by the author's candour that this book is “an adventure ... an experiment ... a first step” (xi), rather than a closed system or comprehensive treatment. These are the kinds of descriptions one might expect from an author who recognizes his own perfunctory and careless work, but such is not the case here as it is a very carefully constructed text. Having said that, the complexity of issues does not allow for easy access,

and readers should be prepared to move between Aristotle, Heidegger, modern science, and Deleuze without much provision for those not already partially familiar with the material.

Further, one cannot help but be struck by the sheer gravity of the project and the author's outrageous claim of bringing together philosophy's countless scattered identities with a transformed ontology that, in the end, does not stray far from either Heidegger or Deleuze in originality. But this is not a criticism so much as a response to the fascinating arrangement in which the author shows great command of both thinkers, including an awareness of modern science, and is able to show how all this might mean the unification of contemporary philosophy—in excess of the sciences.

De Beistegui's project is self-admittedly ambitious, and the scope of his questions makes weighing the success of the book difficult. "What of philosophy today? Of what is philosophy (still) capable? To what can it aspire" (ix)? The nature of his project caters to the perception that he is excessively naive or, more surprisingly, that his project might have merit despite its formidable ambition. His questions, of course, cannot find satisfaction in a single volume, but as a "first step" this work is a promising beginning.

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***Challenging Postmodernism: Philosophy and the Politics of Truth***  
DAVID DETMER

Amherst, NY: Humanity Books (Perseus), 2003; 355 pages.

In writing *Challenging Postmodernism*, David Detmer sets out four specific goals: to "write an accessible, nontechnical discussion of current philosophical controversies surrounding the ideas of relativism, objectivity, social constructionism, and truth," and which "defends the idea of objective truth and attempts to show that doing so is a matter of considerable political importance" (12); in so doing to "engage with the texts and arguments of the postmodern anti-truth squad" (11); critique postmodernism from a "politically leftist perspective" (12); and "approach these issues from a position heavily (and favorably) influenced by continental philosophy" (12). Detmer's book comprises nine chapters, titled "Husserl's Critique of Relativism," "Self-Referential Inconsistency," "The Argument from Disagreement," "Sartre's Defense of Truth," "Truth in Ethics and Politics: Sartre vs. Rorty," "What Is Objectivity? Sartre vs. the Journalists," "The Anti-Truth