temps vécu, les visages et les paysages qui uniformisent nos espaces et notre relation à autrui» (256–7).

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*The Present Personal: Philosophy and the Hidden Face of Language*

HAGI KENAAN


Philosophers of language in both the Continental and Anglo-American traditions, Hagi Kenaan argues, have systematically neglected the personal dimension of language. *The Present Personal*, accordingly, “is a philosophical attempt to think the depth of the possibility of listening to the other person” (ix), where doing so involves something other than listening to their language or words merely as such. Philosophy of language, Kenaan argues, must better distinguish the propositional content of speech from what a speaker says in a more personal sense: “The possibility is there for me to listen to what you are saying without actually listening to you. When philosophy thinks of language, this difference between ‘what you say’ and its apparent double, ‘what you say,’ typically goes unnoticed or else is dismissed as insignificant” (2). Understanding what this distinction amounts to, and tracing some of its implications, are the aims of this study. *The Present Personal* is a book I would recommend rather highly. It is original, concise, tightly argued, and very well written. Kenaan demonstrates an unusual phenomenological sensibility and a freshness of approach that make this, his first book, one of some importance—and not exclusively for specialists in philosophy of language but for those as well for whom this field may be of secondary interest.

Kenaan argues that while the personal is far from peripheral to human language it has been ignored entirely as a theme in the philosophy of language, due in large part to the hegemony of propositional thinking. “The propositional,” he writes, “levels the personal. It altogether misplaces the possibility of listening to the personal, and it does so by objectifying language in a manner that leaves room only for an external understanding of the relationship between language and the individual. The propositional allows us to think of this relationship only after the fact of constructing language and the individual as two independent, fully constituted, entities” (177–8). The manner in which an individual speaker is present in his or her speech is philosophically
elusive for the reason that this is not a matter that can be articulated as a fact. It defies expression in objective, propositional terms and instead requires a phenomenology of the tension between the speaker and his or her speech, since “[i]t is in this tension,” Kenaan maintains, “that the personal is present. This tension is where the personal lives” (178). If it is unsurprising to hear that propositional thinking, and hence the forgetfulness of the personal, dominates analytic philosophy of language it is perhaps more surprising that Kenaan finds much the same at work in Continental thought. Although Continental approaches to language often reject the privileging of the propositional, Kenaan argues that the alternatives offered by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Derrida, and others only perpetuate a forgetfulness of the personal. What all overlook is the sense in which one can be said to be personally present in one’s speech and the strained relation that exists between the public structure of language and the singularity of the speaker.

After a lengthy introduction, the book’s six chapters include an analysis of existential critiques of the hegemony of language’s propositional form, including especially Kierkegaard’s objection to the forgetfulness of the singular individual. While sympathetic with the spirit of Kierkegaard’s critique, Kenaan holds that the view Kierkegaard and other existential thinkers substitute “too easily evolves into a new form of conceptual captivity, one that internalizes the limits of language as a given necessity. The self is left facing the apparently immutable structure of language, and all it can do, as Wittgenstein puts it, is ‘run up against the limits of language’” (16). Kenaan also addresses more recent philosophy of language, particularly Austin and Heidegger, in which the issue turns to the implications of rejecting language’s propositional structure. Does the pragmatic turn initiated by Austin or Heidegger’s turn toward the poetic—two conceptions of language that reject the preeminence of the propositional—help us to conceptualize the personal, Kenaan asks? His reply is a categorical negative: “In spite of their [Austin’s and Heidegger’s] nonpropositional vision of language, the trajectories they open for philosophy remain removed from and external to the ordinary reverberation of language within which the personal speaks” (16).

Kenaan then attempts a phenomenology of the personal within language that is briefer than one might wish, but nonetheless well turned. If uncovering the personal means attending phenomenologically not merely to the content of what is said or the person of the speaker but to the tension between them, Kenaan proceeds by developing an analogy between the experience of linguistic meaning and the aesthetic experience of beauty, drawing on Kant’s Critique of Judgment. Conceiving of the personal in speech means allowing the words of one’s interlocutor to reverberate in a manner similar to Kant’s account of the
aesthetic judgment of the beautiful. For Kant, the judgment of beauty cannot be reduced to subjective feeling while being rooted in it; it makes a claim to universal validity and defies the paradigm of the constitutive laws of understanding elaborated in the Critique of Pure Reason. For Kenaan, beauty provides a model of the personal dimension of speech in that both alike become manifest in the reverberation—the irreconcilable tension—between subjectivity and objectivity.

Kenaan’s approach to the personal primarily draws upon Kant and phenomenology as well as the literary work of Kafka and Kundera, among others. Unfortunately, the book provides little to no discussion of such noteworthy Continental figures as Gadamer, Ricoeur, Derrida, Foucault, Habermas, and Lévinas. Although Kenaan would likely offer a similar assessment of these philosophers to his critique of Kierkegaard and Heidegger, one wonders whether his project might be able to appropriate at least some of their work (Gadamer on dialogue, for instance, Ricoeur on metaphor, or Lévinas on the said/saying distinction) or, if not, then to offer a novel critique of the same. In any event, The Present Personal deserves a strong recommendation. It is undoubtedly an original contribution to the philosophy of language and will be of interest to philosophers in both the Continental and analytic traditions.

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The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy
IAN JAMES

In the last decade Jean-Luc Nancy has come to occupy a prominent place in Continental philosophy. The growing importance of Nancy’s work can also be witnessed in the secondary literature in English. This past year, two books have appeared which proposed an overview of Nancy’s wide-ranging thinking: B. C. Hutchens’ Nancy and the Future of Philosophy and Ian James’s The Fragmentary Demand. While the former focusses more on the relevance of Nancy’s thought to current discussions around (for the most part political) issues such as nationalism, racism, and the media, the latter is more intent on situating Nancy’s thinking in the history of philosophy and contrasting it with other contemporary Continental philosophers. It offers both a discussion of all major themes in Nancy’s thinking as well as an account of Nancy’s readings of Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Bataille, among