

often playful disregard for order and structure and its courting of ambiguity, is transposed into poetry. Bruns succinctly moves through the texts of Heidegger, Derrida, and John Caputo (*Radical Hermeneutics*) to develop some questions about the work of art. Specifically, Bruns wants to know how to interpret the world that art discloses and what principle of rationality is disclosed therein. The radicality of hermeneutics in this regard is its appeal to the being-in-the-world of an event, text, or tradition, and to throw into reflection the forestructures of understanding. What Heidegger, in his theory of the poetic work, Derrida, in his deconstructive readings of philosophic and literary texts, and Caputo, in his immanent working through of the crisis of Enlightenment rationality, all reveal is the sense of hermeneutical excess and loss that plagues the conceptual resources of the Western philosophical project.

Bruns applauds these efforts toward a 'hermeneutics of freedom' (what he calls an 'approach' rather than a 'method' in an effort to avoid committing an overformalization) because they entail the study the modern subject and its self-understanding in both its allegorical and satirical possibilities. The necessity for both modes of understanding comes from Bruns' wish to avoid embracing a theory of rationality whose conceptual scheme is too inflexible or indulgent to profitably address the ethical diversity of modern culture. Since the entire enterprise of *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* is founded on the subtle and empathetic engagement with the being-in-the-world of others, this conclusive move to the rudiments of a social theory, although unexpected, is not entirely unjustified. Luther would not be such a pivotal figure for Bruns if there were no civil dimension to his hermeneutical project.

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Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition

KATHY EDEN

New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997, 119 p.

Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition is a compact but meticulous study of a somewhat neglected subject. In a series of short chapters that might serve better as appetizers than as main courses, Kathy Eden sets the table for an enjoyable sampling of ancient theories of rhetoric. But if the fare is on the light side, there can be no complaint about the presentation. The clarity with which Eden establishes an unbroken line of influence from Republican Rome to Reformation Europe is impressive and flawless. Beginning with Cicero, Quintillian, and Plutarch, Eden moves competently to Basil and Augustine, before linking up with Erasmus, Melanchthon, and Flacius, all the while

maintaining a commonality of concern among the interpretive theories espoused by these respective thinkers. With skill and economy Eden locates the origin of modern hermeneutics in the ancients' understanding of the interpretive process.

Delineating the primary interests of the ancient rhetoricians, Eden defines the two main areas of debate over *interpretatio scripti*: "the discrepancy between a writer's words and intention — so-called *scriptum* versus *voluntas* — and ambiguity" (56). Debates over both necessarily required investigation into the context from which a piece of writing emerged. Despite not using the term 'historical context', the Romans, she maintains, had an acute interest in what Quintillian refers to as "*negotium*, defined as a *congregatio*, or congregation of persons, times, places, causes..." etc, which later come to be described by the term 'decorum'. Decorum, Eden argues, "is the productive counterpart to the receptive or interpretive principle of historical context" (17-18). Eden illustrates with a number of quotations from both Cicero and Quintillian that these ancient rhetoricians already prioritized the relation of the part to the whole, of the text to the tradition from whence it came.

To be fair, Gadamer, himself, in what is the magnum opus of contemporary hermeneutical theory, *Truth and Method*, gives more than the occasional nod of deference to some of the scholars of antiquity lauded by Eden, acknowledging from the outset of his project the indebtedness of his work to the ancients, especially Aristotle. Yet Gadamerian hermeneutics is more widely perceived to be part of a much more recent tradition which can be traced back to Heidegger, Dilthey, and ultimately Schleiermacher. Eden's project, it seems, is to ground contemporary hermeneutics unequivocally in the medieval and ancient sources she quotes by establishing a correspondence or equivalence among terms and concepts used by rhetoricians of old and contemporary hermeneutics alike. Gadamer's *Horizontverschmelzung* or 'fusion (literally 'melting') of horizons' is already articulated in Plutarch's understanding of the reader's experience as 'Odyssean' in nature, as a union of the foreign and familiar (35-40). Eden's argument is a strong one here, and establishes an incontrovertible connection that sets up the basis for further links.¹

Eden's book is welcome in the midst of a growing debate over the history of hermeneutics.² The slimness of the volume is countered by a sharp focus that consistently builds on an increasingly impregnable claim. Readers will be hard pressed to dispute the connections Eden makes between ancient rhetorical models of interpretation and those of the modern German tradition.

Notes

- 1 There are, however, many links that she misses (perhaps because they transcend the scope of her thesis). For example, Augustine's concern that

the reader seek out the *voluntas* (intention) of the *scriptor* (writer) is an early version of Schleiermacher's concern with authorial intention.

- 2 See, Jean Grondin's *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, for example, in which he proposes a non-linear history of hermeneutics.

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Die Normalität einer Berliner Republik

JÜRGEN HABERMAS

Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1995, 187 p.

Die Normalität einer Berliner Republik — La normalité d'une république berlinoise — est le titre des *Kleine Politische Schriften VIII*, les huitièmes et derniers écrits politiques de Jürgen Habermas. À l'image des écrits politiques précédents, Habermas abandonne ici le champ de la théorie fondamentale pour aborder des questions politiques d'actualité.

Ses premiers écrits politiques, couvrant les années 1960, portaient avant tout sur la question de la réforme des universités et sur les mouvements de protestation; les années 1970 et 1980 ont été l'occasion pour lui de s'en prendre au tournant néo-conservateur (*Tendenzwende*) qui s'opérait en Allemagne, comme dans plusieurs pays occidentaux. Les écrits politiques des années 1990 se tournent quant à eux vers la question de l'identité allemande, particulièrement à la lumière de la réunification des deux Allemagne. Ils tablent, cependant, sur des positions politiques qu'il avait développées durant les années 1980. En effet, Habermas s'était alors engagé dans ce qui sera connu comme la «querelle des historiens» (*Historikerstreit*), un débat qui porte essentiellement sur l'interprétation du passé nazi de l'Allemagne. Or, cette querelle des historiens constitue rien moins que le prolongement de la polémique entre le néo-conservatisme et le libéralisme social dont Habermas se fait l'avocat.

Dans le contexte du présent ouvrage, les tenants du néo-conservatisme cherchent à minimiser, au profit de la réunification allemande, le rôle de l'holocauste et de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, perçus désormais comme intermède fâcheux. Ils cherchent à mettre en valeur la continuité de l'identité nationale, du II^e Reich à aujourd'hui. Cette interprétation de l'histoire permettrait d'assurer une certaine «normalité» à l'Allemagne unifiée, et de promouvoir l'émergence d'une nation fière et puissante. Par opposition, Habermas postule une «dialectique de la normalisation» où l'accession à la normalité ne serait possible chez les Allemands qu'à travers la reconnaissance de l'a-normalité de leur histoire relativement aux voisins européens. Selon Habermas, Auschwitz doit être maintenu dans le discours identitaire en tant