

# Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

## ***The Author's Intention***

JEFF MITSCHERLING, TANYA DITOMMASO, AREF NAYED  
Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004; 143 pages.

*The Author's Intention* is the second volume of a proposed trilogy concerning the critique and reconstruction of the ontological foundations of hermeneutics. This project arose out of problems identified in the first volume, Mitscherling's *Roman Ingarden's Ontology and Aesthetics* (1997). The third volume is a work in progress tentatively entitled *Aesthetic Genesis*. The stated task of *The Author's Intention* is to "place the current discussions of 'the author's intention' back into the larger historical and conceptual framework in which they belong" (ix). In doing this, *The Author's Intention* offers intriguing insights into the nature and origins of the deficiencies of current hermeneutic ontology and points towards a new direction for its revision.

The book includes an Introduction and four chapters: "Nietzsche and the Revision of Hermeneutic Ontology," "From Inspiration to Intention," "The Question of the Relevance of Authorial Intention," and "Authorial Intention and the Logos of the Work." In the Introduction the authors set out the overall argument of the book, stating that "our basic thesis in this work is that the 'traditional,' common-sense view of authorial intention is largely correct, and that recent attempts to do away with this view—most notably current attempts by philosophical hermeneutics and poststructuralism—are ill-founded and misleading" (1). The introduction continues by claiming that contemporary scholarship tends to overlook essential features of the aesthetic experience: the experiences both of the author engaged in artistic creation and of the audience or reader. According to the authors, these essential features are accessible to the analyst through "proper phenomenological analysis" (1). It is further suggested that these features are prelinguistic and, as such, have been overlooked given the overwhelming influence of Heidegger and Gadamer upon current hermeneutic discourse.

Chapter One begins with a discussion of Nietzsche's contributions to the field of hermeneutics and his identification of certain prelinguistic features of aesthetic experience. According to Nietzsche, language itself is the manifestation of a series of metaphors through which nerve impulses are translated into images that are in turn translated into spoken sounds. Each step in this process represents the transference of meaning into another cognitive realm and, in this way, constitutes a metaphor, a carrying over of meaning from one meaningful state to another. The im-

portance of this notion to the overall thesis of *The Author's Intention* is that it identifies a meaningful event of understanding (two in fact) that is essentially prelinguistic. Chapter One concludes with a brief explanation as to how Gadamer was led to overlook this feature of Nietzsche's philosophy and, in so doing, misdirected the progress of hermeneutics in general.

In the second chapter the authors sketch the genesis and evolution of the notion of "the author's intention." This evolution begins with Plato's notion of the inspired author through the work of the Neo-Hegelian philosophy of Croce. The most important discussion in this chapter concerns Schleiermacher's general hermeneutics. At the heart of Schleiermacher's general hermeneutics is his doctrine of reenactment. For Schleiermacher interpretation is, in a manner of speaking, a process through which the interpreter gets into the author's head and attempts to re-experience the self-same thought process that went into the creation of the work. The interpreter's ability to access the author's thought process, however, is precisely what later theorists have rejected (36).

The third chapter provides a review of contemporary movements in hermeneutics and the various figures associated with them. The first discussion focuses on poststructuralism and the work of Derrida. Discussions that follow address the work of Greenblatt, Foucault, Rorty, and Eco. More lengthy treatments of Betti and Hirsch are also offered. By far the most important discussion of this chapter, and indeed one of the pivotal discussions of the book, concerns Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and what the authors refer to as his "metaphysics of light." After some prefatory discussion concerning Gadamer's *Truth and Method* the authors characterize his *magnum opus* as a commentary on the prologue to the Gospel of St. John. The authors explain that at first Gadamer identifies language with the Greek notion of *logos*, then proceeds to equate it with the medieval Christian notion of *verbum*. Language, as such, requires the invocation of certain analogies in order for its subject to extract meaning from the written text. The most appropriate analogy, we are told, is the analogy with light. Accordingly, Gadamer concludes that language reveals its meaning to the subject just as light reveals all things to consciousness.

In their concluding chapter the authors return to the notion of *logos* that Gadamer raises. This concept turns out to be pivotal in their reaffirmation of the notion of authorial intention. Their analysis reveals two types of intention: (1) dynamic intention (referring to the Greek term *dunamis*), which is described as the fixed potential meanings that any given word possesses; and (2) energetic intention (referring to the Greek term *energeia*), which is said to activate the potential meanings of words

through their arrangement according to the *logos* of the work. The *logos* of the work is revealed through the author's act of composition. Through the process of reading the text we come to engage its energetic intention; in so doing we reactivate the dynamic intention possessed by each word of the composition, and ultimately we come to participate in the *logos* of the work. Energetic intention, as it turns out, *is* the author's intention. Understood in this way, the author's intention is not merely the moral or point of the text, but is the experience "embodied" in the text; it is the experience of inspiration that the author engaged in and which we as readers are meant to share.

With their basic thesis articulated, the authors then return to the larger project of the revision of hermeneutic ontology. They conclude by elaborating upon the greater significance of *The Author's Intention* within this project and briefly outlining the trajectory the project will take in the third volume, *Aesthetic Genesis*. The authors present a direct critique of Heidegger's and Gadamer's position(s) that language is the foundation of all experience, arguing that neither provides any insight into the origin of language itself. This has led to what the authors refer to as the "linguistic mistake." That is, without considering where language may come from, as Nietzsche did, both Heidegger and Gadamer elevate language to the pinnacle of existence without, at least explicitly, scrutinizing the possibility that language may itself arise out of certain ontological preconditions. Recalling Nietzsche's analysis of the rhetorical origins of language discussed in the first chapter, the authors reaffirm their position that the meaning of language can be traced back to the prelinguistic reception of sensory data. Indeed, according to the authors, "conceptual thinking, logic, and all 'rational' cognitive operations are grounded upon and ultimately—via the operation of the imagination—derive from brute sensations and raw feeling" (117).

What is especially appealing about *The Author's Intention* is that it manages to achieve considerable depth in its analysis without reverting to the jargon in which discussions of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Gadamer are so often couched. This is not to say that *The Author's Intention* is entirely exoteric in its delivery. In their concluding comments the authors suggest that "We have to extend the Ingardenian sort of phenomenological analysis [the kind to which they themselves subscribe] to fields beyond art, demonstrating the importance of the peculiar mode of being belonging to intentional objects in all sorts of interpretive acts" (117). This line of thought, we are told, has led them to what they describe as a "new Copernican Hypothesis" (118), suggesting that the notion of authorial intention of which they speak is itself ontologically prior to the text to which it gives rise. We must, however, await the sequel to *The*

*Author's Intention* to find out to what this line of thought ultimately leads.

DARRYL J. MURPHY, *University of Guelph*

### ***Phenomenological Epistemology***

HENRY PIETERSMA

New York: Oxford University Press, 2000; 204 pages.

The scholarly literature has mapped the intricate filiations and complex affinities weaving together the works of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty. An additional study bringing together these towering figures of Continental philosophy can hardly be unusual for readers familiar with phenomenological debates. However, a rigorous inquiry into the epistemologies underlying their works has failed to arouse the deserved interest. Pietersma's attempt to fill this gap is thus all the more rewarding.

Remarkable for its richness of historical detail and systematic investigation, Pietersma's book follows an original line of thought. Unlike so many scholars who situate themselves within the phenomenological tradition, comfortably assuming its vocabulary, Pietersma feels at ease in encountering philosophical crossroads that allow him to step outside the phenomenological tradition in order to challenge it from the standpoint of theoretical alternatives.

Pietersma focuses his book on the controversy between phenomenology and epistemological realism. Flanked by a lengthy Introduction and concise Conclusion, the core of the book comprises three independent expository chapters, one for each of the thinkers mentioned above. The Introduction provides terminological clarifications and conceptual scaffolding for the following analyses. The Conclusion assesses the hypotheses set forth in the Introduction on the basis of the findings arrived at by means of a close reading of Husserl's, Heidegger's, and Merleau-Ponty's essential texts. Classical realism takes the role of a foil for transcendental phenomenology. Pietersma warns the reader that realism should not be confused, as is often the case in phenomenology, with naturalism or physical objectivism. Instead of hastily condemning realist theories for being abstract, naive, or dogmatic, Pietersma construes the realist position as a strong adversary for phenomenology. Epistemological realism (externalism) grants an external observer the capacity to report the relations between a cognitive subject and her environment. A realist episte-