

- 6 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 90.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 168.
- 9 Strangely, Derrida feels it necessary to point out to his readers that God is not someone up in the sky (108). This shift of register in the text is striking. It makes one wonder who Derrida's readers are, or who he thinks they are.

IAN ANGUS, Sociology and Humanities, *Simon Fraser University*

Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics

JEAN GRONDIN

New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997, 256 p.

As a brief overview of the historical influences of philosophical hermeneutics, Grondin's book is first-rate. Evidence of extensive research in various areas of hermeneutics (especially theological hermeneutics) is supplemented by a vast sixty-page bibliography, complete with its own index.

There are two main themes at play in this book, and they cause more tension than harmony. First, Grondin's task is "to introduce readers to the philosophical dimension of hermeneutics" (xv), in which lies its claim to universality. This claim is not that of absolute certainty but of the "philosophical task" (ix) of re-tracing the "inner word" (xv) of expression. Hermeneutics is explained as the reverse of expression: whereas expression "makes what is contained within knowable from without," hermeneutics "tries to penetrate an uttered expression to see the spirit contained within it" (21). It is in this spirit, as the attempt to express experience, that the universal dimension of hermeneutics lies.

Grondin uses the various ways in which philosophers have conceived of the universality of hermeneutics in order to trace its history. To summarize briefly, Augustine is noted for countering the view that the meaning of Scripture is merely 'allegorical' by claiming that the words themselves bear their 'spiritual' meaning. Understanding is always possible insofar as "[t]he word truly perceived — that is, according to its inner tendency — is already spirit" (41). Schleiermacher developed Augustine's theory to account for the author's intention. His 'psychological' hermeneutics (which was to supplement 'grammatical' or contextual hermeneutics) suggests that interpretation is an endless task, since we can never fully grasp the author's intention; "From the outset, then, the interpreter must be on guard against possible misunderstanding," promoting "an ever deeper interpretation" (70,

71). Universality now consists not in the working out of an inner word known beforehand by God, but in the endless task of reconstructing the author's intention.

Dilthey, in turn, uses Schleiermacher's psychological hermeneutics to overcome the distance between an interpreter and an historical expression. His claim is that since we share the same quest for bringing experience to expression, we share an ability to understand expressions in terms of our own historical context (85-88). Universality comes now to be attributed to the historian's access to the meaning of an historical object. Finally, Heidegger and Gadamer transform the shared historical background of Dilthey's science into an ontological structure underlying all human behaviour (Chapters 5 and 6). The inner word becomes the universal concern of *Dasein* to bring its being, and thereby its world, into meaning, while interpretation becomes the unfolding of the context of understanding. The finitude belonging to every interpretation by virtue of its historicity is shown to be a problem only as long as truth is assumed to be absolute. But now the universality of hermeneutics comes to be located in the very task of expressing being within language, which is stimulated by the very finitude that thwarts exhaustive expression (11, Chapter 6).

So far, Grondin has not presented anything new. What is novel in his book is the second theme; that is, the non-linear development of hermeneutics. Grondin claims that "we need to avoid presenting the history of hermeneutics as a teleological process" (3), as other writers on hermeneutics have done. Grondin develops this thesis in two ways. First, Grondin calls into question certain lines of development that are traditionally attributed to the history of hermeneutics. Grondin demonstrates, for example, that Stoic and Medieval sources that are usually employed to ground hermeneutics are limited in scope. Augustine and Luther are shown to have no comprehensive view of hermeneutics, and Luther's student, Flacius, to have been responsible for most of the contributions generally attributed to Luther (Chapter 1). The contributions made by Schleiermacher are similarly revealed as more the result of work done by Lucke and Dilthey than by Schleiermacher himself (67). Grondin further argues that Dilthey never really gave up his search for an absolute grounding of history in psychology (88-89), and Heidegger's contributions are described as having been overshadowed by his interest in the meaning of Being (92, 103-4). According to Grondin, then, the idea of a comprehensive hermeneutics is quite recent — as recent as the writings of Gadamer! (The thesis sounds like Thomas Hobbes' comment that civil philosophy is "no older ... than my own book."¹)

The other way that Grondin develops his non-linear history of hermeneutics is by presenting a period of obvious development that has been virtually ignored by its heirs. In Chapter 2 Grondin discusses the grandiose

hermeneutical theories developed by Dannhauer, Chladenius and Meier, all of whose work remained in the shadow of the Enlightenment. Despite the apparent Modernistic tone to much of their writings, they are very close to Romantic hermeneutics and, yet, they appear to have been largely unknown to Schleiermacher and Dilthey. All of this, according to Grondin, suggests the lack of linearity in the history of hermeneutics.

The non-linear thesis, on its own, is interesting enough. Grondin presents a lot of material in a compact and digestible volume. But one begins to wonder what the actual point of his analysis really is. If he wants merely to expand on and enrich the current discussion of the history of hermeneutics, then he has made a substantial contribution indeed. But the tone of the beginning of the book is much stronger, suggesting a radical re-reading of hermeneutics. If the latter is Grondin's intention, then his position is weak in at least two serious respects. First, it is hard to see how a strong non-linear thesis can be made commensurable with Grondin's description of the universality of hermeneutics; a description that seems itself to be an appropriation of a more or less linear history. Second, it seems highly unlikely that any of the authors who allegedly 'misread' history would claim to be doing anything more than what Grondin himself is doing; namely, re-tracing their own historically bound interpretive context. I do not see, then, how Grondin's non-linear thesis is capable of accomplishing the bold task that he has claimed for it. Further, I do not see Grondin's book as the best introduction to the philosophical *problem* of hermeneutics. So much time is spent on developing the non-linear thesis that only about four pages remain devoted to each of the discussions of the relations between philosophical hermeneutics and, respectively, positivism, ideology critique, and post-modernism. The brevity of this chapter of Grondin's book leaves one wondering what all the fuss has been about.

To get an answer to this question, one must look at some of those 'other' books that suggest linearity in the history of hermeneutics. But perhaps one lesson to be learned from Grondin is that the relation between philosophy and history is complex, and perhaps not adequately dealt with in the format usually employed by other texts. The greatest value of this book, then, perhaps lies not in its historical accuracy or the way in which it penetrates into the recent philosophical debate, but rather its untiring unfolding of the historical dimension of hermeneutics, and in its attempt to formulate this unfolding as a philosophical problem in its own right. His success in both regards ensures that Grondin's book will occupy a major position in the very history of hermeneutics that it has adopted as its theme.

Notes

- 1 Thomas Hobbes, *Elements of Philosophy: The First Section, concerning Body*, in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. W. Molesworth, vol. I (London, 1839) Ep. Ded., ix.

JAMES B. STEEVES, *McMaster University*

Knowing Other-wise: Philosophy at the Threshold of Spirituality

JAMES H. OLTHUIS, Editor

New York: Fordham University Press, 1997, 268p.

This collection of essays is designed to find a place for ethical talk in postmodern philosophy. As we wander through these essays, what we find is a plea for ethical discussions to once again become the ‘mother tongue’ for ontological and epistemological dialogues. Each of these essays makes a case for ethics and either shows how ontology *without* ethics is devastating or how ontology *presupposes* an ethics in the first place. While the authors all agree on the primacy of ethics, they disagree about whether the study of ontology actually presupposes or simply requires an ethical analysis.

The central theme in this book — namely, the idea that ontology and epistemology without ethics is dangerous — is developed against the rational ideal of the Enlightenment, where reason violently silences all marginal others. This oppressive ideal, already critiqued by Derrida, Foucault and Lévinas, continues to be a threat against the possibility of communication with the other. The demand for ethics found in this collection, founded upon a recognition of how the ethics of rationality has failed us, takes up Lévinas’ question, “Can we speak of morality after the failure of morality”.¹ How it is possible to talk about the other, how we *ought* to talk about the other, and finally, how the talk of the other is inescapable (since the other is always irreducibly brought to our attention as our limit) are some of the weighty questions developed in this book.

Knowing Other-Wise looks to “...understand what the renewed contemporary interest in spirituality means for philosophy” (20). This spiritual reawakening marks a reaffirmation of a self that stands despite the fashionable deconstruction and dissembling of subjectivity. Leaving the Cartesian self in its ashes, we are able to find another *different* self, since “...the fact that the modern self of absolute agency is an illusion does not demonstrate that there is no such entity as a self...there is still room for an agent self...a gifted/called self, gifted with agency and called to co-agency by