

ligator often earns the majority of his income from some other function in the book trade, as, for example, *librarius* or *pergamenerius* (parchment seller). Most of these terms vary slightly in their orthography depending upon where they are recorded — i.e., *testus* (Italian) for *textus* — because of the influence on the Latin language of the developing regional vernaculars.

The passages I have quoted above are typical of *Medieval Latin* as a whole. The essays are consistently informative, concise, and thoroughly researched and documented, and there is frequent cross-reference among the various entries. The scholarly contribution of this book is immense, and despite its announced student audience, it will doubtless prove invaluable also to scholars in the field. And for those of us who have been waiting for a non-specialist's introduction to the rapidly growing field of medieval studies, this is definitely a book to treasure.

JEFF MITSCHERLING, *University of Guelph*

The Gift of Beauty: The Good As Art

STEPHEN DAVID ROSS

Albany, New York: The State University of New York Press, 1996, ix + 348 pp. \$24.95

Stephen Ross' *The Gift of Beauty* intricately weaves together the themes of interruption, motion, giving, and the good. Through a thoughtful reading of Western philosophy, Ross explores the meaning of 'the good' and shows how this good can be given as a gift. The good, as Ross explains, is *always more than* and *beyond* the bounds of any one, established, restricted economy. Ross undertakes the difficult process of living in a 'restricted' economy and, at the same time, describing the good as being beyond the sort of binary oppositions we might find in such an economy. The good exceeds all limits and measures, is given everywhere, and can be seen as an intermediate motion of interruption. The good interrupts all restricted economies, all measures, exclusions, limits and structures. Traces of this interrupting good, given as gifts, are to be found in every restricted economy (p. 297). In fact, such restricted economies presuppose, yet cannot capture, the good that always "wanders off in difference" (p. 283).

Ross plays on the notion of the good given as a *gift* in order to highlight the ceaseless activity and motion of *giving* rather than focus on a 'that which gives'. Ross' notion of the gift, as exceeding all binary oppositions, is primarily Derridean in flavour. Ross implicitly borrows Derrida's idea of the gift as involving a sacrifice and death of singularity.¹ Unfortunately, offering neither an elaboration nor a critique of these Derridean notions, Ross uncritically accepts Derrida's stand and therefore seems to presuppose a Derridean dialogue with which his reader may not be familiar. Without a basic comprehension of Derrida, the reader would certainly find Ross' terms, in general, vague and very difficult to understand.

At any rate, Ross develops the gift of the good as given through art. Ross is concerned with not placing too much importance on art as a 'great' achievement, for he wants to avoid the Heideggerian exclusion of other human and animal activities. In his reading of Western philosophy Ross pays particular attention to Nietzsche. He finds Nietzsche's arrival on the scene of philosophy to have interrupted the endless advance of Western civilization (pp. 169-171). Ross sees Nietzsche working towards the good in his striving towards immeasure and calling for a re-valuation of values. With Nietzsche, however, Ross again finds art placed in superior light.

While seeking to remove art from the pedestal Nietzsche and Heideggerian both award it, Ross, at the same time, calls attention to how Western philosophy tends to exclude art. Beginning with Plato and then with Kant's idea of disinterested interest, and finally, with Hegel's idea of the end of art, Ross shows his readers how philosophy has exercised *techné* or force over art, limiting and, indeed, ending art's role towards the good. Ross' reading highlights this exclusion, makes sense of it, and then tries to show how we might re-think art as working toward a good that is beyond both good and bad, beyond all exclusions and binary oppositions. Art exposes us to the endless possibilities of cherishment (i.e., seeing the good everywhere, in everything). Bringing us face to face with the unfamiliar and heterogeneous, art displaces determinate identities (p. 289). Interrupting the authority of a restricted economy, art urges us to "speak against the idea of absolute singularities, absolute individuals unrelated to other individuals, subjects or objects...against the authority of any disciplinary stabilization of the identities of kinds" (p. 296).

Ross strikes a difficult balance between showing how, on the one hand, art is unique yet, on the other hand, it does not enjoy a special status above rocks. It is necessary for Ross' entire project — of calling for interruptions and breaking down all identities created out of binary oppositions — that art be removed from its pedestal of enjoying a superior 'nature'. Ross' position, however, is in constant need of being balanced. With his talk about the work of art — as reaching out towards abundance, cherishing every nuance and

shadow, ready to touch us in our hearts and stomachs — we find it very difficult to fathom how a rock could represent the good in a way similar to a work of art. I have yet to be torn apart by rocks as I am by tragedies. Ultimately, *The Gift of Beauty* does not advance a coherent enough position on how art is and is not specially powerful. Ross must already have a slight sense of this problem, for he promises his readers another book in the future to describe the gift of the good in ways other than its exposure in works of art.

Ross' book celebrates life, beauty, the other, and our own selves. This challenging and provocative text begs us to reassess and interrupt all exclusions; it asks us to be open to including and cherishing the other. Despite the often difficult vocabulary, I would recommend this text to anyone who is interested in aesthetics and sympathetic to Derridean terms.

Notes

- 1 See Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press) pp. 33, 40-45, 66-72, 105-115.

TANYA DITOMMASO, *University of Guelph*

Toward a New Interpretation of Plato

GIOVANNI REALE

Trs. & eds. John R. Catan and Richard Davies

Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997, 459 p.

Invoking the principles of *sola scriptura* and *sui ipsius interpres* of Protestant hermeneutics — the principles maintaining that the text alone is the object of interpretation, and that the text is to be interpreted exclusively 'through itself' — Schleiermacher challenged the neoplatonic interpretation of Plato that was still current in his day. In the Introduction to his *Platons Werke* of Berlin 1804 — interestingly, the same date of publication as the first edition (in Bombay) of Thomas Taylor's heavily neoplatonic revision and completion of Floyer Sydenham's translations of Plato's works — Schleiermacher stressed that Plato can be properly understood only if we adhere to a strictly literal interpretation of his written works. Not only are the other varieties of interpretation to be rejected — most notably, the allegorical, analogical, spiritual, and moral, which had been widely practised even before Origen