

that Heidegger had pronounced his own critique of metaphysics, and more tellingly—while Nietzsche is commended, after a fashion, for having abandoned philosophy for poetry in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Allen very correctly points out not only Carnap's profound misreadings of Nietzsche and Heidegger, but the manner in which such misreadings informed, or misinformed, the course of positivist and later analytic philosophy. Allen also points out "an underappreciated continuity between the original positivism of Auguste Comte and the austere formality of the later logical positivists, from whom analytic philosophy largely descends" (37). Carnap's views that science could be foundational for philosophy and that logical analysis and "language planning" might put a decisive end to metaphysics have their source in this "original positivism," traces of which remain with us. Allen's essay concludes with some interesting remarks on the fascination with order within positivist thought, noting that "[o]rder, control, predictability, may be by-products or side-consequences of knowledge, and contribute to the practicality of its pursuit, but they are not what drives knowledge forward, least of all where it is experimental and inventive" (54).

This unique volume is important both in its inspiration—to place on speaking terms philosophers on both sides of the analytic-Continental divide—and for what, for the most part, it accomplishes. As with any edited collection, some contributions are more noteworthy than others, but the overall quality of its eleven chapters is relatively even. If a sizeable portion of contemporary philosophy, not all of it Continental, endeavors in a serious way to build bridges between traditions, many of which speak to each other only with tremendous difficulty, then what is needed is more volumes of this kind—ones that foster productive exchanges that do not deteriorate into overly facile "compare and contrast" essays. Analytic and Continental philosophers alike will find much of interest in this collection.

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The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal: John Dewey and the Transcendent

VICTOR KESTENBAUM

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À propos the merits of vagueness in philosophical discourse, Hans-Georg Gadamer once remarked that "It is not so terribly easy to speak in such a way that many ideas are awakened in a person without his being hammered on the head.... It may be a cultivated thing to eat with a knife and fork, but that is not the right approach to philosophy." This emphasis on interpretivity over transitivity, on awakening ideas rather than conveying propositions, is especially useful when one considers a philosophical movement such as pragmatism, which is so easily and frequently oversimplified as "cash-value" thinking.

Victor Kestenbaum's *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal: John Dewey and the Transcendent* is a subtle, evocative and—in Kestenbaum's own word for Dewey's writing—"painterly" consideration of the place of the ideal in Dewey's philosophy.

More interested in the “lights and shadows” than the “lines and boundaries” (9) of Dewey’s thought, Kestenbaum trains his gaze less on arguments “posed, defended, won, or revised” (9) than on the spirit of Deweyan pragmatism, a spirit that can be overlooked when one focuses exclusively on what his texts say, and never on what they do not or cannot. Kestenbaum rejects the old “from-to” story in which the young Dewey sows his oats with the Vermont Transcendentalists only to find pragmatism and ultimately to reject idealism in favor of naturalism and instrumentalism. Instead, in a series of studies that range from close readings of Dewey’s texts to reflections inspired by them, Kestenbaum argues that concerns with the transcendent run threadlike through Dewey’s writings on ethics, aesthetics, religion, and education well after his famous break with Hegelianism at the turn of the last century. He adumbrates this position by bringing Dewey into fruitful dialogue with such figures as Gadamer, Michael Oakeshott, Hannah Arendt, Iris Murdoch, and Wallace Stevens.

Early on, Kestenbaum makes the provocative claim that “transcendence is built into pragmatism” (36). In essence, Dewey’s idealism never disappeared; it merely went underground, subtly shaping his thought in the form of a dynamic tension between the immanent and the transcendent, the seen and the unseen, the present and the absent. Indeed, it is difficult to deny that such Deweyan notions as habit, staking, and striving gain both complexity and robustness in the face of the transcendent, that is, that which is “significantly discontinuous with the ordinary, the everyday, the taken-for-granted and which eludes verification” (227 note 1). The project is clearly an important one for Dewey scholarship. It is, however, a project that Kestenbaum undertakes with mixed results.

On Kestenbaum’s view, the transcendent for Dewey is not a full-fledged external *telos*, but a *conatus* toward the “better” and the “better still.” We catch glimpses of the ideal in our own willingness to stake what is actual and seen on that which is only imagined. Ideals are always connected to the human while drawing us toward a new horizon. They are thus intimately bound up with practice, habit, and the actual. Thus, Kestenbaum argues, “there can be no experience of transcendence for human beings which involves [he quotes Stevens] ‘more than human things’ or ‘more than human voice’” (209). This decidedly human-centered transcendent, however, is not easily reconciled with Kestenbaum’s “significantly discontinuous” experience, and it shows. Throughout the book, Kestenbaum offers a series of lists intended to elucidate transcendent experiences. We are opened to transcendence in “a violin sonata, a thank-you note, a photograph, a conversation” (25); in “a sunset, a recurring anxiety, a melody from a Haydn quartet, a two-year-old’s hands” (96); in “a May morning, an act of gratitude, the carpenter’s or surgeon’s skill” (120). The lists go on. Taken individually, an encounter with any one of these examples might easily take one by surprise in such a way that one sees suddenly and briefly in the finite an intimation of the infinite. Any one of these could be a koan. However, presented in lists as they are here, these examples are as life-changing as a greeting card shop full of tastefully inscribed koans. Transcendence starts to look like just another consumer good.

Something similar occurs in Kestenbaum’s tendency to “mass market” key phrases. Himself a lyrical writer, Kestenbaum has a sharp eye for a well-turned phrase, if not an addiction to them. When he discovers a particularly powerful expression, he repeats

it until it becomes a dull cliché. Thus, in his chapter on education, he quotes William James on self-identity: "The traditional psychology talks like one who should say a river consists of nothing but pailsful, spoonsful, quartsful, barrelsful, and other moulded forms of water. Even were the pails and pots all actually standing in the stream, still between them the free water would continue to flow" (126). In the remaining eleven pages of the chapter, Kestenbaum refers no fewer than fourteen times to pailsful or potsful or moulded water.

This combination of perfectly apt expressions with editorial intemperance reflects a larger unevenness in the text as a whole. *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal* has some very good moments. Chapter 2, "The Pragmatic Struggle for the Good" evinces—to borrow Kestenbaum's description of Richard Poirier's literary criticism—"careful and wonderfully discerning attention" (59) to Deweyan texts. There are passages here where Kestenbaum not only shows us how to read Dewey, he shows us how to read. Likewise, Chapter 4, "Humanism and Vigilance," is a revelation, offering in place of dogmatic, creedal humanism, vigilant humanism, where vigilance is the space we create through our attentive balancing of openness and commitment. However, Chapter 6, "The Undeclared Self," takes an overly romantic approach to pedagogy in its vision of the humanities as "soul-making" disciplines. Depending upon one's definition of a "soul"—and Kestenbaum never offers one—there is simply no obvious reason why an intermediate literature course should be more "soul-making" than the course in intermediate accounting that Kestenbaum offers by way of contrast. As well, readers of Gadamer will be disappointed by Chapter 7, "Meaning on the Model of Truth: Dewey and Gadamer on Habit and Vorurteil" in its reductivist account of truth and fore-understanding in Gadamer.

Overall, however, what stands as both the greatest merit and one of the weaknesses of Kestenbaum's text is the subtlety of his language and thought. On the one hand, Kestenbaum's approach ensures a care and fidelity to material that is itself complex and elusive. On the other, there are moments where his eloquence does little to illuminate his subject. This is a shame because the questions Kestenbaum raises are important ones, and ones that richly deserve the attention Kestenbaum gives them.

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