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practices of the Rabbinic tradition, for which “no set of principles” can be given “by which all cases [of halakhah or Law] are measured symmetrically or equally; instead we find the constant subordination of the general rule to the particular case” (55). For Levinas, the skepticism of Talmudic thought pointedly refuses sacralization or reification by undoing closed dialectical oppositions and so fostering “dynamism, . . . real rupture” (215). Levinas’s turn to Talmudic thought, Eisenstadt argues, is particularly directed toward resisting that Hegelian notion of history, in which events may be on the move but are so only insofar as they contribute to a universal result, the edifice of spirit as it is finally elaborated by and in history. Theodicy, in which the suffering of others is justified through its outcome in history, is, in Levinas’s mind, the most unbearable of thoughts. Eisenstadt’s careful reading in her final chapter, “Night Spaces,” of how the suffering of the victims of the Shoah figures within Levinas’s philosophical exploration of the significance of ethics provides, along with Robert Gibbs’s *Why Ethics?*, perhaps the most nuanced and careful working-out to date of what Rabbinic discourse might bring to the writing of philosophy.

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**Leonard Lawlor, *Thinking through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), xvi+212 pages.**

In *Thinking through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question*, Leonard Lawlor brings together the philosophies of three of the most important thinkers of 1960s France, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Gilles Deleuze. The book relates these thinkers to each other and to their predecessors in the French and German contexts (Merleau-Ponty, Hyppolite, Husserl, and Heidegger) in ways that are not only novel but designed to open up new avenues of thinking. The book is composed of an introduction, eight essays, and a conclusion, as well as two appendices. Seven of the eight essays have appeared elsewhere and were revised for the volume, while the introduction, first chapter, and conclusion were written

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especially for the volume. Despite this, the book does not have the artificial feel of a compilation of independent essays. Rather the chapters form a cohesive whole. They are organized according to the relations between the philosophies in question and held together by several overriding themes.

In particular, the eight essays in *Thinking through French Philosophy* could be divided into four interconnected pairs: Chapters 1 and 2 present Foucault in relation to Derrida and Merleau-Ponty; Chapters 3 and 4 discuss Derrida in connection with Merleau-Ponty; Chapters 5 and 6 deal with Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty; and Chapters 7 and 8 compare Derrida and Deleuze. Although each essay in the volume could stand on its own in terms of its scholarship and analysis, the essays are not merely isolated studies of individual authors. Each is a comparative study that weaves together the thought of two philosophers, highlighting intersections and/or divergences between them. In this sense, the studies are complex and dynamic. The pairing of chapters allows for two divergent lines of analysis to be brought to bear on each pair of philosophers, one presenting the oppositions between them and another their potential rapprochement (e.g., Chapters 3 and 4 present respectively the differences and continuities between Derrida and Merleau-Ponty). There are neither categorical pronouncements nor simple definitions here. The book follows through paths of thinking opened up by Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, and Merleau-Ponty and witnesses their meeting points as well as their diffractions. The presence of Merleau-Ponty in so many of the essays (five of the eight) serves not only to demonstrate the legacy of his thought (the book would be interesting for this reason alone), but also permits a comparison of Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze in view of their different intersections with Merleau-Ponty's philosophy.

A great merit of *Thinking through French Philosophy* is its author's sensitivity to the nuances of each philosopher's thought. Concepts are not taken at face value, nor are they grouped together simply because they resemble each other or share the same name. The differences that mark off each philosopher from the others are carefully traced and the commonalities that then appear between them are more profound and surprising as a result. On the concept of the "simulacrum," for instance, Lawlor clearly presents both the affinities but also the differences between Derrida's and Deleuze's use of this concept (110–11). The "nearly total affinity"

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that he discovers between the two thinkers reveals a deeper rift (owing to their respective appropriations of Husserl and Bergson) as well as a deeper affinity (owing to Heidegger's ontology of the question) (121).

Another comparison that Lawlor treats in lucid and nuanced terms concerns the respective critiques of Platonism found in Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze. The "reversal of Platonism," to use Deleuze's expression, provides a common frame of reference by which to situate all three philosophers and is a theme that weaves together several of the essays in *Thinking through French Philosophy*. Hence the significance of the book's second appendix, a translation by Heath Massey of Deleuze's 1966 article "Reversing Platonism" (a later revised version of which was included by Deleuze in *Logique du sens*). Although all three thinkers could be said to be reacting against the "metaphysics of the transcendent" (123), which they name "Platonism," Lawlor's contribution lies in demonstrating that Platonism has a different sense for each. This is significant since it explains not only their divergent positions with respect to presence, for example, but also the different strategies that they adopt for "overcoming" or "reversing" Platonism. Already in Chapter 1, Lawlor remarks a divergence between Foucault and Derrida in their definitions of metaphysics (20–21). While both aim at a temporal critique of metaphysics (20), a project which they share with Deleuze (111), this critique takes different forms depending on their respective understandings of metaphysics and time. Most importantly, Lawlor shows that Derrida's identification of metaphysics with "knowledge of presence" and time with non-presence means that his strategy for overcoming metaphysics will prioritize "temporal mediation" (20), whereas for Foucault metaphysics is the "belief in non-presence," and time is identified with presence, so that "temporal immediacy" is prioritized (21). This comparison is then seen to have further repercussions for the respective formalism or informality of their philosophies (22–23). With the two essays on Derrida and Deleuze at the end of the book, Lawlor helps eliminate much confusion surrounding the relationship between the two philosophers. These essays address the strange proximity and difficult distance between Derrida and Deleuze. In particular, Lawlor explains aspects of Deleuze's philosophy that will have surprised readers of Derrida who have approached Deleuze's work: Deleuze's appropriation of so many

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metaphysicians from the history of philosophy, his positive use of the terms “purity,” “presence,” and “immediacy” (111–12, 132), and his unconcern for the “death of metaphysics” (98). Indeed, Deleuze’s reversal of Platonism is not simply an overcoming, it “conserves’ elements of Platonism” (98). Between Deleuze’s and Derrida’s reactions to Platonism or metaphysics, different concerns and methodologies are at play. As Lawlor points out, Derrida’s deconstruction aims to “contaminate” the metaphysics of presence with non-presence, whereas Deleuze’s reversal “purifies” Platonism with presence (111). This emphasis on purity comes from Bergson and entails an immediacy that readers of Derrida would find problematic (112). But for Lawlor the diffraction between Derrida and Deleuze stems from two ways of conceiving difference—two readings of Heidegger’s ontological difference (113)—and this is one of the great insights of his book: “With contamination, Derrida is trying to conceive difference with mediation, whereas, with difference in itself, Deleuze is trying to conceive difference without mediation” (130). This contrast entails other diffractions between the two thinkers. It enables us to understand their divergent positions on resemblance, form, negativity, and on the simulacrum, as mentioned above (127–33).

Despite their different approaches to metaphysics, a common project can be ascribed to all three thinkers: “For Derrida, Deleuze, and Foucault, the task of liberating thought was the reversal of Platonism” (140). Liberation from an absolute transcendent term, whether it takes the form of a telos, of an origin, or of the Other (142), is the negative side of a positive project that joins together all three philosophers. This is what Lawlor calls the “renewal of thinking” (123), a project that owes to Heidegger’s re-opening of the question of being where being itself is a question (153). What Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze offer are then different philosophical “options” for articulating the experience of the question, different avenues of philosophical thinking (153–54). These options share a deeper affinity, however, for they are all options within immanence according to Lawlor. Since all three philosophers discussed in the book are engaged in the reversal of Platonism in one way or another, their philosophies are philosophies of immanence (143). This explains the absence of Levinas from Lawlor’s book (143 n. 3), as well as the evocative reading of Derrida who is presented by Lawlor as a thinker of “contaminated immanence” (140).

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What is refreshing in Lawlor's reading of 1960s French philosophy is his ability to recast it beyond the usual slogans of "the overcoming of humanism" or "the deconstruction of the subject" (123, 154). *Thinking through French Philosophy* frames this philosophy in a new and more productive way. This is made clear in the interview with Lawlor that forms Appendix I of the book: "What is at stake," says Lawlor, "is a renewal of thought" (154). The book does not content itself with pointing out this renewal, but maps the different tendencies and lines of flight that thought takes in the movement of renewal. In this sense, *Thinking through French Philosophy* does even more than that: it attempts to think *with* each philosopher. The book not only traces the logic of the "system of thought" of each philosopher (3), it also maps the oppositions between that thought and those of the others and follows a gradual differentiation which brings it to "that fine point where one kind of thought turns into its opposite" (3). This methodology means that each essay traces dynamic lines of thinking that demand of the reader an effort to think further. It is this method of *thinking with* that is, beyond any categorical analysis or static description of a philosophy, what French philosophy of the 1960s demands of its readers. Lawlor is right that what is important here is not to take sides (154), but rather to think through, or with, the multiple diffractions and convergences that define this era of French Philosophy.

How then should the project of *Thinking through French Philosophy* be characterized? Lawlor calls this project both an "optics" (3, 143) and the construction of "the system of thought of the great French philosophy of the Sixties" (3). But whereas an optics implies diffractions, mirrorings, and convergences, the idea of a system seems more homogenizing. What Lawlor constructs in the book appears at the end to be more a network or web of relations than a system of thought. For one, it is hard to see how three thinkers can form a single system. There may be a common logic here, which Lawlor elucidates, but it is unclear whether this can be described as a system, or whether ascribing such a unity to it would be desirable. It seems to me that the merit of Lawlor's book lies in its sympathetic, insightful, and complex readings of each of the philosophers discussed, its ability to think with each of them in turn. This, rather than any constructed system, is how the book itself succeeds in renewing thought about French philosophy.

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In the conclusion, we are told that this book is meant as a propaedeutic for further studies, specifically a book on Bergsonism (since published as *The Challenge of Bergsonism: Phenomenology, Ontology, Ethics* [London/New York: Continuum, 2003]) and another on the themes of memory and life (144–45, 161). This helps explain a shortcoming of *Thinking through French Philosophy*, its fleeting treatment of the Bergsonian influence on 1960s French philosophy and the open-ended nature of its discussion of the theme of memory. The desire to save Bergson for another work means that his influence sometimes goes unmentioned. For example, the discussion in Chapter 6, “The End of Ontology,” of Deleuze’s critique of the negative mentions only the Husserlian influence (102). But Deleuze’s argument here would seem to owe as much to Bergson’s critique of the negative in *L’évolution créatrice* as it does to Husserl’s reduction. In addition, memory arises repeatedly in the book, in several contexts and in relation to all the philosophers discussed, but the concept of memory, which is at play in 1960s French Philosophy, is not given the complex treatment that other themes in the book receive (e.g., language, immanence, formalism, or time). In a suggestive statement, this memory is defined as “a memory of the future” (31, 145). In the context of Foucault’s archeology, Lawlor speaks of a forgetfulness that forms a different kind of memory, a “counter-memory” (45). In the discussion of Derrida and Merleau-Ponty, writing is linked to a kind of memorization that implies the forgetting of the acts that produced it (67). And in the comparison between Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty, the “past that has never been present” is identified with Bergsonian pure memory (86, 89). But the connections between these uses of memory are not developed in the book. One is left hoping for an additional essay that compares these French philosophers on the theme of memory.

*Thinking through French Philosophy* is a well-argued and thought-provoking work. It can be read as a work on the French philosophers of the 1960s, but one might also read it for its analyses of Merleau-Ponty—the chapters on Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze being especially engaging since they bring together thinkers that are apparently opposed on many fronts. The book strikes a rare balance: it offers detailed and complex comparisons of the philosophers in question without losing sight of common threads, and it brings these philosophers together within a general framework without

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compromising the depth of its analysis. *Thinking through French Philosophy* offers a unique optics for understanding French philosophy and engages the reader in new adventures in thinking.

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