JOURNAL OF
French and Francophone Philosophy
REVUE DE LA
philosophie française et de langue française

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Kris Sealey

Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy - Revue de la philosophie française et de langue française, Vol XX, No 1 (2012) pp 138-142.

Vol XX, No 1 (2012)
ISSN 1936-6280 (print)
ISSN 2155-1162 (online)
DOI 10.5195/jffp.2012.543
www.jffp.org

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Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch (eds.), *Phenomenologies of the Stranger: Between Hostility and Hospitality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 256 pp.

In *Phenomenologies of the Stranger, Between Hostility and Hospitality,* Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch edits a collection of essays that truly spans the challenges and difficulties that pertain to questions of the stranger, the uncanny and the unfamiliar in Western thought. Though Jean Greisch's essay is located in the last section of this compilation, one can argue that the following (quoted from his work) quite aptly sets the stage for the entire collection. "[In] what way and under what conditions the question of the stranger can become a properly philosophical one. How does the stranger enter into philosophy?" The collection is divided into four sections, each wrestling with different ways of approaching the challenge that Greisch raises. As such, we find four varied modulations of giving a phenomenological account of what, arguably, disrupts all "phenomenologizing." Likewise, we are called to understand those scenes of hospitality, which involve the entry of otherness into "the same," in terms that "signal a parallel threshold in inquiry itself" (263). As the book's title aptly suggests, these essays give an account of the possibility of such hospitality, or of Western philosophical thought being host to that which does not have (perhaps because it cannot find) a home in the city of the Western thought.

Section one of the book negotiates the concepts of place, site, borders and portals, both in their production of the stranger, and in their providing the conditions under which this stranger can be met with hospitality. In "Strangers at the Edge of Hospitality," Edward Casey proposes that, in order to embody strangeness, the stranger necessarily comes into being at the edges of our world (of the city, or polis), those regions of life that "frame spaces for offering passage" (42). In this regard, though the stranger stands at the edges of our world, there exists the possibility of passage, or of passing through and onto a place in our world. Casey pursues the question of how this "passing through" takes place, and we see that this is a question of the possibility of extending hospitality toward the stranger. But before this, it is interesting to ponder his reading of the edge as that which is,

properly speaking, "in-between" places. In one sense, we might read this, along with Casey, as "the non-place" of the stranger. But there seems to be that other possibility, of reading the in-between as neither place *nor* the absence of place. At the edge, the stranger is not of us, unfamiliar, unknown, not in our place. But s/he also, somehow, beckons from the unsettling edges, and so crosses the familiar and the unfamiliar, very much like Freud's and Heidegger's formulation of the uncanny as "the stranger within." This would set the tone for the last section of essays of the text, but it is note pointing out this interesting resonance.

In any event, Casey determines that hospitality is the act of giving place to the stranger on the edge, and so must actually takes place at the *edges* of places. "It is a striking fact that hospitality as an event occurs at or on an edge. There is no hospitality in the open air just as there is no hospitality in general" (43). Interestingly enough, in the essay that follows, Brain Treanor attempts to "put hospitality in its place," in the claim that "hospitality always happens in a place" (50). Its possibility rests in the hospitable one having a place, or occupying a place, and extending one's hospitality *from* that place. The ground of Treanor's argument seems to be that we must actually *have* a place to offer to the stranger, in order for hospitality to signify as such. His case is a strong one, but it stands juxtaposed to Casey's call to encounter the stranger at the gate, or at the edge that is not quite yet a place. Nevertheless, both authors seem to agree that the stranger is the one without place (or, at the very least, in between places). The difference in accounts seems to lie in their interpretations of the "how to" of hospitality. Employing certain "linguistic components" of giving place to the stranger, Treanor argues that the role of hospitality lies in facilitating the guest in finding a home in the language of one's place. The tone of Treanor's claim is that this would entail more than leaving open the gates at the edges of our world, which is what Casey seems to suggest. According to Treanor, "to be at home in a language is to inhabit it in such a way that its idioms…feel natural and not forced" (64). My hospitality would then make the stranger "feel 'as if' she is at home" in my language (65). To be sure, he notes that such hospitality comes in degrees, and we could well imagine a disintegration to the extent that my language, my place, is made into the edge "in" which the stranger is, once again, fully displaced. Nevertheless, the directionality of Treanor's account of performing hospitality seems opposed to Casey's. While the latter has it that I venture out into the edge, Treanor holds that, outside of my place, hospitality cannot be performed.

Section two is devoted to divine strangeness, and understand the divine as that which is always elsewhere, radically otherwise and excessive. To this end, the essays in section two continue the expositions of section one, except for their consistent emphasis on the performance of strangeness as a rupture of the self who is called to hospitality. John Caputo understands "God" to be "the name of undecidability itself," and regards strangeness to represent

those limit-points of our human condition where "things fall apart," including the very possibility of saying who we are (84-85). His exposition presents the divine as what approaches, always, as trouble, endangering that "safe circle of the same," which provide the condition upon which I find myself in a world. The "work" of the divine, from Caputo's account, is somewhat estimated by what David Wood ("Things at the Edge of the World") describes as fractalterity – the transformations and reversals of (familiar worlds) that occurs upon encountering the excesses of alterity. Indeed, along with Caputo, Wood identifies God as one of the many sources of this (ethical) reversal of my world. But while his conceptions of reversal and transformation seem to already point to some promised end result (new worlds, with new values and new mode of dwelling), Caputo's exposition rests explicitly in the moment of disassembling, when the divine stranger comes in the form of a disturbance, and we put all at risk in our answering the call of that provocation. This risk seems to lie in the fact that we *cannot* know what lies ahead, in the aftermath of our being provoked, or of our being hospitable to trouble, and asking for trouble, "which is an excellent definition of prayer" (87). This is much like Kalpana Seshadri's description of hospitality as a "remaining absolutely open to a non-predictable 'whatever'" (135). For Caputo, this undecidability or not knowing constitutes the radical risk that ensues in the moment of hospitality. It is to risk welcoming what is inherently "unwelcomable," or to "love the unlovable." Only then does the excess of the divine stranger accomplish the task of disturbing that "safe circle of the same." To borrow from Christopher Yate's essay in section four, "Derrida and Waldenfel on the Art of Hospitality," "[order] triumphs otherness" (262). Hence, the alterity of divine strangeness is what would be diametrically opposed to the order of decision, knowing, and knowing what to expect.

For Caputo, "welcoming the stranger involves a certain death to the self, [even though] hospitality is not supposed to be just plain suicide" (86). He situates hospitality to be a divestment of self, which nonetheless permits the self to remain to bear witness to its own rupturing. In section three of the book, Kelly Oliver's essay identifies this very structure in Levinas' conception of paternity. "[In paternity] the I breaks free of itself without ceasing to be I" (201). Like the other essays in this section, her analysis of maternal election finds the stranger to be inherent to the structures of identity, or as Simon Critchley's account of Heideggerian uncanniness would have it, within the being of Dasein. It is we who are strange, or strangers to ourselves, which means that hospitality would consist in embracing or electing this "stranger within." Oliver juxtaposes Kristeva's account of motherhood alongside the relation that Levinas identifies between the father and the son, and determines that both take the self out of an egocentric "clock time" (what we might liken to Caputo's "safe circle of the same"). The father's relation to the son opens for him an infinite time, while the mother's relation to the child to which she gives birth directs her

to a "lost time." According the Oliver, both "turn the self back to itself." Hence, in place of a subjective potency, the father finds the purely unrecognizable futuricity of the son. In place of her self-absorbed "wanting it all" (the love of her father and a return to her mother), the mother finds the miracle of her love for the child (a love that simultaneously embraces *and* releases that child).

In this regard, Oliver's presents hospitality as "the relationship with this uncanny other who is both me and not me" (208). In other words, hospitality concerns a comportment toward oneself as strange. Simon Critchley locates this in Heidegger's ontological program, insofar as it "[brings] the human being face to face with its uncanniness" (145). Similar to Oliver's description of the uncanny as that which is "both me and not me," Critchley presents Heidegger's conception of the call, which is "from me yet beyond me," and calls me to (my) uncanniness (147). Heidegger names this "conscience," and Critchley traces the implications of the concept for questions of the stranger and of hospitality. His reading of Heidegger is unmistakably Levinasian when he writes of man's "unmasterable throwness" in being, or more specifically, of how that throwness generates a facticity that is a burden that we can never support. The call of conscience thrusts upon me (again, from a "within" that is also a "beyond") the "nothingness of throwness" and the "nothingness of projection," between which I exist. Critchley points out that, in this sense, uncanniness is the "happening of action between these two nothings" (153). Dasein acts, which is to say that it is potency, but the call of conscience brings us to ourselves as an *im*-potency (insofar as our throwness is unmasterable). Critchley traces this impotency (vulnerability) back to our primordial indebtedness to fill the (double) lack constitutive our of being. There is no explicit mention of hospitality in Critchley's account, but we are left to understand the appropriate (most authentic response) to this debt – to "choose oneself," and not the collective "they" – functions as a hospitality to that which is most strange.

Jean Greisch's essay, "Being, the Other, the Stranger" also argues for a legitimately ontological engagement with the question of the stranger. He writes that "for Heidegger the ontological condition of possibility for the recognition of others as strangers is to accept the primary fact that existence itself is not reassuring" (225). His exposition comes in the last section of the book, and identifies certain anthropological and ethical axes alongside this ontological axis, through which such "recognition" might take place. Under the anthropological, we arrive at the signification of the stranger across the dichotomy of "near" (what is close and hand, culturally familiar, known) and "far" (remote, unreachable, culturally alien). This anthropological interrogation will be threatened by an ethnocentrism – "that repulsion when faced with ways of living, believing, and thinking alien to us" (218).

Greisch illustrates that the ethical and ontological axes of inquiry actually intersect, insofar as ethical reflections on the stranger (she who

deflects the gathering attempts of *logos*) become duplicated in thinking strangeness ontologically. To be sure, the latter will be threatened by a logocentrism, which assembles everything so that all things can be discovered, or uncovered. Nevertheless, Greisch argues for a "going beyond" the opposition between an ethics of the stranger, and an ontology of the stranger. This is because the question of being can reveal the fundamental strangeness of being (this is clear from Critchley's analysis of Heideggerian uncanniness). The experience of angst is the discovery that "being-in-the-world means always more than occupying a place or finding oneself ensconced somewhere" (225). In this sense, ontology can be the axis along which "thinking" (the hyper-phenomenality of the stranger) can genuinely take place. In this sense, logos does *not* gather into the field of a universal context the Levinasian face, but precisely makes way for the face to express, or to bear "meaning *without* context." Christopher Yates also describes the hyper-phenomenality of the stranger in a similar sense. "[Strangeness] provokes *sense without being meaningful* (emphasis added)" (266). He names this provocation "pathos," to capture the sense in which the self is affected by the encounter. Not only do I passively receive this provocation, but I am also powerless to determine the implications of being touched (pathos as "*path*ogen or perhaps a *path*way to realizing a higher justice," [267]). Here, Yates echoes the sentiments found in Caputo's account of divine strangeness as undecidability and, as such, trouble (83-97). On Yates' account, hospitality would be the disclosure of this disordering that results in a reconfiguration of the places that undergo the pathos of strangeness. "Hospitality is a topological and ontological recovery underway" (264).

In the end, we are called to consider many modulations of the stranger, as well as what it means to extend hospitality toward that stranger. The stranger might be none other than ourselves, in which case hospitality would be an acknowledgement of the inevitable unease with which we navigate a tenuously familiar world. In that regard, what signifies as strange does so to the degree that it calls us out of comfort zones and modes of complacent intellectual dwelling. Hence, the value of the essays in this book rest in their being open to the possibility there is no "last word" on the phenomenology of the stranger, or to the possibility of the impossibility of "last words" in the vocation of thinking.

Kris Sealey
Fairfield University