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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Robert Brandom

By Jeremy Wanderer

Acumen, 2008. Pp. xii + 240. ISBN 978–1–84465–088–0. £14.99/\$22.95 (pbk).

Jeremy Wanderer's *Robert Brandom* provides the reader with a clear and insightful overview of Brandom's work from *Making it Explicit* (Harvard University Press, 1994) to his most recent work, *Between Saying and Doing* (Oxford University Press, 2008). In his Introduction, Wanderer describes his aim for the book as that of providing 'a sympathetic account of Brandom's philosophical "edifice", in a manner that provides a glimpse of some fine detail, while having the broad contours clearly in view' (p. 3). Brandom's work is quite demanding, both in its details and in its far-reaching and systematic scope. Consequently, it is easy to lose the forest for the trees as we focus on this or that part of his work. Wanderer's book provides a nice exposition to remind us how these many facets of Brandom's project fit together. Going beyond exposition, Wanderer also provides a thoughtful treatment of many of the more prominent critical questions which have been raised of Brandom's work, generally issuing in a defence of Brandom, though occasionally in suggestions for revising Brandom's positions somewhat.

Wanderer's book is divided into two parts. Mirroring in broad terms the division between Parts I and II of Brandom's own *Making it Explicit*, Wanderer first sketches Brandom's basic account of what one must do in order to count as saying something followed by an elaboration of how what we do in our linguistic practices confers semantic content on those doings, in particular, how what we do comes to have the representational purport we associate with assertions *about* something.

Part I begins with parrots. Brandom frequently appeals to the example of a parrot able to respond differentially in a reliable way to red objects with 'that's red' in much the way we can in order to highlight what is distinctive about our own verbal behaviour: our capacity to embed that reliable differential response in a network of inferential relations enabling us to recognize that 'that's red' implies, for example, that it is also coloured and is precluded from being green. It is the presence of a linguistic practice that makes the difference between the parrot and us: a distinctive form of norm-governed

social practice in which some of our speech acts play the role of assertions, claims which stand in need of reasons and can provide reasons in turn for other claims. It is playing a role in 'a game of giving and asking for reasons' which makes the difference between the merely vocal behaviour of the parrot and our own truly verbal behaviour (p. 11).

In Chapter 2 Wanderer turns to the question of what we must be able to do in order to play such a game. Brandom's task is to characterize the pragmatics of the game in ways that, though making use of normative vocabulary, eschews intentional or semantic vocabulary. Wanderer shines in this chapter as he sketches the terms of a game that would meet Brandom's requirements. Players place counters in front of each other to register commitments while other players, playing the role of scorekeepers, record those commitments by placing the same counters in a commitment box for that player, along with any other counters the scorekeeper regards the player as also committed to by virtue of that first commitment. Wanderer introduces other features of the game such as entitlements, incompatibilities, query and response, and intrapersonal and interpersonal inheritance of commitments and entitlements in a similarly illuminating way. Wanderer's sketch of the game helps to crystallize the demanding nature of his understanding of Brandom's 'big bold conjecture': that such a game of commitments and entitlements in which the players undertake a responsibility to respond to queries concerning the entitlement to commitments is a linguistic practice (p. 52).

Wanderer turns to a consideration of the introduction of logical vocabulary in Chapter 3: 'the vocabulary required to make linguistic abilities explicit' (p. 58). One of the highlights of this chapter is Wanderer's use of the new analytical machinery Brandom deploys in *Between Saying and Doing* to clarify how the capacity to deploy logical vocabulary can be elaborated algorithmically from the capacities already presupposed in the game described in Chapter 2. These new analytical tools bring a degree of precision to Brandom's project which it previously lacked.

Part II concludes with a critical consideration of Brandom's 'big bold conjecture'. Is the sort of game Wanderer carefully explicates sufficient to count as a linguistic practice or is it 'just a funny kind of game' (p. 81)? In considering this question, Wanderer focuses on John McDowell's suggestion that Martians with very different means of communication than ours would probably regard vocalizations which conform to Brandom's game as no more than that. 'It does not occur to them that the behavior has a meaning, except in the sense in which, say, chess moves have meaning.' (McDowell, cited in Wanderer, p. 82). As Wanderer explains, the challenge for Brandom is to show that our Martians could not master the game we were playing without the possibility of conversing with us emerging for them (p. 85): a tall challenge which Wanderer believes Brandom cannot meet with anything like a proof. He goes on to consider Brandom's direct

response to McDowell, that it is 'implausible' that the game could come as close as it does to modelling the deployment of rational and logical vocabulary without it actually being an instance of what we do in speaking. But Wanderer rejects this response as well, arguing that a sceptic such as McDowell would not be convinced.

In the end, Wanderer recommends abandoning Brandom's 'big bold conjecture' for a weaker one: that the gameplaying model is 'a simplified, theoretical model of a practice that is loosely recognizable to the practitioner as sharing some of the structural features of his/her own (linguistic) practice' (p. 91). In this way it could serve to help make explicit some of what it is we do when we engage in a linguistic practice without the game itself being sufficient to count as a linguistic practice. As Wanderer's thesis here concerns what we can defensibly make of the very heart of Brandom's project, it is worth further consideration. But it will be helpful to defer that as there are other issues of relevance to it that we have yet to consider.

Part II of Wanderer's book takes up Brandom's inferentialist account of semantics. Wanderer appropriately frames his discussion by highlighting the difference between more traditional representationalist approaches to semantics which privilege notions of truth and reference and Brandom's approach, which 'understands representational content in terms of appropriate inferences, and appropriate inferences in terms of the role played by sentences in a linguistic practice' (p. 98). Then, in Chapters 5 and 6, he develops Brandom's account of sentential and subsentential semantics. Chapter 5 works through some of the specific commitments of Brandom's 'strong' inferentialism including the thesis of the sufficiency of the inferential connections between sentences in determining semantic content, the leading role of the notion of a material inference in the account, the inclusion of non-inferential circumstances and consequences of application in the inferential articulation of a claim, and the importance of auxiliary commitments in the determination of what inferentially follows from what. Chapter 6 tackles Brandom's account of subsentential semantics, carefully unpacking the concepts of substitutional commitments and anaphora in Brandom's account of the semantics of discrete parts of sentences.

Wanderer takes up the problem of communication in Chapter 7. The problem is that since, for Brandom, the significance of any speech act is determined by its inferential connections with other speech acts *and* different speakers can differ in their assessment of what inferentially follows from what, the same speech act can mean different things for different speakers. But without shared meanings between speakers, how can they successfully communicate with one another? As Wanderer insightfully notes, however, the problem presupposes that communication requires *shared* meaning, and this is precisely what Brandom calls into question (p. 151). Communication, Brandom argues, requires only that different speakers keep track of each other's different inferential commitments so they can 'navigate' between

the different perspectives. And this is achieved by the use of *de re* and *de dicto* styles of specifying the content of each other's commitments, which distinguishes commitments acknowledged by a speaker ('He believes *that* the witness is telling the truth') from commitments attributed to a speaker ('He believes *of* a pathological liar that he is telling the truth'). With this capacity, however, we also see the emergence of a sense of objectivity in Brandom's inferentialist account of language whereby speakers must see the correctness of what they say as dependent on the way things are – with what their speech acts are *about*.

How, though, can Brandom's model of language account for this representational dimension of language, the way in which our words are *about* something other than themselves, when all we have, at bottom, is a web of inferential connections between words and more words? This is the question Wanderer takes on in his last chapter with an examination of what Brandom describes as the 'solidity' of linguistic practices. Reliable differential responses to the world, such as that of the parrot's 'that's red', can be incorporated into our linguistic practices insofar as we embed them in a web of inferential connections to other assertions. This then gives the observation reports we are disposed to produce a certain authority in what we can take ourselves entitled to assert of the world. To take Brandom's favourite example, if we believe that a sour taste is a sufficient condition for something being acidic and that turning litmus paper red is a necessary condition, observing a sour-tasting substance turn litmus paper blue will rationally constrain us to re-evaluate our beliefs. In this way our linguistic practices can be seen to involve not just word–word relations, as our initial question presupposed, but word–world relations as well, which enable what we speak about to exercise a form of authority over what we say of it.

These observations come with the caveat, however, that they are only important for *empirical* content, not propositional content as such. As Wanderer reminds us, Brandom acknowledges that '*empirical* content represents an enrichment of the generic sort of propositional content specifiable in abstraction from the contribution of observation' (*Making it Explicit*, p. 234). For this reason Wanderer characterizes Brandom's account of observation reports as 'an add-on to (the) core theory, an optional extra ...' and reserves his treatment of this aspect of Brandom's account for the end of his book, the remainder of the book treating linguistic practice independently of the sort of word–world connections secured by the inclusion of observation reports. It is not clear, however, that Wanderer is on completely secure interpretive grounds here. As he notes (p. 41), what Brandom seeks to explain is an autonomous discursive practice, 'a language game that one could play though one could play no other' (Brandom, cited in Wanderer, p. 41). But Brandom is quite clear that 'purely theoretical concepts' without empirical content 'do not form an autonomous language game' inasmuch as 'one must be able to respond

conceptually to the utterances of others in order to be talking at all'. At best, they could form an '*insulated* region' of an autonomous language game that did include observation reports (Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead* (Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 366). Wanderer recognizes that there can be no language game, 'empirical or otherwise', without the ability 'to respond differentially to the utterances of others' (p. 192) So it is not as if he misses this point. But what he does not appear to recognize is that his treatment of Brandom's account of observation reports as an 'optional extra' entails that much of his analysis of linguistic practice misses its proper explanatory target: an *autonomous* discursive practice.

This is not to say that the lion's share of Wanderer's analysis is unhelpful or inaccurate. Quite the contrary. And, to the extent that we can unpack so much of Brandom's account of linguistic practice without reference to observation reports, it does show the way in which a case can be made that this aspect of his account is not essential to it. But there is also a case that can be made that Brandom himself regards his account of observation reports as a part of the core of his theory of linguistic practice. He tells us as much in *Making it Explicit* (p. xxii). And, notably in his most recent work, *Between Saying and Doing*, he elaborates his earlier notion of the 'solidity' of linguistic practices considerably, describing our practical engagement with the world as a form of 'practical intentionality' characterized by a 'cycle of perception, performance, assessment of the results of the performance, and further performance'. He goes on to stress that 'the specifically *semantic* intentionality displayed in language-use ... should be understood both as a development of and as a special case of ... *practical* intentionality' (p. 179). Though Brandom is clearly committed to the idea that we can have propositional content independent of observation reports, it is not clear that he believes we can have a theoretically adequate account of a linguistic practice, not just ours but any linguistic practice, without them as well. At the very least, the question of the role of observation reports in Brandom's work and of what he now calls 'practical intentionality' deserves to be posed as a question in a way Wanderer fails to do.

In relegating this aspect of Brandom's work to the status of an 'optional extra', Wanderer also denies Brandom resources to meet the challenge raised by McDowell discussed earlier. It is quite plausible to suppose that Martians might take the sort of game Wanderer outlines, a game without language entries in perception and language exits in action, as just a game. But once these entries and exits are added and they see our vocal behaviour as inextricably linked to our practical engagement in the world, our commitments altering the way we interact with the world and vice versa, it becomes incredible that they could conclude we were just playing games. Once we add this practical dimension to our account of a linguistic practice, a stronger case can be made for Brandom's 'big bold conjecture' that doing *that* is sufficient for it to count as a linguistic practice, rather than a mere game or,

as Wanderer suggests, a model of ‘some of the structural features of [our] own (linguistic) practice’.

There are many other aspects of Wanderer’s book which deserve consideration, some for critical reasons, but – and this is what I want to stress in conclusion – most to highlight how successful his book is in achieving its objective. On balance, Wanderer’s book provides us with a very insightful overview of Brandom’s work, one that helps not only to clarify his ideas, but also to continue a critical discussion of the merits of Brandom’s significant contributions to our understanding of what it is to be, as Aristotle described us, animals with language.

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Steven Hendley

Elucidating the Tractatus: Wittgenstein’s Early Philosophy of Logic and Language

By Marie McGinn

Oxford University Press, 2006. Pp. xiv + 316. ISBN 0–19–924444–8. £40.00/\$99.00 (hbk).

In her *Elucidating the Tractatus*, Marie McGinn has written one of the best books to be published on Wittgenstein’s early work since Elizabeth Anscombe’s famous, and notoriously difficult, *An Introduction to the Tractatus* (Hutchinson, 1959). Despite their respective titles, McGinn’s book is the more nearly an introduction of the two, and though it is itself a difficult work, it is sufficiently well written to make it accessible to more advanced undergraduate students, though perhaps not many will be able to afford it at £40. More than that, however, McGinn’s book makes an excellent and highly original contribution to the debate (which, in spite of its detractors, still shows no signs of going away) between ‘resolute’ readings of Wittgenstein’s early work pioneered by Cora Diamond and James Conant and a more traditional or ‘standard’ approach defended most notably by Peter Hacker, developing in the sort of painstaking detail that resolute readers have often been criticized for failing to provide, an interpretation that cuts (or purports to cut) a path between the two. McGinn’s book develops and significantly extends a line of thought first broached in her 1999 paper ‘Between Metaphysics and Nonsense’ (*Philosophical Quarterly*, 49), and establishes her position as one of the most interesting thinkers trying to find and articulate a middle route between the two interpretive poles of standard and resolute readings of the *Tractatus*.

The preface and chapter 1 of the book together bear much of the burden of establishing McGinn’s claim to have developed a genuine alternative to those two kinds of readings, articulating instead ‘a distinctive, third

approach to the work' (p. xi) that McGinn identifies with earlier opponents of the standard realist line, such as Rush Rhees, Hidé Ishiguro, Peter Winch and Brian McGuinness. Perhaps inevitably, much of the reception of McGinn's book will focus on this claim, and especially on how (and how successfully) McGinn distinguishes her approach from the resolute approach developed by Diamond and Conant.

Standard readings, as McGinn characterizes them, take Wittgenstein's early work to be committed to a form of realism, giving an account of the relation between language and world which sees the logical structure (McGinn's term) of the former as being grounded in the independently constituted structure of the latter (p. ix). Furthermore, the account of that relation in such readings entails both that the account itself cannot be put into words and that the world's structure 'cannot be represented' (p. ix); it is, instead, shown in the logical structure of language. McGinn notes her own dissatisfaction with that view, but she notes too that she is not persuaded by the 'self-denying ordinance' that she takes to be characteristic of resolute readings: namely, their demand that any successful interpretation of the *Tractatus* must 'avoid finding in it any positive philosophical insights into how language functions' (p. ix). Thus, she describes the resolute approach developed by Diamond and Conant as 'notoriously robust', claiming that the *Tractatus* 'does not contain an account of the relation between language and the world', and that its aim is purely therapeutic, consisting in an attempt to lead its readers from an impulse to try to provide an account of that relation to 'the realization that any such attempt results in sheer nonsense' (p. ix).

McGinn's motivation, then, lies in the thought that there must be a third way here: one that rejects the idea, associated with standard readings, that Wittgenstein 'puts forward an account of the relation between language and the world that must, by its own lights, be conveyed by means of propositions that are strictly nonsensical', but that does not also (as, for McGinn, resolute readings do) reject the idea that Wittgenstein aims 'to achieve genuine insights into the nature of a proposition and the nature and status of logic' (p. ix-x). The result is an approach that McGinn calls 'non-resolute' and 'anti-metaphysical' or 'anti-theoretical' (p. 6), maintaining that Wittgenstein aims to achieve positive insights into the functioning of language, but through a method that is purely clarificatory or descriptive (p. 9): a method that 'makes no attempt to go outside language' (p. 283) and instead 'allow[s] language itself to reveal how it functions' (pp. 20-1), as opposed to one that offers metaphysical explanations.

Given McGinn's characterizations of both standard and resolute approaches to the *Tractatus*, there is obviously space available for a number of other approaches, and her own interpretation itself forms a clear, third and intermediate, alternative. Nevertheless, McGinn's characterizations differ in certain respects from those given by Diamond and Conant, and, in

the case of what is to be considered central to a resolute approach, in a way that threatens the kind of distinctiveness McGinn wants to claim for her own reading. Thus, for Diamond and Conant, resolute readings have two central features, each of them a rejection of an idea that they in turn take to be central to standard readings: first, they reject the idea that the elucidatory sentences of the *Tractatus* (those that Wittgenstein declares, at §6.54, to be nonsense) are supposed to communicate an ineffable insight of any kind; second, they reject the idea that the elucidatory sentences of the *Tractatus* are to be recognized as nonsense by means of the application of a theory of sense (see their 'On Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely', in M. Kölbel and B. Weiss (eds) *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance*, (Routledge, 2004), p. 47). McGinn, it seems, would not dispute either of these two points; instead, what she would dispute is just the idea that these two features together are sufficient in a reading for it to count as resolute. Thus, McGinn in effect adds a third (necessary and, in conjunction with the other two, sufficient) criterion of 'resoluteness', in the commitment to not finding in the *Tractatus* any positive insights into the functioning of language, and it is here, in the broadest terms and on her own understanding, that McGinn's approach diverges from that which she takes to be characteristic of resolute readings.

All of this would, of course, be of little consequence were it the case that McGinn's and Diamond and Conant's contrasting characterizations of what is central to the notion of a resolute reading were equally coherent or viable, but it is not clear that this is indeed the case. McGinn's characterization relies on the idea that one can, or that Diamond and Conant would claim that one can, separate out wholly the positive and the negative tasks of, respectively, shedding light on the functioning of language and exposing or uncovering philosophical nonsense as nonsense. Yet it simply isn't clear that one can achieve the latter task without, either first or thereby, gaining some insight into how language functions, and it is not clear either that Diamond or Conant would claim that one can. Instead, what they would, I think, claim is quite simply that the insights thus gained are not appropriately characterized as being ineffable. As a result of this kind of consideration, it may well be that some will regard McGinn's book as offering a very sophisticated and highly worked-out example of, precisely, a resolute reading. Whatever the case, the differences between McGinn's reading and those developed by Diamond and Conant cannot be captured by a simple contrast between positive and negative insights, neat though it may be.

Regardless of how this classificatory issue is to be settled, there is much else of interest about McGinn's book, and plenty of points of substantial disagreement in the details to mark McGinn's reading out as distinct. After her interpretive territory has been staked out in chapter 1, chapters 2 and 3 turn to providing the background to McGinn's interpretation of the *Tractatus* in the work of Frege and Russell. These two chapters, with

their focus on Wittgenstein's understanding and criticisms of Frege and Russell's work and setting out, 'from Wittgenstein's own perspective, what the philosophical problems are that he sets out to make completely disappear', bring out beautifully how, for Wittgenstein, these problems all lead back to the one 'single great problem' of understanding the nature of the proposition; as with much of the rest of the book, these chapters will no doubt prove to be immensely helpful for students of the *Tractatus*.

Chapters 4–11 then provide the detail of McGinn's interpretation, with chapters 4 and 5 focusing on the description of pictures and propositions and chapter 6 turning back, in the order of the *Tractatus*, to neutralize the ontological appearance of the opening remarks – remarks which McGinn describes as 'some of the most treacherous in the book' (p. xi) – in line with McGinn's interpretive programme. Thus, McGinn argues that, once Wittgenstein's main task of clarifying the nature of the proposition has been achieved, these remarks should undergo a change of aspect, and we should come to see them as 'tracing around the logical order that is essential to language's ability to express propositions' (p. 137), emptying them of ontological content. (Again, McGinn contrasts her own approach with Diamond and Conant's here, in that McGinn wants to retain some positive role for these opening remarks, once the work of clarification is done, whereas for Diamond and Conant, McGinn claims, these remarks are simply instances of philosophical nonsense to be uncovered as such and then discarded.) Chapters 7–10 then turn to dealing with various aspects of Wittgenstein's 'single great problem' in logic and the philosophy of logic (there is no discussion of Wittgenstein's remarks on ethics or aesthetics in the book), treating them in the order in which they occur in the *Tractatus*, with McGinn aiming to show how they are dissolved by the clarifying work that has gone before. Chapter 11, the penultimate chapter of the book, argues for a central role for Wittgenstein's remarks on solipsism as the culmination of this discussion of logic. A key feature throughout these central chapters of the book is the way that McGinn ties her reading closely to the details of the text of the *Tractatus*, as well as making judicious use of the *Notebooks* and *Proto-Tractatus* in developing her views.

One of the central problems a reading such as McGinn's faces, given its commitment to reading Wittgenstein as consciously seeking an approach that is, as McGinn puts it, purely clarificatory or descriptive, is how to make sense of the development of Wittgenstein's thought from early to later, and in particular how to understand the criticisms of his earlier self that Wittgenstein makes in the *Philosophical Investigations*. In the final chapter of her book, McGinn turns to addressing this problem. In short, McGinn argues, like Diamond and like Oskari Kuusela too (whose work McGinn discusses at some length here), that the later Wittgenstein now recognizes a dogmatism, a kind of unexamined and unconscious metaphysical commitment, which he did not recognize before and which is embodied in the framework of his

earlier investigation in the conception of analysis that he employs there, and which runs counter to the anti-metaphysical, anti-theoretical intent of the investigation itself. But McGinn also thinks that focusing exclusively on this change in the methodology of the investigation, in the concept of analysis that Wittgenstein works with, obscures a sense in which this change is accompanied by a corresponding change in the actual object of investigation too (pp. 282–3), which in turn brings with it a change in the positive insights into how language functions from the early to the later philosophy amid the broader ‘continuities of philosophical purpose’ (p. 296).

Whether her interpretation presents a genuine alternative to a resolute approach to the *Tractatus* as she claims, or instead a distinctive strand of interpretation within the broader resolute programme, McGinn’s book is an important addition to the literature on the early Wittgenstein, and one that it is hard to imagine being surpassed any time soon. It makes for an illuminating and enjoyable read.

University of Chicago

Edmund Dain

Sounds

By Casey O’Callaghan

Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. vi + 193. ISBN 978–0–19–921592–8. £30.00 (hbk)

This book, within its context, is written by an author with seemingly bold and good instincts. O’Callaghan discerns that so much epistemology in philosophy has been based upon visual examples in what he calls visuocentrism. He wonders what epistemology – and metaphysics – would be like were it to take deeper account of, or be based upon, auditory experience. He claims that auditory perception is ‘a nearly untouched terrain rich in philosophical problems and illumination [oops, a visuocentric term here?]’ ... (p. v.) He then proceeds to undertake a careful, but also carefully confined, examination of auditory perception as related to philosophical problems and outlooks.

The prose and arguments are very clearly framed and the book reads well. What O’Callaghan focuses upon, sounds, are circumscribed. For example, he excludes from consideration the auditory role of language (speech) as being outside his purview, but as I read on, he also excludes much of another human auditory activity, music, but in primarily one form: orchestral or multi-instrument music. I shall try to show why these exclusions are indexical for deeper limitations to this study of sounds. But first, some positive comments on several of the bold intuitions which O’Callaghan does work out.

Although the book is short, the progression of chapters is impressive, and in spite of limitations, explicit and implicit, a good survey of sound

phenomena is made. Beginning with an introduction to visuocentrism and a plea for 'sonic realism', O'Callaghan opens with an inquiry into the nature of sound; takes account of location phenomena; looks at some of the physics of sound such as sound and vacuums; discusses the event structure of sound; and then explores a whole series of more unusual aspects of sounds, including echoes, recorded sounds and cross-modal illusions. There is much to tweak one's interest.

Then, with respect to epistemology/metaphysics, he quickly recognizes that a shift is needed from visuocentric to auditory examples and perceptions, that time and temporality emerge as more important and foregrounded than the spatial and often static preferences of much traditional epistemology. He thus taps into a very ancient and well-recognizable tradition concerning sight and sound with sight taken to be dominantly spatially focused; sound temporally focused. There is nothing new to this, but the recognition arises that more attention to auditory perception does bring a recognition of a richer temporality to all experience. He also recognizes that the experience of sound is not without some spatial significance and thus there are extensive discussions of directionality. But, strangely, there is missing much discussion on the 'surroundability' feature of auditory experience, perhaps because of the lack of analysis of orchestral and dramatic situations, and virtually no discussion of the auditory capacity to hear interiors! I get the impression that O'Callaghan's sounds, often taken as discrete, and clearly connected to the sounds *of things*, remain strangely surface-like, indeed almost like the very visual objects as described in what I shall now call early modern epistemology.

There are also other strong intuitions which are discussed: for example, once underway, O'Callaghan, begins to question the distinctness of the long tradition of five separate and distinct senses. This doctrine, synonymous with early modern epistemology, becomes doubtful, not only in view of synaesthesia, but in view of what I would like to call whole-body perception. O'Callaghan gestures in this direction. Then, too, in a long series of arguments, he speaks of the 'phenomenology' of experience, which I take it means a careful first-person description of experience. And here, his 'phenomenology' is usually a careful one which, to my mind, correctly describes how we hear trucks on the road, musicians playing in the next room and the like. I recall this move away from sense data and abstract sound data in Heidegger's claim, 'Much closer to us than all sensations are the things themselves. We hear the door shut in the house and never hear acoustical sensations or even mere sounds' (in *Poetry, Language and Thought* (Harper & Row, 1971)). O'Callaghan takes this 'phenomenology' seriously farther on by claiming that we do not hear sound waves, but hear the sounds of things.

Yet good as his intuition is, and accurate as his 'phenomenology' may be, I was puzzled by the fact that his bibliography and references simply lack philosophers or psychologists trained in phenomenology, with the exception

of Gibson, almost entirely. It is here that I want to point out that in all probability, O'Callaghan is restricted by the constipated philosophical tradition out of which he is operating. I praise his opening claims concerning how overcoming or modifying visuo-centrism, as he calls it, could open up philosophical problems. But he remains stuck, often precisely because he is either unaware of, or is committed to, a narrow philosophical tradition which continues to maintain the major problems of early modern epistemology. For example, possible allies for his intuitions have actually been around for some time now – but they are authors who work in cultural studies or, media studies, or, above all, they are phenomenological philosophers. Questioning what some call 'ocularcentrism' is common to much postmodernism and cultural studies; philosophers out of phenomenology have also examined auditory experience (David Levin and Don Ihde, for example). However, the unnecessary restrictions O'Callaghan imposes upon himself can also be recognized from his choice of examples, which show more particularly how he remains close to his early modern paradigm.

I have already noted that the purposeful exclusion of spoken language and speech, and the implicit exclusion of compound and complex sound, such as symphonic music, limits the investigation. When O'Callaghan does turn to performances, in most cases he explicitly speaks of only individual instrumentalists or vocalists. But even on the micro-level one can gather clues to the problem. Many sounds – if we accept O'Callaghan's version of a 'phenomenology' which accepts sounds as sounds of things – are from the outset complex and compound. For sight, the ordinary objects lying around, as it were, usually remain silent for normal listening. But, if I hit the table, first with my hand, then a hammer, then a drumstick, the sound which is produced is a 'duet', that is the sound of both the table and the thing pounding the table. Yet, in this complex sound, each of the variants yields something discernibly different, and a careful and critical listening can extract from this something of the table's composition as well as the composition of the hitting device. O'Callaghan does discuss collisions and explosions, but in the above example, such duet sounds are common and ordinary. His own favourite example, which occurs over and over again, is the tuning fork. Note that for a tuning fork to sound, it too needs to be struck, but the instant of striking, given the unique configuration of the tuning fork, is almost immediately separated from the sounds of the initial strike. Does this come as close as we can to a 'pure' sound? Next, note the predilection for examining auditory illusions. I could not help but recall the appearance/reality and evil genie worries of so much early modern – and still contemporary analytic empiricist – concerns with the illusory. Yet another echo from past metaphysics is the focus upon particular sounds, sound particularities, as if one were rebuilding now in auditory form the atomistic worlds of early modern metaphysics. From musical – individual instruments, individual vocalists – to sounding particularities, one often senses an almost 'Flatland' world of auditory entities.

While I have criticized what I think is a too close adaptation to the traditions from which O'Callaghan draws, there remains a stimulating set of examples and problems which are worth considering. He also draws upon a diverse set of empirical studies in acoustics and the physics of sound which help inform the science side of the study, and he also is able to discriminate critically such claims from others arising from his emphasis upon auditory experience. The book, within its limitations, is well constructed, and I would recommend it to the others missing from Callaghan's sources, readers in cultural studies and phenomenological philosophy as well.

Stony Brook University

Don Ihde,

The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe

By Roger Teichmann

Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. x + 244. ISBN 978-0-1-929933-1. £45.00/\$90.00 (hbk).

G. E. M. Anscombe was one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century, almost singlehandedly reviving the field of philosophy of action and motivating the emergence of virtue theory. So it is somewhat surprising that her whole philosophy has not been treated at book-length before now. It is gratifying not only that this has now been done, but also that it has been done so well. Teichmann's book is not quite flawless, but it is lucid, insightful, and thoroughly well informed by a familiarity with Anscombe's daunting range of philosophical writings.

One possible reason for Anscombe's relative neglect is precisely that her work ranged over a wide variety of subjects and is not tied together by any obvious unifying theory. Those who associate her name with campus Anscombe Societies promoting conservative ideas about sex might be surprised to find that there is next to nothing about such views in Teichmann's book. Instead he focuses on her most original philosophical work, so there is little here about either practical ethics or the history of philosophy. As well as a short introduction and conclusion, the book has six chapters: 'Intentional Action', 'Practical Reason', 'Ethics', 'Mind and Self', 'Time and Causality', and 'Language and Thought'. In each Teichmann explains and evaluates Anscombe's main ideas on the subject, and brings out connections between them and her thoughts on other issues. He offers no systematization of Anscombe's work or general theory about it, but instead works through many different arguments and insights to construct a large picture of Anscombe's major contributions to philosophy.

If the book has a significant weakness, it lies in its organization, or the way this organization is presented. Teichmann rightly says that 'Part of the difficulty in reading Anscombe is in finding your bearings' (p. 1), but he

approaches her work in a seemingly arbitrary way. In a footnote on p. 10 he points out that Anscombe's interest in intention stemmed from her interest in, and opposition to, the proposal to grant an honorary degree to President Truman, but Teichmann treats the connection between ethics and intention as simply one connection among many in this area. The reader might have a better sense of what Anscombe was up to in *Intention* (Blackwell, 1957), and why she should care, if the connection with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were made more explicit. Anscombe opposed that bombing because it intentionally targeted innocent people. Its defenders typically try to justify it by claiming that the consequences are all that matters, that intentions are irrelevant to the ethics of an action. One thing that Anscombe does in *Intention* is to bring out the role this concept plays in our lives and what would be lost (perhaps our very ability to make sense of life) if it were somehow abandoned. We understand human action as being intentional, as being done for reasons. Part of what it means to understand an action is to understand with what intention it is done (is my neighbour doing vocal exercises or making sure that I get no sleep?). This does not mean that consequentialism is incoherent, that we have no option but to judge actions with reference to intentions, but it does mean that the concept of intention is important, and that we might need to be careful with ethical theories that encourage us to ignore intention, and with empiricist ideas that push us to think of an intention as a mysterious mental object in a causal chain. Anscombe's view, as Teichmann puts it, is that 'Giving reason's for one's actions is giving an *account* of oneself – and this is not the same as describing one's own psychology' (p.102).

It is possible that Teichmann has not gone into the debate about Truman and the use of atomic weapons in order to avoid tasteless sensationalism, but the decision to put philosophical interest before 'human interest' might diminish the reader's ability to find her bearings in Anscombe's work. Further evidence of Teichmann's relative disregard for the convenience of the reader appears when, having divided the subject of *Intention* into three parts, labelled A, B, and C, Teichmann proceeds to deal with them in the order B, A, C, giving no explicit reason for doing so. The reader is left to work out afterwards, if ever, why this was the best way to go. This is, of course, a fairly minor criticism.

Teichmann clearly sees the relevance of ethics for Anscombe's discussion of intention – he alludes to it on pp. 45, 52, and 65, for instance – but he rather downplays it, preferring instead to focus on intention itself, either to chart the grammar of this concept as carefully as possible or to bring out the implications of Anscombe's work for the philosophy of mind (which are not good for behaviourists and functionalists, as Teichmann sees it, since an expression of intention to ϕ is not a report on one's disposition to ϕ intentionally).

His chapter on ethics focuses on the paper 'Modern Moral Philosophy', and in particular on Anscombe's critiques of the fact/value distinction,

Kantian legalistic conceptions of morality, and consequentialism. The fact/value distinction comes in for some criticism in *Intention*, especially in Anscombe's pointing out that it is not intelligible to claim that one wants or values just anything. Only certain values are intelligible as such, and which these are depends on certain facts about nature (including what human beings need in order to survive) and about human practices and institutions (one can only intelligibly want to get married in certain kinds of societies, for instance). Given certain familiar institutions, it is a fact that one owes a merchant payment for goods ordered that have been delivered, unless the circumstances are exceptional in some way. Similarly, if one has promised to do something, then, *ceteris paribus*, one ought to do it. Coherent uses of the word 'ought' are, as Teichmann puts it, 'embedded in an institution or rule-governed practice – such as that of promising' (p. 94).

The incoherence of some legalistic moral theories comes from treating morality as if it depends on the existence of a law while simultaneously ruling out the existence of any plausible law-giver, judge, or enforcer, such as God. Teichmann relates these criticisms to contemporaries of Anscombe, such as Mackie and Hare, which is surely right. Hare's prescriptivism is more straightforwardly legalistic in a problematic way than is Kant's, and Anscombe certainly had Hare in mind (among others). Teichmann points out, also, that Anscombe does not rule out non-theistic uses of such words as 'ought' and 'obligation', as a number of her critics mistakenly believe (see p. 107, n. 26). As he puts it: 'Anscombe's own view ... looks like this: obligation, properly speaking, arises from either law or custom; in the first case, there must be a lawgiver with power to enforce the laws, and in the second case, there must be a society in which the modals "cannot", "may", etc. have the sort of role we have described. There will be a further question, as to whether the law or custom is good for human beings, whether there is an Aristotelian need for it [i.e. a necessary condition for some good]; if the answer to this question is positive, we may speak of "moral obligation", or better still, of what is *just*'. (p. 110). The sort of role Teichmann had described earlier for modals such as 'cannot' is the kind of role these words play in some games. Someone learning chess who tries to move a piece incorrectly might be told that she cannot move it that way. She might even be physically prevented from making such an illegal move, as a tennis coach might move the racquet in one's hand and say, 'You have to hold it like this.' It is in such ways that we learn how to play games and to engage correctly in various other human practices. It is perfectly reasonable to say that someone has an obligation to do something, that she has to do it, if she has promised to do that thing. Anscombe makes no objection to this. Her objection is to those who would speak of moral obligation without any connection to 'legal or custom-based practices and the empirical preconditions for such practices' (p. 112).

Her objections to consequentialism, Teichmann says, are two: it denies that any acts are out of the question, and it exaggerates our moral responsibility

to such a degree that doing the right thing is likely to seem impossible, and so not worth striving for. The first point is a familiar objection to act utilitarianism, but Anscombe introduces the term ‘consequentialism’ precisely in order to distinguish it from the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill (Teichmann singles out Mill on p. 113, n. 30, on the grounds that Bentham is guilty of the same error that Anscombe attributes to Sidgwick, whom she describes as the father of consequentialism, namely the denial of any morally significant difference between intended and merely foreseen consequences). Consequentialism, in her view, is corrupt, and she prefers to read Mill as a rule utilitarian rather than as corrupt, although she clearly implies that Mill’s view, like Kant’s, really has no content at all (see *Human Life, Action and Ethics: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe* (Imprint Academic, 2005), p. 172). The second objection to consequentialism is that it is corrupting. Teichmann notes the similarity here with Anscombe’s objection to pacifism: it sounds high-minded, but in fact leads to a sense that, since one must compromise with brutal reality, one might as well be as brutal as is convenient.

Anscombe’s work in this area is easily misunderstood, and Teichmann deftly explains it without making heavy going of it and with scarcely a misstep. He adds some speculation about the origins of consequentialism in, for instance, government paternalism which is not always compelling (must ‘middle-class parents who send their children to a comprehensive school because they believe such schools benefit from having such children, even when their own children will lose out by this decision’, be guilty of an ‘inflated conception of personal responsibility’ (p. 125)? Isn’t the simple desire to be a good citizen a possible motive?) and finishes with a claim that is simply false: that its commendation and encouragement of injustice, for Anscombe, ‘renders the distinction between old-fashioned utilitarianism and consequentialism ... inconsiderable’ (p. 126). On the contrary, rightly or wrongly, Anscombe’s criticisms of utilitarianism are all intellectual: she accuses Bentham and Mill of having failed to realize the difficulty of the concept of pleasure and, in Mill’s case, the need to stipulate the relevant description of acts if his theory is to have content. As a result Mill’s position is ‘stupid’ (*Human Life*, p. 180), but still, the emergence of consequentialism is something else, ‘a startling change’ in the history of moral thought (*Human Life*, p. 180). It is the moral failings of consequentialism that Anscombe finds startling. If Bentham’s and Mill’s theories are morally just as bad as consequentialism, Anscombe did not think so.

In the chapter on ‘Mind and Self’, Teichmann takes us through Anscombe’s thinking on perception, where she identifies various philosophical puzzles as having a linguistic origin without falling into simplistic, conservative ordinary-language philosophy. Teichmann emphasizes Anscombe’s ability to see what is good in the sense-datum theorists’ position against some ordinary-language philosophers. What truth there is

in phenomenalism can be saved, Teichmann argues, by recourse to Anscombe's distinction between intentional and material objects, which allows us to recognize the subjectivity of perceptual experience without imagining that private objects exist.

Also in this chapter Teichmann looks at Anscombe's work on the first person singular. While Anscombe's attention to grammar clearly owes much to Wittgenstein, here Teichmann notes that she takes a different view from Wittgenstein's (as expressed in *The Blue Book*). Wittgenstein distinguished between the use of 'I' as a subject and its use as an object. In the sentence 'I am in pain' (used in normal circumstances) I cannot fail to identify the bearer of pain correctly because there is no identification going on at all. If I catch sight of what I take to be the back of my head in a mirror and declare that 'I am going bald', however, I can be mistaken about the person I am referring to. Or so Wittgenstein thinks, and Teichmann, against Anscombe, who denies that 'I' is used to refer to anything, seems to agree.

Anscombe is much closer to Wittgenstein on the subjects of time and causality. That the past cannot change is a grammatical truth, its denial being ruled out by the language-game. This makes the non-realist view that the past can change nonsense, as Teichmann points out n. 7. on p. 175, Anscombe follows Wittgenstein also in emphasizing the fact that the notions of causation and constant conjunction are not the same. If I see a can pulled by a string and follow the string to its puller, then I have found the cause of the can's moving without needing to repeat the experiment in order to establish a constant conjunction of string-pulling and can-moving.

Some of Wittgenstein's views, of course, changed during his lifetime, and Anscombe did not necessarily follow him in all these changes (for instance, on the question whether a sentence that has a sense must be either true or false, which Teichmann discusses on pp. 192–3). At other times she uses Wittgenstein's methods but discusses issues to which he devoted little or no attention (as in *Intention* and 'Modern Moral Philosophy'). And, as we have seen with the meaning of 'I', sometimes she simply disagrees with him. Despite the influence of Wittgenstein and Roman Catholicism on her thinking, there can be no denying the originality of Anscombe's contribution to philosophy. Like Anscombe, Teichmann has no single theory to propound but instead deals carefully with an interrelated set of problems, which makes his book hard to summarize or evaluate with a simple True or False. He gets precious little wrong, though, and always argues intelligently for his positions. He is an unusually careful reader of Anscombe and an interesting philosopher in his own right. His book is a worthy tribute to Anscombe's legacy.

Aesthetic Perception: A Thomistic Perspective

By Kevin E. O'Reilly

Four Courts Press, 2007. Pp. 136. ISBN 978-1-84682-027-4. 45.00 (hbk).

When Thomas Aquinas died in 1274 at the age of 49 (or thereabouts) he was already the most prolific author who had ever lived. Over the course of a writing career of less than twenty years he had managed to write over 9.5 million words or an average of 3,500 words a day while dictating to up to four secretaries at a time. His output ranged over all of the then known subjects which made up *scientia* as he sought to produce a system covering all that was then known. The success of Aquinas' undertaking can be measured from the fact that after Pope Leo XIII turned to him as a model for Catholic thought in 1879, Neo-Scholastic thinkers were able to look to Aquinas' thought as an alternative to contemporary philosophical systems. One of the chief merits of Aquinas' writings, compared with those of other medieval authors, is his clarity, nowhere more apparent than in the *Summa theologiae*. Indeed, it has often been remarked that, unlike the writings of many thinkers from the past, those of Aquinas are not read only from the point of view of the history of thought but by those who today still find Thomas to be the inspiration for theological and philosophical reflection. Thus, it should be remembered that, despite the criticisms which might be levelled against it, Thomism is a living school, and this is certainly the case of this new publication by Kevin O'Reilly on the aesthetics of Aquinas.

However, an immediate problem facing any writer on Aquinas' aesthetics is that Aquinas' comments on the topic are, to say the least, somewhat restricted. Thus, anyone trawling through Aquinas' works will come up with very little apart from the famous phrases 'pulchra enim dicuntur quae visa placent' or 'id cuius ipsa apprehensio placet,' and it is around these words that Neo-Scholastic discussions took place. Indeed, it is remarkable to note that in some cases this was all that some authors looked at. They then proceeded to construct some rather elaborate theories rather than asking what surely was the most important question, namely, did Aquinas have an aesthetic theory at all? Or were his words merely an aside which he intended to come back to later, but he never had the time to do so? If Aquinas was to be the sole inspiration for Neo-Scholasticism, then the construction of a Thomistic aesthetics was always going to be a difficult task. In the earlier part of the Thomistic revival the most valiant and best-known attempt to reconstruct a Thomistic aesthetics was that of Jacques Maritain; a more recent revival in interest came through the work of Umberto Eco. The topic has perhaps received less attention in recent years, and so the moment is ripe for it to be revisited. In this respect O'Reilly's book is to be welcomed both as summarizing the achievements of past writers and as engaging with their debates and presenting solutions to some of the problems which

emerged, and finally for suggesting new directions for philosophical debates, especially in the area of virtue aesthetics.

O'Reilly begins by acknowledging that Aquinas did not write specifically on the theory of beauty and art but that one must look at references scattered throughout his writings (p. 11). Special attention is given to the work of Jacques Maritain, especially his *Art and Scholasticism*, and O'Reilly repeats Eco's view that it was Maritain who reinstated medieval aesthetics as a 'living force in contemporary thought' (p. 12). Eco, of course, accused Maritain of not being sufficiently sensitive to the historical Aquinas and of having carried out a 'violent' interpretation of him, substituting his own teaching for that of Aquinas. Dr O'Reilly skilfully guides the reader through the points that are under debate. In chapter 2 he gives us a very useful examination of the formal constitutive elements of beauty in Aquinas' aesthetic theory, namely, proportion, integrity and clarity. His conclusion is that Maritain's views are a legitimate development of Aquinas' thought. In chapter 3 we have a detailed examination of the foundations of the aesthetic *visio* in Aquinas' philosophy of the human person. O'Reilly argues that what many authors seem to have missed is that for Aquinas the human person is a unity of body and soul, of the intellectual and the sensual, and so they also failed to realize that aesthetic experience is clearly a combination of sensory and intellectual elements, and also of subjective and objective elements.

For O'Reilly, aesthetic experience is not just a matter of pleasure or enjoyment; rather it can also be seen as a way of living better, of being a more fulfilled and better-functioning human being. In this sense it has a moral dimension. As he comments: 'a person who actualises his cognitional and volitional potentialities becomes a better specimen of a human being'; 'Not only is true aesthetic experience an experience of beauty, it is immediately productive of beauty. Moreover, it is productive of beauty in the only creature capable of producing works of beauty. We can therefore describe artistic creativity as a means whereby man can humanise his fellow human beings or be humanised by them' (p. 49). This leads O'Reilly to appeal for an extended place for the fine arts in the educational curriculum as a way of inculcating the appreciation of beauty and also as a means of facilitating 'moral and religious formation' (p. 50).

In chapter 4, Dr O'Reilly again returns to Maritain, this time to the latter's work *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*. He holds that in emphasizing the notion of knowledge through inclination (or connaturality) Maritain identified a key notion in Aquinas' thought. Chapter 5 takes us through a careful and thorough examination of what Aquinas had to say on the matter. O'Reilly quotes (p. 62) the definition given by R.-T. Caldera that a judgement by inclination is 'an intuitive judgement of the value of an object, posited by means of an affective reaction of the subject in relation to it'. In other words, the *cognitio affectiva* to which Aquinas refers, i.e., affective knowledge, is a synthesis of what makes us human, namely, knowledge and

love. However, if we are speaking here of an intuitive judgement about value, one might ask whose judgement and whose value are concerned. Aquinas' reply will be (as was Aristotle's) that someone who is virtuous is the measure and rule of human acts, including what is truly beautiful. The inclinations which a person has flow from the kind of person that he or she is. The morally corrupt person will pick and choose according to his or her false perception of the situation. O'Reilly concludes: 'Affectivity therefore, when it reacts to the facts of a given situation, betrays the value system of the subject: he approves what he considers and considers what he approves [quoting Caldera]. By a sort of self-economy the quality of the personality tends to reinforce itself: the subject finds what he wanted to find' (p. 71).

In chapter 6, O'Reilly presents us with what appear to be his own views on the nature of the experience of beauty, showing the influence of H.-G. Gadamer and A. MacIntyre upon his appreciation of Aquinas' holistic approach to the human person. He rejects what he terms the 'Enlightenment fallacy' that reason is, or can be, free from any kind of conditioning whatsoever. He quotes MacIntyre to the effect that the myth of an impartial, universal, uniting reason masks the will to power of particular interests (p. 79). Reason always works within a context and is neither neutral nor disinterested.

How, then, does all of this relate to identifying and evaluating art? Clearly no two individuals can ever enjoy exactly the same quality of aesthetic experience of the same work since the 'different emotional-intellectual trajectories create different existential perspectives from which each one "sees" the object' (p. 85). Each of us is 'prejudiced' in some way or other. This, for O'Reilly, is not a bad thing, but is simply part of the human condition. This being the case, one cannot simply consult a range of objective criteria but should, according to O'Reilly, defer to acknowledged experts in art and beauty (p. 88). Once we have learnt what the tradition has to offer us, we can make an 'autonomous' judgment.

In the section of chapter 6 entitled 'Art, Morality and Religion', O'Reilly deals with the question of how aesthetic artefacts communicate values and how artistic activity arises out of a community of shared experiences. Readers, however, will be divided on what he then goes on to state:

An artwork which comes into existence by means of an act animated by the mind of one who has placed himself to some degree or other outside the kind of mindset which is conditioned by belief in God may well boast great aesthetic worth and thus be of great cultural significance; it can nevertheless not lay claim to objective beauty. For it is important to remember that for our own times, what has aesthetic worth is not necessarily beautiful and whatever is beautiful does not necessarily have aesthetic worth. Only in the one who sees with the eyes of faith do the aesthetic and the beautiful combine. Creation and

appreciation of truly beautiful art ... can be the fruit only of a life lived under the influence of ultimate values.

(p. 93)

O'Reilly acknowledges the problems that such a view give rise to, not least that some of the greatest works of religious art and music have been produced by people who are not believers – how can they communicate what they do not possess? However, he comments that the non-believing artist can help believers to experience their faith in ways which were previously unknown to them, even while the artist remains 'outside'. Clearly in the eyes of the religious person, the non-believer is someone who does not 'see' correctly or grasp the ultimate significance of things in the way that the believer does. This, however, begins to take us out of the realm of philosophy and into a more difficult territory, relating as it does to the question of religious truth. What remains, however, a topic both for philosophical and theological reflection is the relationship between art and morality. Since art clearly communicates values, can one have, say, a good painting that is clearly 'bad', or a well-written book that is immoral? Much of the artistic output of the last hundred years or so has proclaimed the freedom of expression of the artist even if (or sometimes because) it shocks or challenges. Totalitarian regimes have persecuted artists because of the challenge which they pose to the status quo. How far should art be allowed to go? For O'Reilly art can become a threat to human flourishing when it 'subverts moral values and promotes agnosticism or atheism' (p. 96). Thus, if an artist's life is not correctly ordered towards the Final End of all existence, namely, God, this will detract from the goodness of, and ultimately from the beauty of, the work. I wonder, however, if Aquinas would have started from here – this is a position which one reaches (if at all) after long philosophical and theological reflection and (if one is a believer) above all through the action of grace. It is not something which is apparent to everyone. It also brings to mind the one place in the book where the author disagrees with Aquinas. In the quotation which Dr O'Reilly gives on p. 60, Aquinas states that there are two kinds of wisdom corresponding to two kinds of judgements. The first is by way of inclination (which we have already noted above); the second is through a cognitive process where 'someone learned in moral science can judge rightly about virtuous acts, though he himself lacks virtue'. O'Reilly claims that Aquinas' description is not wholly accurate and argues that 'we must conclude that the judgement of an ethicist lacking in virtue is erroneous to some extent, depending on the degree to which vice regulates his lifestyle'. The same is presumably true of an artist or a critic; but this, it seems, is not Aquinas' view.

The final chapter again takes up O'Reilly's view that a believer does not treat limited things as absolute but rather directs his or her life towards

absolute Truth and Goodness. O'Reilly contends that if one does not seek God as the Final End of one's existence, then as a consequence one's intellect and will function in a defective manner. The tendency to aestheticize everything, including the marginal, banal, ugly and obscene, which O'Reilly depreciatingly terms 'aestheticism', has, he holds, served to undermine the aesthetic vision of Christianity and has manifested itself in ecclesiastical art, architecture and music since Vatican II, as a sign of increasing secularization within the Church.

In the next section, 'Beauty: A Transcendental Property of Being?' O'Reilly returns to a central problem in the Thomistic teaching on the transcendental properties of being. He gives an excellent summary of the nature of the problem, and through an incisive use of texts reaches the conclusion (correctly in my view) that beauty, although related to the transcendentals of the true and the good, is not in itself a transcendental but is the true perceived as good (p. 110). Again, in the final section, 'Faith, Charity and the Aesthetic *Visio*', the author reiterates his view of the necessity of belief for a correct appreciation of truth and goodness and so also of beauty.

There is unlikely to be unanimity among readers regarding O'Reilly's contention that the refined Christian aesthete is the rule and measure of all that is truly and objectively beautiful. However, in his concluding chapter (8), he does make the valuable suggestion that just as recent writers have begun to pay attention to the importance of virtue in securing the basis of knowledge, aesthetics ought to consider how a virtue approach might enhance its own deliberations. Indeed, if for nothing else, this book should be welcomed as a contribution in the direction of a *virtue aesthetics*.

Although it is beyond the scope of *Aesthetic Perception*, and this is in no way to criticize the author, I think that further studies are needed to set Aquinas' views on beauty in context. It would be useful to know if the Thomistic dictum 'pulchrum est quod visum placet' is entirely original or whether it had earlier formulations in other authors. Again, it would be useful to know if Aquinas' ideas were taken up by his contemporaries and if they were accepted, rejected or modified. Finally, perhaps a simple study of all of the uses of the word *pulchrum* and associated words in the works of Aquinas as facilitated by such a research tool as the *Index Thomisticus* might be a useful starting point before looking at other authors of the thirteenth century.

The author is to be commended for his extremely useful bibliography. Not only are there works in French and German, but there are representative works in both Italian and Spanish. All too often the philosophical debate in Italian-and Spanish-speaking lands is neglected by us in the 'North', and we are the poorer for it.

The book is published to the usual high standards that we have grown to expect from Four Courts Press. I spotted three errors only: on p. 97, 'sink'

instead of 'sync', on p. 100, last paragraph, 'explain' instead of 'explains' and on p. 120 after 'sub specie pulchri' 'Once' rather than 'Ones'.

NUI Maynooth

Michael Dunne

The Politics of Aesthetics

By Jacques Rancière

Continuum, 2006. ISBN 0-8264-7067-X, pp. x-116. (hbk). ISBN 0-8264-8954-0. £9.99 (pbk).

Gabriel Rockhill's newly translated *The Politics of Aesthetics* provides English speakers with a highly condensed yet extremely useful account of the aesthetics of Jacques Rancière. In *The Politics of Aesthetics* Rancière's Post-Marxian approach to political discourse is applied to the area of aesthetics. The primary concern for Rancière is to demonstrate that the aesthetic has a politics. In short, Rancière regards the aesthetic as the structure of reflection on art, while politics is considered to be the struggle for influence in the established regime. To claim, then, that aesthetics has a politics is for Rancière to claim that the structure of reflection on art is necessarily subject to political change. Accordingly Rancière conceives his aesthetic task to be the study of aesthetic regimes of artistic representation as opposed to art theory or the particular discipline of art. This task aligns Rancière firmly with the institutional and structural tradition of aesthetics. However, his achievement is to overcome the limitations of these traditions by also invoking a more classical tradition of aesthetics based on the senses. These traditions converge in Rancière's concept of the 'distribution of the sensible'.

More than a mere naming activity, for Rancière the distribution/partition of the sensible is the process whereby the mode of aesthetic perception is established and instituted. Furthermore, it is the name given to the prevailing regime of representation as it is experienced. Once it has been identified, Rancière is able to employ it as a methodological tool with which to treat of the aesthetic. As its name suggests, the distribution of the sensible offers Rancière the ability to account for both the politics of aesthetics on the level of the macro-aesthetic regime, that is distribution, and what he calls the level of 'primary aesthetics' (p. 13), that is singular sensory experience. Both aesthetic experience and the aesthetic regime are thus explained in terms of the distribution of the sensible. Regarded as akin to the *a priori* distinctions of time and space in the sense of their universality and self-evident nature, the distinctions of aesthetics are for Rancière equally structure-giving forms for sensory experience, albeit not quite in an everlasting sense as they crucially remain cultural and subject to political change. Hence we find Rancière to be a philosopher of convergence; he is situated

at the meeting point of politics and aesthetics, of distribution and the sensible, of structure and experience.

The effect of the political on the aesthetic is demonstrated, for Rancière, by the identification of a genealogical trilogy of distinct stages of ‘historical regimes of identification’ (p. 51). Each regime is explained as having a significantly different balance of, and emphasis on, distribution and sensibility. These are, in order of historical domination, firstly the ‘ethical regime of art’, where images are Platonically defined in terms of origins and goals. This regime is labelled ethical as it distinguishes between the original and the copy, the true and the fake. The second regime is the representative one, where Rancière sees a development towards an emphasis on the written word begetting the championing of poetics, fiction and resemblance. This aesthetic regime is rendered possible by Aristotelian *mimēsis*. Here the logic of representation is what makes aesthetic experience possible. The narrative of the aesthetic regimes has hitherto arrived at the ‘aesthetic regime of art’, where an equality of indetermination and subjectivity are promoted and the sensible naming of works is continually undermined.

This may at first seem like a failure on the part of Rancière to identify a post-representative regime of art, save to say that there is some sort of anti-aesthetic at work. However, this would be to overlook the account of the aesthetic regime of art that is provided in terms of an analysis of the distribution of the sensible in this regime. Rancière regards the current aesthetic regime as just that: a triumph of distribution. Under this regime ‘the identification of art ... is based on distinguishing a sensible mode specific to artistic products’ (p. 22). No particular sensibility is to be found. Here the singularity of works and the equality of genres, styles and subjects are promoted to the extreme. The remaining aesthetic sensibility is one of singularity. Anything approaching a shared aesthetic experience is denied.

These regimes and the project which they serve for Rancière are best understood as not unlike Foucault’s philosophical approach. Each regime is akin to the use of the episteme in Foucault in the sense that ‘[T]hese “politics” obey their own proper logic’ (p. 15), albeit in the area of representation as opposed to discourse. Like the genealogy of episteme, the genealogy of regimes of identification informs a greater philosophy than one simply concerned with representation. For example, once Rancière’s aesthetics is liberated from notions of modernity, post-modernity and the *avant-garde*, as his political genealogy is, these terms are rendered redundant beyond aesthetics for the same reasons. The critique of aesthetic modernity takes the following form: it equates new forms and methods of production with new aesthetics. A new aesthetic regime for Rancière, however, requires a more substantive development than a change in production; that is to say, it requires a new method of aesthetic experience also. Modernist aesthetics fails to achieve this as it continues to promote the singularity of the aesthetic by focusing on technical and mechanical differences, omitting an account of

sensibility. It is for this reason that in modernist aesthetics, the aesthetic regime of art is regarded as factory-like. This factory of the sensible is the core target of Rancière's critique. In simultaneously promoting the singular and extreme equality of aesthetics, modernism is blind to the implications for sensibility resulting from its very forcible aesthetic.

Rancière's genealogy enables him to illustrate how change occurs under the theory of the distribution of the sensible by relating what is common to each regime. Here a notion such as the *avant-garde* is replaced by the internal logic of the term 'politics'. Politics, for Rancière, when applied to aesthetics qualifies the latter as a practice where there exists an almost inevitable disruption of the distribution of the sensible and the inscription of new aesthetics. More often than not politics entails that those allocated a place of exclusion at the hands of the distribution of the sensible are the source of the disruption. Specifically the term 'police' is given to those bodies, institutions no doubt, that codify the aesthetic, that enact the distribution of the sensible. These agents of the distribution of the sensible take on the mantle of limiting politics. In drawing the aesthetic with the marker of a politics of inevitable change, Rancière presents a broader conception of the aesthetic, one that is able simultaneously to account for not only the existent hierarchical structure of representation but also the advent of new regimes.

It is only when Rancière has made these genealogical and redefinitional moves that we can see the significance of his claims that aesthetics has a politics. The distribution of the sensible has a politics. Distribution has a politics – of that there is perhaps little surprise – but so too does sensibility have a politics. While a political approach to aesthetics is nothing new, its dilemmas are well documented within the institutional theory of art, for example. The strength of Rancière's thesis lies in his ability to redefine and distil existing concepts in a radically engaging way. This is done by overcoming the terms of contemporary aesthetics. Rancière thus is able to bring the full implications of the political to bear on the aesthetic.

Distribution of the sensible, for example, is able to account for an aesthetic regime that operates clearly in institutional practice, but is not restricted to explaining the politics of aesthetics entirely in terms of the institution. Institutional explanations of aesthetic change are limited to the interlinked notions of the *avant-garde* and changes in production methods. The *avant-garde*, however, does not offer a new aesthetic sensibility as it is inscribed institutionally, or as Rancière might say, is equally regulated by the 'police'. The same can be said for changes in production methods. The use of the term 'distribution' allows Rancière to focus on that which is excluded as well as that which is included in the prevailing aesthetic regime. And what is excluded in any aesthetic regime, but particularly the aesthetic regime, is always a different aesthetic sensibility. In considering aesthetic sensibility on political terms Rancière is able to provide a more forceful

account of what is considered art, and of why that consideration is subject to change, than is offered by the limits of the politics of the institutional theory of art. Both that which gets called art and that which is ignored and excluded betray a shared heritage in the distribution of the sensible. For Rancière the political change inevitable for the aesthetic need not be dependent on the paradoxes of a singularly institutional explanation. By employing the term 'sensible' Rancière is not only invoking the initial approach of aesthetics as principally focused on the senses, as found in Baumgarten, but is also supporting this more holistic aesthetic account. As a result Rancière is better able to fulfil his task of explaining the structure-giving forms of aesthetics, that is, the politics of aesthetics. In doing so his approach and his employment of terminology ensure that the distribution of the sensible remains an applicable structure with which to tackle aesthetic concerns beyond the changing of the structure of reflection on art.

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